



## **Borneo Oboe campaign – Second World War Historical Background**

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In 1945, Australia's armed forces took part in a series of landings on the island of Borneo, including the largest amphibious landing undertaken by Australian forces in the Second World War.

The Borneo campaign included the final major operations of the Second World War for Australian forces. More than 75 000 Australians served in or supported the landings and more than 590 lost their lives in this campaign.

General Douglas MacArthur, the Allied supreme commander in the South-West Pacific Area, ordered Australian forces to undertake landings in Borneo, before beginning operations on Java.

Originally six landings were planned, but only three took place. The landings were codenamed 'Oboe' and were undertaken from May to July 1945.

Months before the first landings, the Services Reconnaissance Department, a codename for Special Operations Australia, dropped teams behind enemy lines. Commonly known as Z Special Unit, its men trained indigenous people from the Borneo interior in guerrilla warfare and reported on Japanese activities on the island.

Australian forces assembled on Morotai Island, in the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) in preparation for the landings. The forces included airmen of the 1st Tactical Air Force, troops of 1st Australian Corps – including men of the 7th and 9th Divisions, some of whom had fought in the Middle East and New Guinea – and sailors in Australian warships and beach landing units.

The main landing of Oboe 1, on Tarakan on 1 May was preceded by a massive naval and air bombardment. A small landing on tiny Sadau Island the day before enabled artillerymen to shell the Japanese while engineers cleared the beach defences. The 26th Brigade Group landed and for several weeks fought on Tarakan, as airfield construction personnel struggled to repair the captured airfield. More than 250 Australians lost their lives on Tarakan.

The Oboe 6 landings on Labuan Island and around Brunei Bay, began on 10 June. Preceded by naval and air bombardments. Landings were made on Labuan Island, on the Borneo mainland at Brunei and on Muara Island. In some places Australian troops overcame pockets of fierce resistance. Labuan was developed as a base while the Australians liberated much of British North Borneo. Some 115 Australians lost their lives during this second Oboe operation.

Oboe 2, the third and final landing, took place at Balikpapan and was the largest amphibious landing by Australian forces in the Second World War. Warships opened fire ahead of the landing by the 7th Division and supporting units on 1 July 1945. The landing area through which the Australians advanced was devastated, darkened by plumes of smoke from burning oil tanks. By war's end, some 230 Australians had lost their lives in the Balikpapan fighting.

After the news of Victory in the Pacific on 15 August 1945, Australian forces accepted the surrender of the Japanese in Borneo. More than 590 Australians had lost their lives in the Oboe operations.