

History of Intelligence Activities in Queensland from September 1939 to September 1945

PART II OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE COMMAND

In the initial stages of the war little operational intelligence work was performed in view of the fact that the risk of Australia being involved in actual operations appeared to be negligible. Normal assistance was given to General Staff in connection with the training of troops called up for full-time duty in the A.I.F. Intelligence reports on operations overseas, and from information received from the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence, were prepared for the information of the Command as required.

Duties of I (a)

The duties of I(a) mainly comprised obtaining and collating information relating to terrain and other topographical subject; organising and building up the Military Reporting Officers (see Pt 8) organisation; preparing and distributing maps and dyelines of the coastal areas which had previously been unmapped; assisting Deputy Assistant Director of Survey in connection with mapping programme; and production of the Military Directory.

Liaison with other Headquarters

Up to the date when Japan entered the war the only probable form of attack on Australia was by means of enemy naval craft or sea borne aircraft. For this reason an Area Combined Headquarters (AGH) was stationed in Townsville under arrangements made by Army Headquarters to which a Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (COIC) was attached. The Intelligence Officer, Townsville, maintained close liaison with COIC and by such method this Headquarters was kept informed of the position from time to time. In Southern Queensland a Combined Defence Headquarters (CDH) was set up in Brisbane and liaison was established between I(a) and CDH. Direct telephone communication was arranged between I(a) and CDH through which reports and information of mutual interest were transmitted. Such telephone was manned during the night by the Intelligence Duty Officer. When the Japanese Forces invaded New Guinea and New Britain in 1942, it was decided to strengthen I(a) by the appointment of a GSO 3 (Int) to co-ordinate and direct its work. This officer maintained a battleroom on a small scale for the information of Headquarters, and the training of Intelligence personnel. Daily conferences were conducted in the battle room by the GSO 1 (Int) at which the situation and probable future developments were discussed.

The GSO 3 (Int) maintained close personal liaison with CDH, Adv LHQ, Headquarters, First Aust Army, Fighter Sector unit, and Intelligence of other Services and the Allied Forces in the area so that all available information could be obtained. A daily revisit was produced by the GSO 1 (Int) for the information of the GOC and Heads of Branches at Headquarters. These duties ceased in March, 1943, when First Aust Army took over responsibility for all operational intelligence. The appointment of GSO 3 (Int) was then abolished.

Apart from several air raids at Horne Island and three abortive raids in the Townsville and Mossman district (North Queensland) there were no enemy operations in this area during the period of hostilities. In each instance intelligence relating to these raids was the responsibility of Intelligence Officers attached to the local Commanders concerned. This section was interested only from the information point of view, and such information was obtained through local IOs stationed in the districts named.

The only other instance where operational intelligence was performed was in relation to Cairns and Townsville Fortress Commands. When these Commands were organised by First Aust Army it was agreed by this Headquarters that the local Intelligence Officers in each case would perform any operational intelligence duties required by the Fortress Commands, in addition to their own duties. This arrangement continued for several months, until it was found that the amount of time involved interfered with the work required to be done for this Headquarters and they were relieved by Intelligence Officers appointed by First Aust Army.

Special MROs

In August, 1942 (see 1942), at a conference attended by the DDMI, GSO 1 (Int), First Aust Army, and the GSO 1 (Int) at this Headquarters, it was decided that, in view of possible enemy operations against the East coast, it would be desirable to organise a chain of Special Military Reporting Officers (see 1942) in the Cape York Peninsular area to operate behind enemy lines in the event of a landing on our coast. Such men were to be provided with personal arms and equipment, teleradio, six months' supplies, code books, and all other necessary gear. It was arranged that General Staff (Intelligence) First Aust Army would provide all technical equipment, and that this Section would select and train the personnel, install them in selected locations, and be responsible for administration and maintenance. For this purpose a special financial authority was provided which was controlled by the GSO 1 (Int).

An officer of I(a) who had a wide knowledge of the area concerned was allotted the task of recruiting the men and organising the system of communication. Eventually 15 volunteers were selected who were prepared to carry out the task at all costs, and in order to give them the necessary status they were enlisted in the VDC. In order to preserve their identity, by arrangements with Headquarters VDC, they were attached to the Headquarter Company. All administrative details relating to these men were handled personally by the AA&QMG, VDC. These men had a thorough knowledge of their localities, but little or no military experience and no knowledge of radio work. They had to be trained in the use, care, and maintenance of the radio equipment and the use of a simple code which was prepared for them by an officer of the Cipher Section, Australian Corps of Signals.

After being trained in their duties by the Intelligence officer referred to, these men were then installed in isolated localities along the coast. By the end of October, 1942, ten stations had been set up, extending from Cairns to Normanton, and subsequently five additional stations were similarly set up in the Townsville area. The local Intelligence Officers at Cairns and Townsville assisted in the work. A control station was set up in Brisbane which was manned by I(a) personnel, but at a later stage when technical assistance became available the control station was located at Charters Towers, where it remained until this plan was no longer deemed necessary.

The organisation remained in existence until August, 1944 (see 1944), when, owing to the changed situation, it was disbanded. During the period of its existence the members were visited from time to time by the Intelligence Officer and the GSO 1 (Int) and GSO 2 (Int). Although the personnel were not permitted to use their radio equipment save in the event of enemy invasion, on at least one occasion this system was used to obtain information regarding alleged enemy activity in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Maps and Topographical Information

The primary object of I(a) throughout the period under review was to collect and collate all available information for the Military Directory (see Pt 3); collection and distribution of all information received; control and issue of Strat maps, and in addition purchase and issue of Government and local maps, this Headquarters being the only authority in the area for the latter purpose. In 1942, so great was the demand for Strat maps, that bulk stock of approx. 3,000,000 sheets were maintained. Although the issue of Strat maps to Field Units was taken over by an Aust Survey Company under direction of First Aust Army, by arrangement with that Headquarters a small stock of maps was carried for issue to local units and for emergency purposes. In addition, the purchase and issue of local maps was retained throughout. This work required the services of a map issuer and a clerical assistant.

I(a) was also responsible for the production of a large number of maps and dyelines of unmapped areas, and, in the early stages of the New Guinea campaign, for arranging production of operational maps of that area for Field Formations until such time as Adv LHQ had organised this work. In addition, all sketches, maps and topographical information relating to the Islands were made available to Adv LHQ and considerable further information was obtained from former missionaries and evacuees from enemy occupied territory.

Interrogation of Prisoners of War

I(a) also interviewed many evacuated military personnel and escaped Prisoners of War for the purpose of obtaining information of operational importance, until other arrangements were made by Adv LHQ.

At the request of the Military History Section, LHQ, a number of Prisoners of War recovered in Italy and Germany were interviewed and particulars obtained regarding methods of attempted escape, and also details of the actions of specified units during operations in Greece, Crete, and the Western Desert.