

CHAPTER 25

R.A.N. SURVEY KEY TO BRUNEI

THE OBOE plan, as it was named, and which visualised the furtherance of the South-West Pacific campaign by the recapture of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies was, as conceived in February 1945, in six parts. OBOE ONE, as mentioned, was the attack on Tarakan Island. OBOE TWO was to be an attack on Balikpapan on 18th May. The capture of this port would not only secure the oilfields, but would also provide an advanced base for the occupation on 28th May of Bandjermasin (OBOE THREE) on Borneo's south coast. With air support from Bandjermasin, or from British carriers if available, would come the major operation of the series, OBOE FOUR, the invasion of Java by Australian troops, and the seizure of the Surabaya area on 27th June, with advances thence west to Bandung and Batavia and east to Lombok Strait. OBOE FIVE would be the consolidation of the remaining areas of the Netherlands East Indies, and OBOE SIX the occupation of the remaining areas of Borneo. Subsequently operations OBOE THREE, FOUR and FIVE were cancelled and a further landing on Borneo, at Brunei Bay, was planned for 23rd May as OBOE SIX which thus—out of numerical order in the OBOE series—became the next target on the Borneo list.

Brunei (2,226 square miles) on Borneo's north-west coast, a native state under British protection, was bordered on the north-west by the sea, and otherwise by the British Crown Colony of Sarawak (47,000 square miles) in which territory it formed a double pocket just west of Sarawak's border with the other British Crown Colony of British North Borneo (29,387 square miles). Generally the area, partly swampy, was drained by small, short streams, and the coastal plain was accessible from sandy beaches. The coastal lowlands extended in undulating plains some five miles to the rugged, steep, densely forested mountains of the interior. There were large rubber plantations south of Brunei town. The oilfields were at Seria, some 60 miles south-west of Brunei town, and Miri, about 30 miles farther on.

The town—and port—of Brunei lay at the extremity of an arm of Brunei Bay, reaching some 20 miles into the land from the south-west corner of the main bay. This was itself a large rectangular body of water, approximately 20 miles square, and extending south-easterly from the island's north-west coastline. Its portals were the southern tip of the Klias Peninsula to the north-east, and Brunei Bluff to the south-west. Lying about midway in the entrance to Brunei Bay was the equilateral triangle of Labuan Island (35 square miles) which was part of British North Borneo, the boundary between which territory and that of Sarawak bisected Brunei Bay. Midway along the southern base of Labuan was Victoria Harbour, providing the best port facilities in the area, with

three timber wharves, and sheltered anchorage for a limited number of cruisers and destroyers.

Just east of Brunei Bluff, and partially closing the entrance to the south-west arm of Brunei Bay and thus the approach to the town of Brunei, was the small island of Muara, flat, partly swampy, and possessing four T-shaped jetties extending into the channel, suitable for berthing cargo ships (AK's). There were two Japanese airstrips, one at Miri and one on Labuan. Both had been heavily hit in Allied air attacks, and were classed as non-operational.

Borneo's value to the Japanese had been largely as a source of raw materials: oil, rubber, copper and coal. An added attraction at Brunei was the large bay, of which the Japanese had long made use as a fleet anchorage, and which they planned to develop into a naval base. It was estimated that a naval base force of some 500 to 700 would form part of the 2,000 to 2,500 enemy troops considered to constitute the ground strength in the Brunei Bay-Labuan area. Though Japanese naval forces of three heavy (two damaged) and one light cruiser and four to six destroyers were known to be deployed in the Singapore-N.E.I. area, it was thought improbable that these would attempt a raid on Allied forces operating in the Brunei Bay area. Japanese naval reaction to an Allied landing was expected to be limited to harassing attacks by small suicide boats and to light submarine activity. Mines had been laid in the Brunei Bay area and in Balabac Strait, between North Borneo and Palawan Island, by both the Allies and the Japanese. This necessitated extensive—and in the event fruitful—minesweeping.

The tasks assigned to the Allied participants in OBOE SIX were: "Destroy hostile garrison and secure the Brunei Bay area and consolidate that part of the Brunei Bay area necessary to permit establishment of an advanced fleet base and to protect oil and rubber resources therein." As at Tarakan, Admiral Royal was the naval commander in direct command of the operation, and the landing force—of the 20th (Brigadier Windeyer) and 24th (Brigadier Porter¹) Brigade Groups of the 9th Division—was commanded by General Wootten. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock commanded the Allied Air Forces concerned and Admiral Berkey commanded the Cruiser Covering Force, TF.74.3, comprising *Nashville* (Flag), *Phoenix*, *Boise*, H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and five destroyers, including H.M.A.S. *Arunta*.

Planning for the operation, which was originally to be a landing on 23rd May, commenced at Morotai on the 2nd of that month. Inability to assemble all the troops, equipment and supplies at the staging area in time for the projected date necessitated postponement of the operation for seventeen days, so that "Zebra-day"—as it was termed—became 10th June. Three beaches were selected for landing points—one, Brown Beach on Labuan Island, extending from Victoria town to Ramsay Point, a distance of about 1,200 yards. The other two beaches were about 20 miles

¹ Maj-Gen S. H. W. C. Porter, CBE, DSO, ED, 2/5 Bn; CO 2/6 Bn 1941, 2/31 Bn 1941-42; comd 30 Bde 1942-43, 24 Bde 1943-45. Commissioner of Police, Victoria, 1954-63. Bank officer; of Wangaratta, Vic; b. Tintaldra, Vic, 23 Feb 1905. Died 9 Oct 1963.

distant from Brown Beach, in the vicinity of Brunei town—White Beach on Muara Island, extending some 1,000 yards northward from Cape Sapo, and Green Beach, lying about one mile to the eastward of Brunei Bluff. (There was also Yellow Beach on the eastern point of Brunei Peninsula, which was a safe all-weather beach for landing equipment, but was not a suitable assault beach.) Because of the distance between the two sets of assault beaches, it was decided to have two separate assault units. The Brown Beach landing on Labuan at Victoria Harbour would be made by the 24th Brigade on a two-battalion front; those on Green Beach and on White Beach would be made by the 20th Brigade.

It will be recalled that, of the Australian ships which participated in the Tarakan operation, *Barcoo* was the last to leave that island. She sailed on the last day of May 1945 as Senior Officer of Echelon OBOE SIX A, consisting of 10 L.C.T's and 44 L.C.M's, bound for Brunei. This group was one of the first converging on this second Borneo target to set out for its destination. In the afternoon of 1st June the group arrived at Tawitawi and anchored in the bay, where it remained until sailing for Balabac at 7 a.m. on the 4th. At that time, some 400 miles to the south-east, another group of ships was at sea making for Brunei. This was the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group. Its departure on 2nd June from Morotai was recorded by Lieut-Commander Tancred in *Lachlan*: "At 1200 departed Morotai in convoy with 50 minesweeping and fire support craft en route for Brunei Bay. Hydrographic Unit (Task Unit 78.1.6) consisting of H.M.A.S. *Lachlan*, U.S.S. *YMS160*² and U.S.S. *Satinleaf*."³

It was on 4th June, too, that the Brunei Attack Group, commanded by Admiral Royal in U.S.S. *Rocky Mount*, sailed from Morotai. The assault echelon was of 85 ships—including 34 L.S.T's, 22 L.C.I's, 22 L.C.M's and the Australian L.S.I's *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westrallia*. The attack group sailed from Morotai Harbour around noon and Commander Bunyan, in *Kanimbla*, left a picture of its departure in his Action Report:

At 1205 anchor was weighed and *Kanimbla* proceeded from Morotai Harbour in line ahead, courses and speeds requisite to assume cruising formation, and at 1438 ship was in station, *Kanimbla*, *Titania*,⁴ *Manoora*, *Rocky Mount*, *Westrallia*, *Carter Hall* and *Lloyd*⁵ [a destroyer transport, Flagship of a flotilla of five] leading lines of L.S.T's, L.C.I's, L.S.M's and other vessels of the Brunei Attack Group. *Kanimbla* in station as leader of column 7. The Attack Group was escorted by U.S. Ships *Caldwell*, *Bancroft*,⁶ *Jobb*, *Robinson*, *Philip*,⁷ *Day*,⁸ *Edwards*,⁹ *Grant*, *Killen*, *PC1132*,¹ *SC741* and *SC732*.²

² *YMS160*, US motor minesweeper (1942-45), 207 tons, one 3-in gun, 13 kts.

³ *Satinleaf*, US net laying ship (1944), 1,100 tons.

⁴ *Titania*, US attack cargo ship (1942), 7,047 tons.

⁵ *Lloyd*, US high speed transport (1944), 1,400 tons.

⁶ *Caldwell*, *Bancroft*, US destroyers (1942), 1,620 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

⁷ *Robinson*, *Philip*, US destroyers (1942-44), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

⁸ *Jobb*, *Day*, US destroyer-escorts (1944), two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts.

⁹ *Edwards*, US destroyer (1942), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

¹ *PC1132*, US submarine chaser (1942-44), 280 tons, one or two 3-in guns, 18 kts.

² *SC741*, *SC732*, US submarine chasers (1942-44), 95 tons, one 40-mm gun, 20 kts.

The voyage through the Celebes and Sulu Seas was made in fair weather and the attack group "overcame the navigational difficulties presented by Basilan and Balabac Straits without mishap".³ Air protection was provided and dawn and dusk alerts maintained, but no enemy aircraft appeared and no submarine contacts were reported.

Three more groups sailed on 5th June. One was a reinforcement echelon of L.S.T's and L.C.I's and five merchant ships with destroyer escort, which sailed from Morotai. From Subic Bay at 8.30 a.m. the Cruiser Covering Group sailed—Rear-Admiral Berkey in *Nashville*, with U.S.S. *Phoenix*, H.M.A.S. *Hobart*, U.S. destroyers *Conner*, *Burns*, *Charrette* and *Bell*,⁴ and H.M.A.S. *Arunta*. And from Leyte there departed H.M.A.S. *Hawkesbury*, with a slow tow convoy.

First arrival at Brunei Bay at dawn on 7th June was the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group. It was followed within an hour or so by the Cruiser Covering Group, which covered the minesweepers sweeping the approaches to the bay. *Lachlan* laid channel approach buoys and carried out check soundings of the approaches. Next day, the 8th, *Phoenix*, *Conner*, *Hobart*, *Charrette* and *Burns* carried out the first scheduled bombardments, which were accompanied by air bombing. *Hobart* fired 65 rounds of 6-inch at targets on the eastern end of Muara Island. *Lachlan*'s boat "with Lieutenant A. H. Cooper,⁵ R.A.N., in charge, proceeded to lay buoys in and near Victoria Harbour while the naval bombardment and air bombing was at its height". *Lachlan* herself carried out close inshore reconnaissance of Green Beach, placing marking buoys within 30 yards of the beach. This day the Allies suffered the only ship casualty in the operation. The minesweeper U.S.S. *Salute*⁶ struck a mine, suffered extensive hull damage from which she sank, and had four men killed and 37 wounded.

On the 8th the Attack Group passed through Balabac Strait and in the afternoon saw *Barcoo* in Balabac Harbour. Here the group was joined by U.S.S. *Willoughby*⁷ and 10 P.T. boats.

Next day, the 9th — Z-1 day — dawned clear and calm at Brunei, with gentle variable winds and smooth sea with little or no swell. *Lachlan* entered harbour at dawn, carried out a close reconnaissance of White Beach, covered by supporting fire from landing craft, and then surveyed and buoyed the narrow channel south of Muara Island to Brooketon. This survey was scheduled to take place after the capture of Muara Island on Z-day, but, Tancred recorded:

I decided that the whole assault would be speeded and traffic cleared to Brooketon without delay if this survey was completed on Z—1-day. *Lachlan*'s boats, with myself,

³ Report of Commander Amphibious Group Six, TG.78.1.

⁴ *Conner*, *Burns*, *Charrette* and *Bell*, US destroyers (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

⁵ Capt A. H. Cooper, RAN, HMAS's *Hobart*, *Perth*, *Nepal*, *Benalla*, *Lachlan*. Of Greenwich Point, NSW; b. Burwood, NSW, 29 Apr 1920.

⁶ *Salute*, US minesweeper (1943), 625 tons, one 3-in gun, 15 kts. Sunk Brunei Bay, 8 Jun 1945.

⁷ *Willoughby*, US motor torpedo boat tender (1944), 1,760 tons.

Lieutenant C. H. McGee⁸ . . . and Lieutenant W. J. Starkey⁹ . . . in charge, and with two L.C.S(L)'s, two L.C.I(G)'s and *YMS160* rendering close fire support, went into the channel and completed the survey. Two destroyers detailed by CTG.74.3 to cover the operation dropped shells dangerously close to the boats, but with the exception of two shots from the shore at one of *Lachlan's* boats just north of Brooketon, no enemy resistance was experienced. The latter part of the operation was carried out in the smoke from the intensive bombing of Brooketon by formations of Liberators.

During all this, one of the L.C.I's grounded when the boats were being withdrawn from the channel and *Lachlan* spent the night of Z—1-day "feeling rather lonely" anchored 500 yards off Cape Sapo, Muara Island, to give support if necessary. The Cruiser Covering Group entered Brunei Bay at 8 a.m. on the 9th and carried out scheduled bombardments. Of the Australian ships, *Hobart* had no targets this day but *Arunta*, in the afternoon, carried out scheduled bombardments in the Brunei Bluff area.

Meanwhile the Attack Group, approaching Brunei, was joined in the afternoon of the 9th by U.S.S. *Boise* with General MacArthur on board, escorted by destroyers *Killen* and *Albert W. Grant*. News received this day minimised the possibility of any Japanese naval attack. CTG.78.1, commander of the Attack Group, recorded:

On 9 June it was learned that the Japanese heavy cruiser, *Ashigara*, had been sunk at 1242, 8 June, by the British submarine *Trenchant*, in position 1 degree 59 minutes South, 104 degrees 57 minutes East [off Sumatra, just at the northern entrance to Banka Strait]. This removed almost beyond peradventure the possibility of a surprise sortie by enemy fleet units against our forces at Brunei Bay.

II

Sunday, 10th June, Z-day at Brunei, dawned with a clear sky ushering in a calm day. The ships of the Cruiser Covering Group were already in position in their firing areas, having entered the bay at 2.30 a.m. Two hours later the approaching Attack Group executed the "Deploy" signal entering the bay. The Green and White Beach units—*Kanimbla*, 17 landing craft, and *Lloyd* with her four other destroyer transports—detached and altered 90 degrees to starboard to their destinations. And at 5.30 a.m. *Kanimbla* recorded "starboard anchor let go in 15 fathoms". The main body of the Attack Group with *Rocky Mount*, *Manoora*, *Westralia*, *Titania*, *Carter Hall* and 30 landing craft went to Brown Beach, Labuan, and at 6.18 a.m. CTG.78.1 recorded in his report: "*Manoora*, *Titania* and *Westralia* were observed to be on station in the transport area in the dim morning light." The only immediate enemy reaction was the arrival over the transport area, at 6.51, of a Japanese aircraft which dropped a bomb. This landed between *Titania* and an L.S.T., and did no damage. At 7 a.m., said the report, "at first light all ships making assault landings on Brown Beach were observed anchored on proper stations in the transport area".

⁸ Lt C. H. McGee, DSC; RANR. HMAS's *Manoora*, *Stella*, *Polaris*, *Warrego*, *Gascoyne* and *Lachlan*. Of Clarence Gardens, SA; b. Glenelg, SA, 8 Jan 1920.

⁹ Lt W. J. Starkey, RANR. HMAS's *Shepparton*, *Stella*, *Warrego*, *Gascoyne* and *Lachlan*. Of Sydney; b. Chatswood, NSW, 6 May 1919.

At Brown Beach *Westralia* commenced lowering boats at 6.50 a.m., and disembarkation of troops commenced ten minutes later. *Manoora* (recorded CTG.78.1) "lowered boats at 7.8, troops were boated, and boats stood by". Across at Green Beach, *Kanimbla*'s record shows: "8.7 a.m. all boats away and troops for Green Beach assault embarking. Embarkation completed at 8.52 and all boats clear of the ship." At 8.15 the bombardment groups commenced their pre-assault bombardment of the three beaches. Of the Australian ships, *Hobart* fired 549 rounds of 6-inch and 461 of 4-inch at targets on Labuan Island. *Arunta* was at Green Beach where, between 8.45 and 9.45 she fired 600 rounds of 4.7-inch, and later reported "the areas were very well covered". The bombardment by the Cruiser Covering Group was joined by that of the Attack Group support craft and by aerial bombings by aircraft.

With its first wave dispatched at 8.45 a.m., Brown Beach was ahead of White by 11 minutes, and White in its turn anticipated the first wave at Green Beach—at 9.6 a.m.—by 10 minutes. At 9.14 and 9.15 respectively the first waves landed on Brown and Green Beaches, and one minute later, at 9.16 a.m., the first wave landed on White Beach, which was reported captured 16 minutes later, with no opposition. Green Beach was in the invaders' hands by 10.3 a.m., and, as at the inner beaches, Brown Beach was also captured without opposition. As was the case at Tarakan, R.A.N. Beach Commandos did a valuable job on the Brunei beaches. Under Lieut-Commander McKauge,¹ they comprised 20 officers and 157 ratings. In the early phases of the Brunei operation a U.S.N. beaching officer and U.S.N. beaching party selected the L.S.T. and L.S.M. landing slots. This arrangement was unsuccessful, and R.A.N. Commandos took over from them. Commenting on this, and on the work of the Beach Commandos, General Northcott, Chief of the General Staff, said in a letter to Admiral Royle, the Chief of the Naval Staff: "There is general satisfaction in forward areas with the work of R.A.N. Commandos."

Lachlan spent Z-day in the Green Beach area, and recorded her activities in the brief entry: "10th June, Z-day. After an intense preliminary naval and air bombardment, the assault waves of the 9th Division, A.I.F., went in at Muara Island, Victoria, and west of Brunei Bluff. Proceeded with buoying and rapid survey of Anson Passage north of Muara Island." *Barcoo* and her convoy of landing craft arrived at Brunei Bay at 12 noon on Z-day and entered Victoria Harbour. Here the convoy dispersed to anchorage, and *Barcoo* took up patrol duties. *Hawkesbury* at this stage was still in Balabac Strait with her convoy, making for Brunei.

On shore, progress was rapid, with little or no early opposition. At 11.4 a.m. on Z-day, Brigadier Porter assumed command of his troops ashore at Labuan, and a few minutes later General MacArthur, with Admiral Royal, General Morshead and General Kenney, embarked in an

¹ Lt-Cdr R. McKauge, DSC; RANVR. RN 1940-44 (HMS's *Quebec* and *Saunders*); Principal Beachmaster, RAN Commando Beach Unit, Brunei 1945. Railways clerk; of Sandgate, Qld; b. Laidley, Qld, 22 Nov 1909.

L.C.V.P. from U.S.S. *Boise* and went in to inspect the Labuan beaches. In the afternoon, at 3.45, Brigadier Windeyer assumed command ashore at White, Green and Yellow Beaches. General Wootten and his staff disembarked from *Rocky Mount* at 5 p.m., to set up headquarters on shore, and General Wootten assumed command there at 6.30 p.m. Unloading of supplies proceeded with dispatch, and the three Australian L.S.I's, U.S. Ships *Titania* and *Carter Hall*, the five destroyer transports, and 24 landing craft of the Attack Group, were all unloaded on Z-day. With disembarkation and unloading completed² the ships anchored for the night, and at 2.26 p.m. on the 11th, *Manoora*, *Westralia*, *Kanimbla* and U.S.S. *Titania* sailed for Morotai, escorted by three destroyers.

After her participation in the bombardments on Z-day, *Arunta* had no further immediate calls for fire. *Hobart* also had a quiet day on 11th June, but on the 12th carried out call fire bombardments in the forenoon on Cape Klias—the northern extremity of Brunei Bay—in which she fired 102 rounds of 6-inch, reporting: "The area was well covered and direct hits were obtained on a large warehouse and building." At 6.30 p.m. that day the two Australian ships, *Hobart* and *Arunta*, sailed from Victoria Harbour, Labuan, for Tawitawi. The exodus from Brunei at this period was seen by *Hawkesbury* and her slow convoy, still making for Brunei Bay—where they arrived on the 14th—and Weston, *Hawkesbury's* commanding officer, recorded in his Letter of Proceedings:

Considerable traffic was encountered after clearing Balabac Strait at 3.2 p.m. on the 11th, consisting of warship and transport echelons retiring from the invasion beaches of Brunei Bay and included H.M.A. Ships *Hobart* and *Arunta* at 3.15 a.m. on the 13th and L.S.I's *Manoora*, *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* in echelon 0-6-J at 4.30 a.m. on the 12th.

Hobart and *Arunta* arrived at Tawitawi on 14th June, and there found *Shropshire*—who had arrived the previous day after her refit in Australia—and Commodore Farncomb transferred his broad pendant to her from *Hobart*. After replenishing provisions, ammunition and fuel, the group sailed at 4.30 p.m. on the 15th to return to Brunei Bay. The Brunei report of CTG.74.3, Rear-Admiral Berkey, recorded the group's arrival at Brunei in the forenoon of Sunday, 17th June: "0945 CTG.74.1 in *Shropshire*, who joined his Task Group at Tawitawi, with *Hobart* and *Arunta*, stood into Brunei Bay from Tawitawi and anchored." Farncomb attended a conference with Berkey and Rear-Admiral Royal in *Rocky Mount*, and at 6.36 p.m. that day TG.74.3 sailed for Tawitawi, and "relinquished responsibility for naval gunfire support in OBOE SIX objective area to CTG.74.1 (CCAS) in *Shropshire* with *Hobart*, *Arunta* and U.S. Ships *Hart* and *Metcalf*".³

² As an example, *Kanimbla* disembarked 80 officers and 1,199 other ranks, and discharged 320 tons of cargo. Total working hours to complete all unloading—5 hours 26 minutes. Bunyan, *Kanimbla's* commanding officer, remarked in his report: "During the period that the troops were on board, their conduct and behaviour was exemplary."

³ *Metcalf*, *Hart*, US destroyers (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

III

Shropshire carried out bombardments against enemy strongpoints on Labuan Island on 18th and 19th June. The bombardments—which were of the Pocket, an area one mile north of Victoria Harbour and one mile west of Labuan airfield, and the only unsubdued part of the island—were with aircraft spotting, and on both days results were evaluated as “Highly satisfactory”. The Pocket fell to the Australians on the 21st. Meanwhile, on the 19th, Farncomb shifted his broad pendant to *Arunta* and at 6 p.m., with U.S. Ships *Metcalf* and *Hart* in company, sailed for the Miri-Lutong area, some 90 miles W.S.W. of Brunei Bay, and about 30 miles beyond Seria. With the subjection of Brunei and Labuan—except for the Pocket—by 16th June, the landing of a reinforced battalion at Miri was ordered, and the task of the three destroyers was to escort and cover the landing force, and supply support bombardments. A group of minesweepers was operating off Miri-Lutong under difficulties due to the condition of their sweep gear, this being damaged by exploding mines. The area had been thickly sown. On 18th June the group swept 11 mines, bringing the total swept to 387. It was because air spotting was not available, and because of the possible danger from mines, that Farncomb decided not to take the two cruisers to Miri-Lutong.

The landing force—the 2/13th Battalion Group, about 1,900 strong—was carried from Brunei Bay in TU.76.20.50, comprising several landing and assault craft, L.S.T's, L.C.I's, etc. The force rendezvoused off the entrance to Brunei Bay in the afternoon of the 19th. Passage to Miri-Lutong was uneventful—except for the troops who were “very crowded on the decks of the L.S.T's and were most uncomfortable when the wind increased and the sea became very rough”.⁴ Before dawn on the 20th they could see on the eastern horizon the huge fires of the oil wells at Seria, which the Japanese had set ablaze.

The ships opened fire at 8.30 a.m. on scheduled targets in the Lutong area, and at 9.30 the first wave of troops landed unopposed. “The objectives were reached without any Japanese being seen.”⁵ The ships provided the planned bombardments, and during the night of 20th-21st June, *Metcalf* carried out harassing fire at Miri, while *Arunta* and *Hart* retired to sea. In a signal to Admiral Kinkaid on the 21st Farncomb said:

Destroyers of this group provided cover and supported landing Lutong area. Fired total of 1,400 rounds main armament preliminary bombardments and 100 rounds interdicting fire during night. Covering positions now secured. Enemy detachments in adjacent areas reported by natives but no contact has been made. No calls for fire today 21 June. Am now withdrawing to Brunei Bay to rejoin cruisers and fuel from *Winooski*.⁶ On completion intend task group to sail to Tawitawi.

This was the final participation of TG.74.1 in the OBOE SIX operation. The three destroyers left the Miri-Lutong area at 6 p.m. on 21st June,

⁴ Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p. 486.

⁵ Long, p. 487.

⁶ *Winooski*, US oiler (1942), 5,580 tons.

by which time, as Farncomb recorded in the squadron's Report of Proceedings, "the destruction of a further 22 mines by the sweepers had been witnessed. This brought the total swept in this area to over 400." Back in Brunei Bay at 7 a.m. on the 22nd Farncomb re-hoisted his broad pendant in *Shropshire*, and at 6 p.m. TG.74.1—*Shropshire*, *Hobart*, *Arunta*, *Hart* and *Metcalf*—sailed for Tawitawi where it arrived at 8.30 a.m. on 24th June. At 1.30 a.m. on 26th June the Task Group sailed to take up duties in OBOE TWO operation, the assault on Balikpapan.

Of the other Australian ships, the three L.S.I's, as stated above, sailed from Brunei Bay on 11th June for Morotai. They played no further part in OBOE SIX but, at Morotai, prepared to participate in the forthcoming OBOE TWO operation. The three frigates, however, were employed on OBOE SIX duties until the end of June. *Barcoo*, who spent most of the month escorting, and patrolling Brunei Bay, sailed thence on 2nd July for Morotai. *Hawkesbury*, similarly employed after her arrival at Brunei Bay on 14th June, also left there on 2nd July as one of the escorts of an L.S.T. echelon to Morotai.

Lachlan had a busy time, and was concerned in various subsidiary landings at Brunei Bay in addition to her survey work. On 15th June, in preparation for the assault two days later on Weston, a small town on the mainland on the eastern extremity of Brunei Bay, she anchored off the mouth of the Padas River, while her boats, with Lieut-Commander Tancred and Lieutenant Cooper in charge, and with *YMS160* assisting and *LCS60* in support, surveyed and buoyed the channel as far as Batu Batu Point. Whilst on this mission a native canoe was seized and its occupant, closely questioned, stated that the Japanese had retired from Weston. This information, which was contrary to all Intelligence reports, was reported by Tancred to Rear-Admiral Royal when *Lachlan* returned to Victoria Harbour that afternoon. Tancred accompanied Admiral Royal to General Wootten's headquarters and after a conference there it was decided to cancel the preliminary naval and air bombardments of Weston and to continue the survey of the Padas River to Weston next day, taking with the surveying boats two A.I.F. scouts.

This survey from Batu Batu Point to Weston was carried out next day, 16th June, by *Lachlan*'s boats—with Tancred and Cooper in charge, as before—covered by two L.C.I(G)'s. Again a native was seized for questioning and retained on board one of the boats, much against his will. Tancred recorded in his Report of Surveying Proceedings:

He stated that Japanese forces had vacated Weston, but his cries of "Beware, beware", as we approached the village were a little disturbing. The Japanese had gone, however, and on completing the survey at 12.30, a boat went alongside the railway escarpment at Weston and put the scouts ashore. No sign of enemy troops was found. On return of the landing party, the naval force retired down the river.

Next day, the 17th, *Lachlan*'s Lieutenant Starkey piloted the assault craft up the Padas River to Weston. On the 18th her boats, with Tancred and Cooper in charge, surveyed and buoyed the channel to Mempakul,

at the entrance to the Klias River and on the tip of Klias Peninsula. Mepakul was to be the military objective on the 19th. The survey was completed by noon. Interrogated natives said that 50 Japanese troops and two officers had recently left Mepakul, and after a brief investigation of the village—where very recent traces of Japanese occupation were found—the naval forces retired. At the request of Captain Arison, U.S.N., the Amphibious Attack Force commander for the Mepakul assault, Tancred acted as pilot of the landing craft at the attack on the 19th. This was carried out without incident and was unopposed, and 750 Australian troops occupied Mepakul. *Lachlan* then proceeded to Muara Island to commence survey and marking of Brunei River.

Her part at Brunei was recognised and commended in a signal to Tancred from Admiral Royal, before his departure from the South-West Pacific on 17th June:

Your seamanlike and efficient performance both here at Brunei and at Tarakan has been a source of great pleasure to me and should be one of great pride to you. You have a well organised, courageous and efficient crew. To you I give the highest of naval praise. Well done.