

## SOLDIER ON A SECRET MISSION

Gordon Senior Carter was a pupil at Mount Albert Grammar School from 1924-1927. He did well at School, in both 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Forms [Years 9 and 10]. He got High Merits Certificates in Latin, French and Drawing, and in 1925 he got a Credit for English. Two more Credits came in both 5A and 6B.

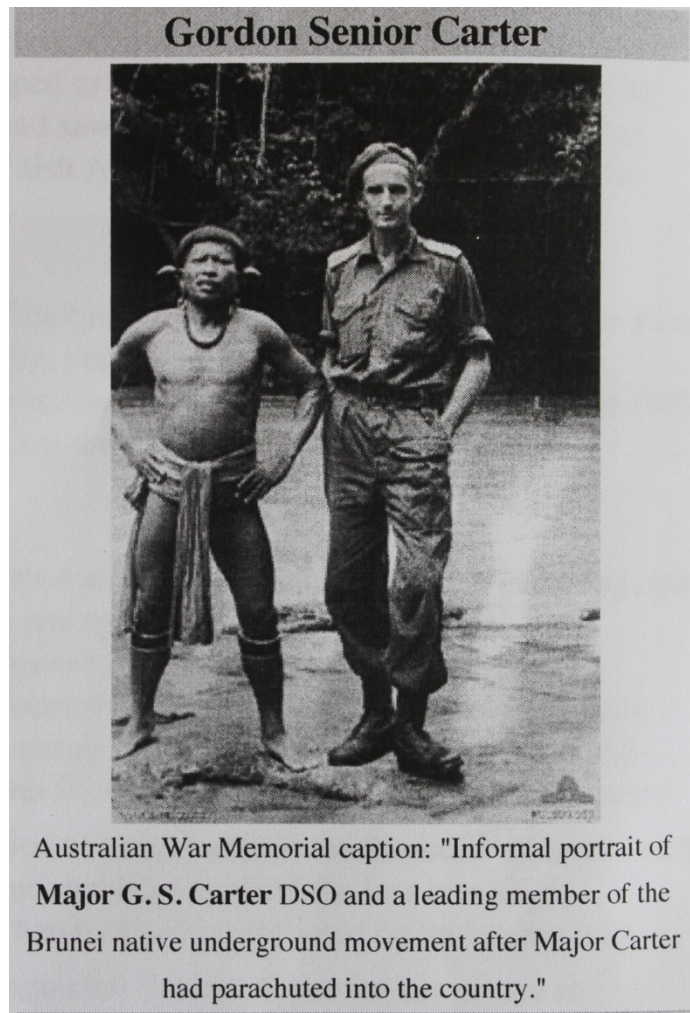
He next appears as a surveyor and road engineer in Sarawak. Borneo, where he worked for Shell Oil. During World War II he evaded capture by the invading Japanese forces in 1941 and joined the Royal Australian Engineers in 1942 and saw service in New Guinea. He then joined the secretive Z Special Unit and with seven others he was parachuted into an area of Sarawak likely chosen by Carter because of his prior knowledge of the terrain and his rapport with the indigenous people.

Carter's group consisted of 17 Europeans and a trained 350-strong local guerrilla force. Carter, who was known as Toby, was called King Carter by the locals.

On the outbreak of war he joined the British Army – the colonial power before joining the RAE. He was polite and soft spoken and regarded as an idealist who never lost sight of the long game of fostering civilian administration where possible. However, Major Carter was a valiant soldier and attacking the invading forces of the Empire of Japan was his main focus.

Carter was initially in charge of all the codenamed Semut operations in Borneo but ran a smaller group, Semut II which was nevertheless a substantial body of men. Carter later noted: "In all our Guerilla activities we were most fortunate in not having sustained the loss of a single European, and native casualties had been light. {5 of 350}. On the other hand, casualties inflicted on the enemy had been considerable."

After VJ day Carter was sent to a prisoner of war camp and a civilian internee camp to assist in evacuation to two Australian field hospitals.



It was two years after the war, in 1947, that an award was suggested for Major Carter. The Head of the Services Reconnaissance Department (another innocuous sounding secret organisation) recommended the OBE (Order of the British Empire) but his CO, General Thomas Blainey recommended an upgrade to the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) which, in military terms, ranks third behind the Victory Cross and the George Cross and in chivalry terms is the highest honour that can be given to an officer in wartime.

The recommendation remarked:

“... He established complete control over an area of 6,000 square miles and organised native relief and medical aid throughout ... During his period of operations Major Carter’s forces killed 258 Japs and captured 2... The excellent results reported above were obtained mainly by Major Carter’s enthusiasm, ability and self-sacrifice. His service and bearing throughout was a fine example and encouragement to every member of his party. On several occasions this officer personally led his guerrilla bands into attacks which inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy.”

The images below are of the DSO awarded to Wing-Commander S.D. Watts, DSO, DFC. which were lent to us to be photographed.



As well as Carter and Watts we have two other Companions of the Distinguished Service Order. They are Major G.B. Nelson D.S.O. and Group Captain C.W.K. Nichols D.S.O., O.B.E. It is a line-Officer only award.

In 1962 Carter initiated and was the driving force behind both the Kinabalu Memorial and the Kundasang War Memorial and Gardens which commemorate the 2,428 Australian and British prisoners of war who died in camp or on forced marches.

The work of ZSU, like other groups with obscure names, remained secret for some years after the war.

While the Long Range Desert Group is the recognised precursor to the New Zealand SAS, it is men like Gordon Senior Carter, in clandestine units who contributed to the formation of the SAS in both New Zealand and Australia.

Brian Murphy  
Archivist

• Most factual information reworked from Wikipedia.