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1945  
**INVASION OF TARAKAN**  
**(BORNEO)**



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# INVASION OF TARAKAN (BORNEO)

1945

OPERATION OBOE ONE

1 May 1945

HMAS HOBART, HMAS WARRAMUNGA - with the Cruiser Covering Force  
HMAS WESTRALIA, HMAS MANOORA - transporting men of the 9th Div. AIF  
HMAS HAWKESBURY, HMAS BURDEKIN, HMAS BARCOO - with the escort screen  
HMAS LACHLAN - with the Hydrographic Unit  
BEACH UNITS of the RAN

Code-named OBOE, there were originally to be SIX operations to seize areas of the Japanese occupied Netherlands East Indies.

They were to be, in order:

OBOE 1	Tarakan Island
OBOE 2	Balikpapan
OBOE 3	Bandjermasin
OBOE 4	Surabaya or Batavia
OBOE 5	East Netherlands East Indies
OBOE 6	British Borneo

Subsequently, this was reduced to THREE:

OBOE 1	Tarakan Island
OBOE 2	Brunei Bay - Labuan
OBOE 3	Balikpapan

In the post-war analysis of World War 2 there were those who contended the Borneo invasions should not have been undertaken - that the main thrust of MacArthur's offensive was from the Philippines to Okinawa and Iwo Jima and on to Japan itself.

Nevertheless, in March 1945, General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters issued operational instructions directing Lt Gen Sir Leslie Morshead's 1st Australian Corps to take Tarakan. The operational plan was to destroy the Japanese there, establish air bases and recapture the oil wells and facilities.

Troops of the 9th Div AIF were to be supported by small detachments of NEI forces to be landed near Lingkas on Tarakan Island, off the north-east coast of Borneo.

Major General George Wootten would command the AIF forces, Air Vice Marshal Bostock the RAAF support for the operation and Rear Admiral F B Royal, of the US Navy commanding the Amphibious Group Six was the Attack Group Commander for Tarakan.

Units of TG 74.3 of the US 7th Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral R S Berkey, provided the bombardment and covering force for the invasion and in that force was the RAN cruiser HOBART and the destroyer WARRAMUNGA.

Infantry landing ships WESTRALIA and MANOORA were assigned to help spearhead the transport of the 18,000 men involved in the invasion force.

Four frigates of the RAN took part - HMA ships HAWKESBURY, BURDEKIN and BARCOO



HMAS HAWKESBURY, early 1945. She mounts two 3-barrel "Squid" mortars on the shelter-deck between the two forward guns.



HMAS BURDEKIN - 1944



HMAS BARCOO, 1945, before conversion for surveying duties. "Hedgehog" in A position; single 4-in HA/LA on forward shelter deck, another at after end of fo'c'sle deck; 20-mm Oerlikons mounted in bridge wings; surface-warning RDF above the bridge; air-warning RDF on top of foremast.

assigned to the US 22nd destroyer squadron which provided the protective screen for the invasion convoy, plus LACHLAN with the Hydrographic Unit. In addition, men of the RAN Beach Unit also played a key role in this operation.

Any of those RAN men could describe the Tarakan invasion from their own personal aspects. This monograph sets out purely to tell, in a day to day sense, the story of the voyage from Morotai base and then events around Tarakan at the time of the landing. For it was the length of time aboard the transports and the distances the ships and troops of the invasion force had to travel that made the Borneo landings so unique - some 700 nautical miles to Tarakan, a great deal further around the top of Borneo to Brunei Bay - Labuan; and finally to Balikpapan. Tarakan was a history-making epic in its own way. It was the first large-scale operation undertaken by men of the AIF since the landing by their forefathers at Gallipoli.

For three of the RAN frigates, the story of Tarakan had its' beginning a shade earlier, for on 17 April 1945, HAWKESBURY, BURDEKIN and BARCOO put to sea from Hollandia, New Guinea. This was the first time the three RAN frigates had put to sea together. Steaming in line ahead, they arrived next day at Mios Wundi, observing the corvettes HMAS COOTAMUNDRA and HMAS GLENELG, plus the venerable depot-repair ship HMAS PLATYPUS as they passed through the boom entrance.

HAWKESBURY's stay in Mios Wundi was cut short when it was ordered to answer an SOS call. Radio instructions pinpointing the probable location of the SOS signals were transmitted to HAWKESBIJRY and the ship's own radio room heard the ever-weakening transmissions from the vessel in distress. Passing a convoy, HAWKESBURY obtained what additional news it could gather from the corvettes HMAS ROCKHAMPTON, HMAS TOWNSVILLE and HMAS BOWEN and the frigate began a painstaking search trying to pick up something on Radar. HMAS STAWELL was sighted, with a convoy, on 21 April, but eventually with no sign of the source of the SOS, HAWKESBURY was ordered to steam for Morotai.

Not long after its' arrival in Morotai base, HAWKESBURY found itself somewhat the centre of attention. Involved in a tour of northern establishments and operations, Admiral Sir Guy Royle, First Naval Member and Chief of Naval Staff, made HAWKESBURY his headquarters for a period. He arrived on board in Morotai with his Chief of Staff, Secretary and other officials - all of which triggered a "merry time": for HAWKESBURY's communications staff, as signals and messages were re-routed to the Admiral aboard HAWKESBURY. In the evening, on the frigate's "B" gun deck, he interviewed the Commanding Officers of MANOORA, WESTRALIA and the corvette ROCKHAMPTON. Next day HAWKESBURY's ship's company turned out in their finest tropical rig for a formal inspection on board, by the Admiral.

That night a unique meeting took place aboard HAWKESBURY. Admiral Sir Guy Royle had a conference on board with Rear Admiral Royal, Commander of the US amphibious forces designated to take Tarakan. Regrettably, America's Rear Admiral Royal died shortly after the second of the Oboe operations he commanded at Brunei Bay - Labuan - a death which saddened many RAN men aboard the ships which had served with his forces.

Admiral Sir Guy Royle left HAWKESBURY eventually for a shoreside conference in Morotai with Lt Gen Sir Leslie Morshead, whose men of the 9th Div AIF were designated for the Tarakan invasion.

On Tuesday 24 April 1945, the frigates HAWKESBURY, BURDEKIN and BARCOO, in Morotai, joined the US 22nd destroyer squadron, with the Fletcher Class Destroyer USS WALLER, as senior ship of the force, whose job it was to provide the escort screen for the big echelon of transports, tank and infantry landing ships and a whole range of vessels that would carry the AIF, NEI and other forces to Tarakan.



HMAS COOTAMUNDRA as a training ship - April 1952



HMAS GLENELG - 1945



HMAS PLATYPUS - 1946, final operational appearance.  
Topgallant masts struck; gun mounted aft.



HAWKESBURY, BURDEKIN and BARCOO, in an overall sense, came under the control of Rear Admiral Royal as Amphibious Force Commander.

Two of HAWKESBURY's signalmen found themselves in an unusual set of circumstances on 25 April. MANOORA carried a Chief Yeoman of Signals, which afforded the two frigate signalmen the chance to undergo an upgraded signalman's examination - an opportunity not to be missed. So, aboard MANOORA, all loaded with AIF troops and ready to go for the Tarakan Beachhead invasion, they underwent the full examination required - and passed.

Next day HAWKESBURY shifted its anchorage in harbour as the overall force switched around in preparation for the departure.

27 April dawned - climaxing weeks of meticulous and detailed planning. Led by WALLER, the destroyers and three RAN frigates of the 22nd US Destroyer Squadron filed out of Morotai harbour via the south entrance. In single line ahead at 12 knots, signals were passed down the line by flag hoists and semaphore - occasionally with signal lamps. Seven US fleet destroyers, two US destroyer-escorts and three RAN frigates on their first operational assignment together. Some sub-chasers and other units of the US Navy departed Morotai via the alternate entrance with the main body of the assault vessels.

It was a nice gesture on the part of one of the Tank Landing Ships (LST) loaded with 9th Div AIF troops, to play the National Anthem "God Save the King" as the three RAN ships passed with the escort force. Australian corvettes and other ships in Morotai hammered out signals of goodwill to the three RAN ships.

Out into open waters, WALLER hoisted the signals to turn the escort screen 90° to starboard and speed was reduced to some 7 knots. Overhead, Beaufighters of the RAAF towed red drogue targets and began runs along the port and starboard sides of the destroyer line, each ship opening up with anti-aircraft batteries. This was maintained for a dozen or so runs.

The chattering of 20mm Oerlikons and the pulsating thump of 40mm Bofor guns, together with the noise from main armaments as ships exercised with "everything on board", resulted in a mighty cacophony of noise.

WALLER hoisted another turn signal and the ships steamed in line after her onto the new course, memorable with a volcano dominating the skyline to one side as the force approached the waters outside the western entrance to Morotai, where the warships dispersed to carefully designated positions.

Out of that entrance then steamed the invasion force - into the ring of protection provided by the disposition of the escorts, USS ROCKY MOUNT, flying the flag of Rear Admiral Royal, USN, led the force out, followed by the USS TITANIA, then MANOORA and WESTRALIA. These ships were column commanders for the steaming echelon and went to their allocated stations. Then came the multiplicity of tank landing ships and infantry landing ships - rocket equipped vessels, tugs, small craft and the paraphernalia of an invasion force.

Aboard the big LST's, the spectacle was memorable. AIF men on the upper deck squatted on trucks, bulldozers, tanks and vast quantities of equipment.

By dusk, the convoy was set up in correct station, each ship maintaining correct bearing and distance from the lead-ship of each column, the ship immediately ahead or on either side. From the flagship came the signal "9.5 knots" and as soon as it was hauled down to execute, engine room telegraphs clanged and the invasion fleet set off at 9.5 knots.

The ring of escorts surrounding the force settled down to a 12 knot steaming disposition maintaining an exacting zigzag on all flanks to give the transports the fullest possible protection.



Troops on board an LST on the way to Borneo, listening to last minute instructions. (*Official photo*)



Up goes the wire - Australian engineers, going ashore ahead of the infantry in the Tarakan landing, successfully blew up wire defences in the shallows. (*Official photo MH 90909*)

First night out was as clear as day - a full moon shone down.

With deadlights clamped tight, the force steamed in blackout conditions at night. Use of signal lamps was all but forbidden. The warships around the convoy used TBS close range radio to pass any messages. A 100 page booklet had been issued with instructions concerning signalling within the force, secret calls to be used to address each ship and special instructions for sending signals to the Force Commander or Escort Commander. Routing instructing and attention to fine detail overlooked nothing. Signals were out to an absolute minimum. Some signals were sent on a special infra-red projector and could be read at the other end only with reciprocal equipment - nothing being apparent to the naked eye.

Reports of all suspicious and friendly aircraft were transmitted to the escort screen - aircraft being designated as bogeys, surface contacts as skunks. Bearings and distances were always quoted. If necessary, a unit of the screen was detached to investigate.

With the whole force well and truly settled down, the disposition of the ships went this way: WALLER and USS BANCROFT were "out in front". Down the port side of the force operating a zigzag, were the destroyer-escort USS BRANNON and the destroyer USS BAILEY plus HAWKESBURY. On the starboard flank were USS FORMOE, a destroyer-escort, then the destroyer USS DRAYTON and BURDEKIN.

Immediately astern of the last row of assault ships was BARCOO, with the destroyer CALDWELL. Bringing up the rear of the entire force was the fleet destroyer USS SMITH. Column leaders were: left to right of the five columns: WESTRALIA, then MANOORA, ROCKY MOUNT (flagship), TITANIA and ARD, a massive floating dock. Behind each was a long line of assault vessels.

Two small tankers were just astern of the last row of vessels. Out in front, between the destroyers WALLER and BANCROFT and the five column lead ships, were two sub-chasers of the US Navy - 740 and 698.

Seventy-two vessels, 14 escorts if the two sub-chasers are included, 13,000 troops plus all the crewmen aboard the warships and the actual invasion force ships. A massive echelon.

There was a touch of excitement on Saturday 28 April when the destroyer-escort USS BRANNON obtained a Sonar contact. Investigations followed and precautions taken with the ships all ready to alter course immediately if necessary. Nothing came of the contact.

Morning found the convoy settled, with no stragglers. Overhead, American and Australian aircraft patrolled above and ahead of the fleet. Away ahead, the cruiser covering force was doing its' job.

Task Group 74.3, comprising USS PHOENIX (flag), USS SOISE, USS DENVER, USS MONTPELIER, USS NASHVILLE and HOBART began "softening up" targets in and around Tarakan, especially adjacent to the headland approach. WARRAMUNGA was with the destroyers bombarding likely targets.

The Hydrographic Unit, involving LACHLAN, was undertaking the detailed work of surveying and preparing the approaches to Tarakan. A specialised force headed for Sadau Island, NW of Lingkas at Tarakan, to provide positions from which artillery could support the main assault on invasion day. During all this, Australian and American aircraft were battering away on bombing missions on and around Tarakan.

Aboard HAWKESBURY, the Commanding Officer gave the ship's company a rundown on what was to happen. He described how a specialised force was being landed on Sadau Island inside



Tarakan Bay, to establish gunnery observation and other posts. Air Force and Navy units were pounding the target area ceaselessly and he detailed what the cruiser covering force was undertaking in its' bombardments.

He told the ship's company that on the afternoon of 30 April, the invasion fleet would be required to close to three columns as approach formation and that at 0815 on 1 May 1945, the assault on the beach-head would begin. HAWKESBURY's allocated role, he said, was on a patrol point between Sadau Island and Tarakan, with the other ships of the escorting force detailed to specific locations around Tarakan Bay and off the beach-head area.

Opposition, he said, was likely in the form of Japanese E-boats and torpedo craft, bombers -especially suicide bombers. There was a possibility, he said, that the 5,000 estimated Japanese at Tarakan would set fire to the oil installations and the oil pipeline running down to the beach. The ship's company, he said, would go into two watches, working 4 hours on and 4 off continuously and that on Invasion Day they could be at action stations for 24 hours or longer.

On the afternoon of 28 April, aboard HAWKESBURY, refresher course lectures and demonstrations were given on the quarterdeck on the use of small arms.

HAWKESBURY's radio room maintained a non-stop guard on the frequency of the Commander, Philippines Sea Frontier and on Manus Fox Radio - the fleet base at Manus. Signalmen on the bridge operating two short-distance radio sets maintaining links with all the assault ships plus the convoy escorts, as well as an ever-alert visual signal watch for flag, semaphore or lamp signals.

Demolition charges were arranged for the Radar and anti-submarine installations in the ship should it become necessary in any emergency situation - designed to destroy them rather than risk any components falling into Japanese hands in the event of unfortunate drama.

At 1600 on 28 April, the formation passed the lovely Sangi Islands - very beautiful, thickly wooded, with high mountains rising into the clouds.

Every morning and again at dusk each evening, the ship's company closed up at action stations, everyone wearing gauntlets, hoods and anti-flash equipment. By this time, Black Widow and Liberator aircraft were providing aerial cover - Black Widow fighters operating over the force also during the dark hours.

After a perfect moonlight night, the convoy saw the dawn of 30 April with no stragglers. But there was an unusual touch of drama at 0724, when a man fell over the side of one of the crowded tank landing ships. With so many ships steaming in tight formation, he was in danger of being run down by the next vessel astern, or even later ones in the column. However, the destroyer USS CALDWELL raced in between the columns and plucked him out of the ocean, safe and sound.

The water at this stage was like the proverbial sheet of glass - so smooth and tranquil it seemed a shame to disturb it with the wash of 72 vessels and 14 warships.

Ballistic balloons were released at 0730 to obtain upper-air data, with details flashed to all key ships for use by anti-aircraft batteries.

At 0900, the fleet exercised changing from cruising formation to approach formation, which was the manner in which they would be required to approach and enter Tarakan Bay's narrow entrance. All units formed into the three-column disposition without difficulty, the manoeuvre taking about two hours.

A signal went out to all ships from the Task Group Commander "Well done".

Checks were made that morning to ensure that every man aboard HAWKESBURY had and wore an identification disc.

The force entered the Celebes Sea on 30 April in perfect weather, now back in its' cruising disposition of five columns.

At 1730 on 30 April, anAB on HAWKESBURY was in pain with a serious appendicitis problem. With no doctor on board the frigate, permission was sought to transfer the man to BARCOO, which was carrying a doctor.

Granted approval for the transfer, the two frigates closed and a line with breeches buoy rigged on which the sick crewman was quickly and efficiently transferred. The operation took place aboard BARCOO that evening and the customary signal went out "Operation successful - patient well". He was operated on at 2030 and it was quite some time later that he eventually was able to rejoin his HAWKESBURY.

The following types of aircraft were used during the invasion of Tarakan and their identification as to whether friendly or foe, had to be known thoroughly:

**US AIR FORCE AND US ARMY AIR FORCE:**

Liberator	Mitchell	Havoc	Lightning
Warhawk	Mustang	Commando	Skytrain
Skytrooper	Catalina	Spotting Cub	SuperFortress

**US NAVY AND US MARINE CORPS:**

Corsair	Dauntless	Kingfisher	SOC
Catalina	Ventura	Mariner	Liberator
	Privateer	Mitchell	

**ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE:**

Warhawk	Spitfire	Beaufighter
Mosquito	Auster	Catalina

The ship's company was required to wear protective clean clothing with long sleeves, socks and boots as a precaution. Coupled with gauntlet anti-flash equipment, they were then best protected from gun flash, bomb or shell blast. At night, each man slept with, handy, a life-jacket, flash gear and tin helmet. Results of bombing and shelling from the target area were photographed by aircraft and promptly printed, after which the pictures were flown to the invasion force and dropped by parachute. Destroyers picked up these packages and raced them to ROCKY MOUNT for evaluation and knowledge.

Monday 30 April, 1945 and the force was just 24 hours from its' destination.

At 0310, USS BAILEY, immediately ahead of HAWKESBURY in the escort screen, obtained a Sonar contact. She raced off at speed to investigate and HAWKESBURY "closed up" to fill the gap caused by her absence. BAILEY lost the contact but nevertheless dropped a pattern of depth charges "just in case". HAWKESBURY and BAILEY then assumed their normal position back in the screening force.

Almost at the same time, the destroyer BANCROFT, out in front of the columns, obtained another Sonar contact. The short-distance radio sets fairly hummed with reports as BANCROFT and WALLER investigated, whilst Admiral Royal on his flagship USS ROCKY MOUNT awaited



news of its' evaluation. Finally, BANCROFT indicated her target to be floating logs on the surface.

At 1300 on 30 April, the following report came through by radio:

*"On 29 April United States minesweepers penetrated Tarakan Harbour and swept close to the piers, where they met small arms fire. Rain and smoke obscured the island from dawn until noon. Air strikes by the US 14th Air Force and RAAF planes continued in Tarakan and around Borneo. Two enemy planes were damaged and one destroyed at Kuriat. Kuching installations were heavily hit.*

*FLASH: Landing of artillery at Sadau Is land continued at 0900 local time April 30 and is progressing satisfactorily".*

At 1600 on 30 April, HAWKESBURY's ship's company went into two watches - four on and four off.

Also at 1600 that day, the invasion fleet went into approach formation, proceeding into three columns as practised earlier. The escorting screen of warships took up their new stations. Invasion time was approaching and an atmosphere of tenseness was building.

At 1630 heavy rain set in. It developed into drenching, tropical rain, known only to those who have experienced it. Thunder and lightning accompanied the rainstorm in true tropical manner and it was impossible to see the bow of the ship from the bridge. We felt our way along, using Radar and used that Radar also to scan other units to ensure they were not dropping out of position in the storm.

In this torrential rain, the Asdic operators reported a contact and HAWKESBURY investigated - with no result.

At 2200 on that 30 April, the cruiser PHOENIX, HOBART, WARRAMUNGA, NICHOLAS and TAYLOR met the formation, having taken part in the bombardment of the target area. Rain

continued until 0230 on 1 May - invasion day.

Two American destroyers, then HAWKESBURY, then the body of the invasion force edged their way past the headland at the entrance into Tarakan Bay. On this headland had stood Japanese gun batteries, but, thanks to the air force and the cruisers, they were now out of action. No shots were fired, but we all bit our nails as we edged past that headland. Large fires were already burning in the target area.

Once inside, HAWKESBURY immediately took up station adjacent to Sadau Island as designated.

Just as the force was coming into position in Tarakan Bay, CALDWELL, still outside, radioed that a torpedo had been fired at her but that it had missed. Almost simultaneously, the big dock, ARD, reported that a torpedo had struck her side, but had failed to explode. Destroyers raced around in an effort to get "on the scent" but no kills were reported from the depth charges dropped. Promptly when dawn broke, the warships opened fire on the beaches - a memorable sight and a noisy affair. Five-inch and smaller shells poured into Tarakan, on to the oil installations and other targets. Quickly the whole scene became a raging inferno as oil tanks exploded sending acrid black smoke cascading into the sky amid fireballs. Oil ran over scorched ground. Derricks and oil fields burned and the whole scene became a mess. Aircraft came in, to add to the destruction.



**BORNEO INVASION SMOKE SCREEN BY 13TH AAF:** In this picture, smoke screens laid by 15th US Army Air Force medium bombers of the Crusader group billow up effectively to hide an Australian combat engineers group as they blast underwater defences blocking the only available landing beach at Tarakan, tiny island just east of the big East Indies island of Borneo. The engineers brought in TNT-filled barges under cover of the smoke screen. For 88 minutes, they blew up the defences and then returned while the assault troops came in for the initial landings. Split second timing co-ordinated the planes and the engineers. The bombers were scheduled to arrive at the exact moment the small boats came within range of the enemy shore installations. Flying from distant Philippine bases, they carried no reserve gasoline. Bombers and boats reached the target area within seconds of the specified time. *(Photo by Lt Raymond L Proctor)*



For the AIF men going ashore, Tarakan was a nightmare. The beach-head was full of hazards and obstacles. There were Dutch, Japanese and also Allied mines that had been dropped, plus four rows of obstacles, rows of posts with each post mined and a fence of steel rails and iron tubes plus a host of other "discouragements".

At 0815, the first wave of troops went ashore in the landing craft. From then on, it was a non stop procession of landing craft racing back and forth to the beach-head. Black Widow aircraft operated overhead. One destroyer opened up on an ammunition dump and sent it sky-high with a direct hit, resulting in a shattering explosion and bits and pieces flying everywhere.

Liberators continued their bombing runs and aircraft strafed low hills and Japanese emplacements. Aboard HAWKESBURY, which we are using as our example in this monograph, breakfast was served to all at action stations - hot sausages and rolls. Ashore with the AIF were some 4,000 RAAF personnel, hoping to put the airstrip into shape fairly quickly - a task that ultimately became a veritable nightmare. Dutch oil experts went in to examine the installations.

Tank landing ships, which carried the bulk of heavy equipment and stores, beached to disgorge their incredible loads.

One member of the RAN beach party was killed and two wounded - the first casualties that HAWKESBURY's men came to know of - picked off by Japanese small arms fire.

Throughout the day, the Japanese positions could be observed from the ship - the Japanese firing mortars plus anti-aircraft fire. It was fascinating to watch the planes sweeping in low and chattering away with their gunfire as they strafed enemy positions.



Smoke Rises As Us Naval Bombardment Hits Japanese Installations on Tarakan: as a four-day bombardment by units of the US Seventh Fleet and the Royal Australian Navy blasts the island off the east coast of Borneo prior to Australian landings there on 30 April 1945. The wavy diagonal streaks across the sky are from phosphorus shells. A smoke cover was used by Australian engineers removing water barriers preparatory to the landings. US Navy units supported and transported Australian infantrymen for the strike into Tarakan, one of the world's richest oil fields. The liberation of the island will provide Allied forces with a source of oil within 800 miles (1300 km) of Manila, Philippine capital, and 1,000 miles (1600 km) from Singapore. (US Info Photo 41195)



At night, the scene was indeed eerie. Flames gave an uncanny red glow over the whole scene, while intermittently, rifle and machine gun fire broke the silence. The moon was down, and another danger came up for the ships - Japanese swimmers who might try and fix limpet mines to their hulls. Each ship was given permission to send its' motor cutter around the ship once every 10 minutes at a distance of 10 yards from the hull - but no further. A machine gun was mounted in the bow of Hawkesbury's motor cutter, by way of example, and her crew, fully armed, was kept busy all night. No other craft were allowed to move at night without specific permission, thus enabling a warning to be given to any ships in the area. Anything else that moved could be attacked without notice. So many of the ships in Tarakan on those nights opened up on "something" - tins, logs, tree trunks and rubble that floated near - picked up so often, by Radar. The ships lay still, fully ready to steam at an instant's notice. One of the oddball things HAWKESBURY came across while near Sadau Island was a Japanese barge - but with no Japanese aboard. Quite empty!

2 May - the second day. Fire support ships were detailed off for bombardment duty, hitting targets designated mostly by army observers. Other ships could fire only if they saw something that required action without awaiting specific orders. All day there was spasmodic shelling but all the while the AIF troops ashore were battling their way into Tarakan.

An unusual task came the way of HAWKESBURY. Several of the big LST tank landing ships disgorged their immense cargoes on to the beach, but because of the morass of mud and some eccentricities of the tides, they found they could not extricate themselves. At 1000 on 2 May, HAWKESBURY and a US destroyer were ordered to steam at a fairly good rate of knots offshore from where the LST's were stranded. The wash they created enabled the LST's, straining on their stern anchors and with engines in reverse, to finally extricate themselves. It was a most unusual assignment.

Through telescopes, HAWKESBURY's observers were able to watch AIF troops ashore moving carefully over ground as they worked their way towards the air strip. Special equipment helped to de-mine the place and great precautions were taken, for some fiendishly devised booby traps had been set by the Japanese. Mitchells, Liberators and Lightning aircraft plus the Black Widows strafed overhead, especially in the area around the still Japanese-held airstrip.

A convoy arrived at noon, including the fleet tanker WINOOSKI, from which HAWKESBURY, LACHLAN, BARCOO, BURDEKIN and the destroyers drew fuel. As one ship left WINOOSKI's side, another took its' place.

A voice-circuit radio gave a description of a fascinating incident that morning. Four Japanese were reported by a ship to be seen paddling furiously along the foreshore in an effort to get to the mainland from Tarakan Island. Planes peeled off from overhead and came down strafing the Japanese, who promptly ditched their boat on the beach and ran into the bushes. Yard Minesweepers 481 and 380 were reported to have been sunk by gunfire on the mainland side of Tarakan and 334 and 260 were said to have been damaged.

On the night of 2 May, HAWKESBURY was allocated a position behind the main body of vessels and anchored there, maintaining continuous anti-submarine and Radar watches. Twice contacts were investigated, with negative results.

By 0830 on 3 May, the US cruiser PHOENIX was brought into Tarakan Bay and manoeuvred off Sadau Island. On that island, army observers called the fall of shot as the big cruiser directed its' shells over the island to hit enemy emplacements "down river". With corrections from the army, the gun positions of the Japanese were wiped out.

All day on 3 May, the bombing and strafing continued. Destroyers spasmodically shelled specific

Japanese strongpoints. When PHOENIX moved out, HAWKESBURY returned to its' position near Sadau. Intermittently, great fires followed by big explosions were seen on the shoreline. Yet another gun was set up by the Japanese in the area which PHOENIX had previously shelled and an American destroyer on patrol duty in that area was damaged by gunfire. HAWKESBURY continued its' patrol off the Sadau Island area, watching the Air Force bomb more enemy gun positions ashore.

Shelling from destroyers and air bombing continued, plus action from the Sadau Island gun batteries. An ammunition dump went up at midnight with a terrific explosion and sheets of flame.

On the afternoon of 5 May, HAWKESBURY took on board an Army Captain and prepared for a bombardment of enemy positions. Shells were stacked on the deck ready for use and the gunnery crews closed up. For 2½ hours, specific targets were shelled, destroying a radio station and its' mast, specific buildings and installations, a roadway, a causeway and other targets indicated by the army observers. The ship continued patrol at night with Radar and anti-submarine gear sweeping constantly. The former picked up a surface object which was hit by gunfire from HAWKESBURY - an aircraft belly tank. A count showed that during HAWKESBURY's earlier bombardment assignment, it had fired 126 x 4" shells and more than 480 Bofor shells.

BURDEKIN sailed from Tarakan on 5 May.

On 6 May, HAWKESBURY was ordered to patrol the sealane areas at the entrance to Tarakan Bay, after which the ship closed the American destroyer ROBINSON for further orders. A convoy of tows which included a whole range of smaller gear necessary to carry on operations when the place was captured, arrived in the afternoon - floating docks, barges, small tugs and other essential craft.

So the battle for Tarakan raged on. The AIF lost in all, 225 men killed in the Tarakan operation, quite apart from wounded casualties.

On the morning of 7 May 1945, HAWKESBURY was assigned to escort the tanker WINOOSKI, departing Tarakan and settling down to a speed of 16.5 knots with the frigate operating a zigzag ahead of the fleet tanker. Upon leaving Tarakan, HAWKESBURY - undoubtedly like other RAN ships operating there - received a signal from the Commander of Task Group 78.1 wishing the frigate all the best in the future and adding complimentary remarks about the ship's performance



Tarakan: LST's sitting high and dry on the muddy beachhead at Tarakan waiting for the tide to float them off. These muddy beaches were a problem to engineers unloading stores.

(Official Photo N1852)

in the operation.

HAWKESBURY's assignment was to escort WINOOSKI to the Philippines and during that trip, on 8 May, the frigate's radio received the signal that the war with Germany had ended. Specifically, the wording as received in HAWKESBURY's Radio Room on 8 May, 1945 when between Borneo and Mindanao read:

ADMIRALTY INSTRUCTION GENERAL

*"German High Command has surrendered unconditionally. All German land, sea and air forces in Europe effective from 00018 hours repeat 00018 (1101 Item) 9th repeat 9th May, 1945 from which hour all offensive operations are to cease. Due to difficulties of communication there may be some delay in these orders reaching enemy forces. Accordingly danger of attacking individual enemy surface craft, U-boats and aircraft may persist for some time to come. The fleet in all waters is to remain on war footing and in a constant state of vigilance. Surrender procedure for U boats will be promulgated separately. No repeat No release is to be made to Press pending an announcement by Heads of Government.  
080012 B.*

Received aboard HAWKESBURY 0208 - 8 May, 1945

The European war was over - but the Japanese conflict had a long way yet to go.

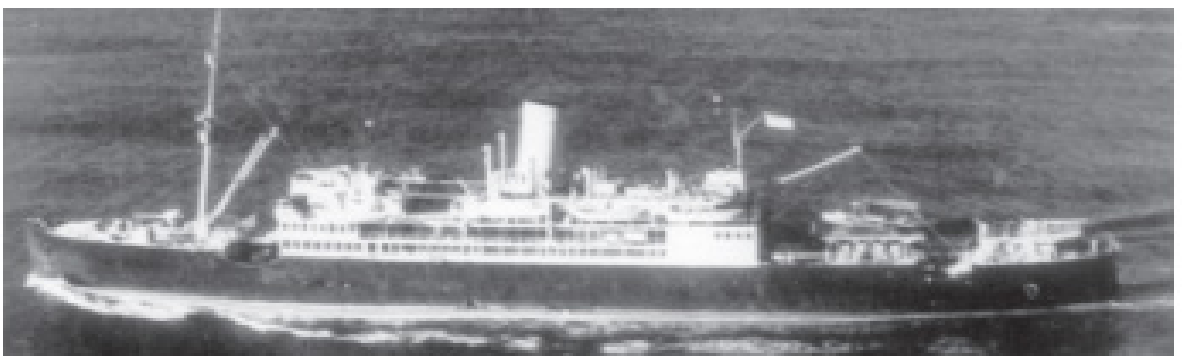
Several of the RAN ships in Oboe 1 - Tarakan - went on to participate in the Brunei Bay-Labuan Oboe 2 campaign, with Oboe 3 at Balikpapan finally winding up the three Borneo operations. The AIF lost another 114 men killed in the Brunei Bay-Labuan campaign apart from all those who were wounded. Another 229 were killed at Balikpapan.

HAWKESBURY took part in the Brunei Bay campaign but missed the Balikpapan operation. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima, then Nagasaki, finally led to Japan surrendering unconditionally. HAWKESBURY was then assigned to go to Singapore with the relief liner DUNTROON to represent the RAN when Mountbatten took the Japanese surrender there on 12 September 1945; and to give Navy escort to the transports returning the Changi prisoners-of-war.

Later on, after a surrender ceremony at Timor, HAWKESBURY embarked a platoon of AIF soldiers and Dutch officials and undertook a lengthy surveillance of the Netherlands East Indies. It was highlighted by many local Japanese surrender ceremonies, the dumping of Japanese equipment, rounding-up of Japanese forces, restoration of civil administration and the gathering of news about Allied pilots who had been shot down in the Dutch East Indies.

In time, HAWKESBURY was to revisit Tarakan - placid and peaceful in contrast to the drama and excitement that had been experienced with so many other RAN and US ships and with the men of the 9th Div. AIF when they all took part in Oboe 1 the first of the Borneo invasions at Tarakan.

HMAS  
WESTRALIA



## INFANTRY LANDING SHIPS (LSI)

### *THREE SHIPS*

During 1943 one Royal Navy and two RAN AMCs were converted to LSIs for amphibious operations in the Pacific region. The trio were equipped to transport up to 1,250 troops each and carried from 18 to 24 landing craft. The latter were held in davits and lowered from port and starboard into the water. With their change of role the LSIs were defensively re-armed to allow additional space for the storage of the new equipment.



HMAS MANOORA

Name	Details	Status
<b>KANIMBLA</b> (C78)	Steamship 11,000 gross tons 468.8 x 66.3 x 24.4 feet 19 knots 1 x 4-inch, 2 x 3-inch 2 x 2pdr., 12 x 20 mm 4 x .303 Vickers 24 Bren guns 1,280 troops, 22 LCVPs 2 LCMs	Built 1935 Req 579/39 RN 6/10/39 LSI 1/6/43 Paid Off 25/3/49 Returned 13/12/50
<b>MANOORA</b> (C77)	Steamship 10,856 gross tons 480 x 91 x 24 feet 8,200 bhp = 15.7 kts 1 x 6-inch, 2 x 3-inch 8 x 20 mm 1,250 troops, 17 LCVPs 2 LCMs 1 Walrus Amphibian	Built 1935 Req 11/10/39 AMC 12/12/39 Paid Off 28/9/42 LSI 2/2/43 Paid Off 6/12/47 Returned 31/8/49
<b>WESTRALIA</b> (C61)	Steamship 8,108 gross tons 445 x 60 x 22.7 feet 6,750 bhp = 15½ knots 1 x 6-inch, 2 x 3-inch 12 x 20mm 1,250 troops, 16 LCVPs LCMs, 1 Walrus Amphibian	Built 1929 Req 2/11/39 AMC 17/1/40 Paid Off 12/1942 LSI 31/5/43 Paid Off 19/9/46 Returned 27/3/51

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