



- This work is dedicated to my parents.

- Bill McBrien, volunteered for the reserve after Munich, mobilised 1 September 1939. In Egypt early in Jan 1940 and fought in North Africa for 3 years until the Germans surrendered.
- We will hear about his battalion, 2nd Rifle Brigade for a week or two until the Australians headed off to greener pastures.

Army Form B.2806.
(REVISED)
MILITARY
IDENTITY CARD No. **A 510774**

Surname *McBrien.*

Christian Names (and rank or designation at time of issue) *William, Robert. Major.*

Sex *Male.*

Personal No. *203461.*

Height *5' 10".*

Colour of Eyes *Brown.*

Colour of Hair *Brown.*



Other Distinguishing Marks (if any) *NIL.*

Date of Birth *29. 3. 1920.*

Signature of Issuing Officer *[Signature]*

Date *5* **AUG 1944**

Signature of Bearer *[Signature]*

- Maggie McBrien, First Aid & Nursing Yeomanry.
- Lied about her age to join up.

W/191334
Page 2

PERMIT *M.M. Robertson*
of *A.T.S. (GH) C (M) T Coy*
**TO ENTER AND PASS THROUGH
WAR DEPARTMENT PROPERTY
AT H.Q. Scottish Command.**
subject to local Bye-Laws and Orders
and the Conditions hereon,
for the purpose of *Duty*

Available from noon on *24 AUG. 1944*
Expires at noon on *31 DEC. 1944*
unless extended by endorsement on page 4.

**This Pass does not admit to any Military Office, Store,
Work of Defence, or other Prohibited Place whatever ;
nor to any Barrack Room, Mess, Hospital, Institute, or
other Military Building, unless so endorsed hereon.**

Issued at the ~~Military Permit Office~~ at
H.Q. Scottish Command.
on behalf of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
by *[Signature]*

Available for named person only. Not transferable.

Army Form A29. Page 3

WAR DEPARTMENT PASS. No. L 68482

Nationality *British*
Occupation *Driver*
Description

Height 5' 4 1/8"
Hair Black
Eyes Grey Green
Complexion Fresh

Office date stamp.



Signature of Bearer *M.M. Robertson*

- This is the type of ambulance Mum drove.
- If you look closely you can see that the government has economised by not providing doors or side windows to the drivers cab.
- There is a roll of canvas that can be fastened across the bottom half of the opening, that might keep most of the mud and some of the rain out.
- Driving these things in British weather would frequently have been uncomfortable.



- Mum had been seeing a boy in the Black Watch and there were hopes for the relationship, but he went to North Africa and never came home from Alamein.

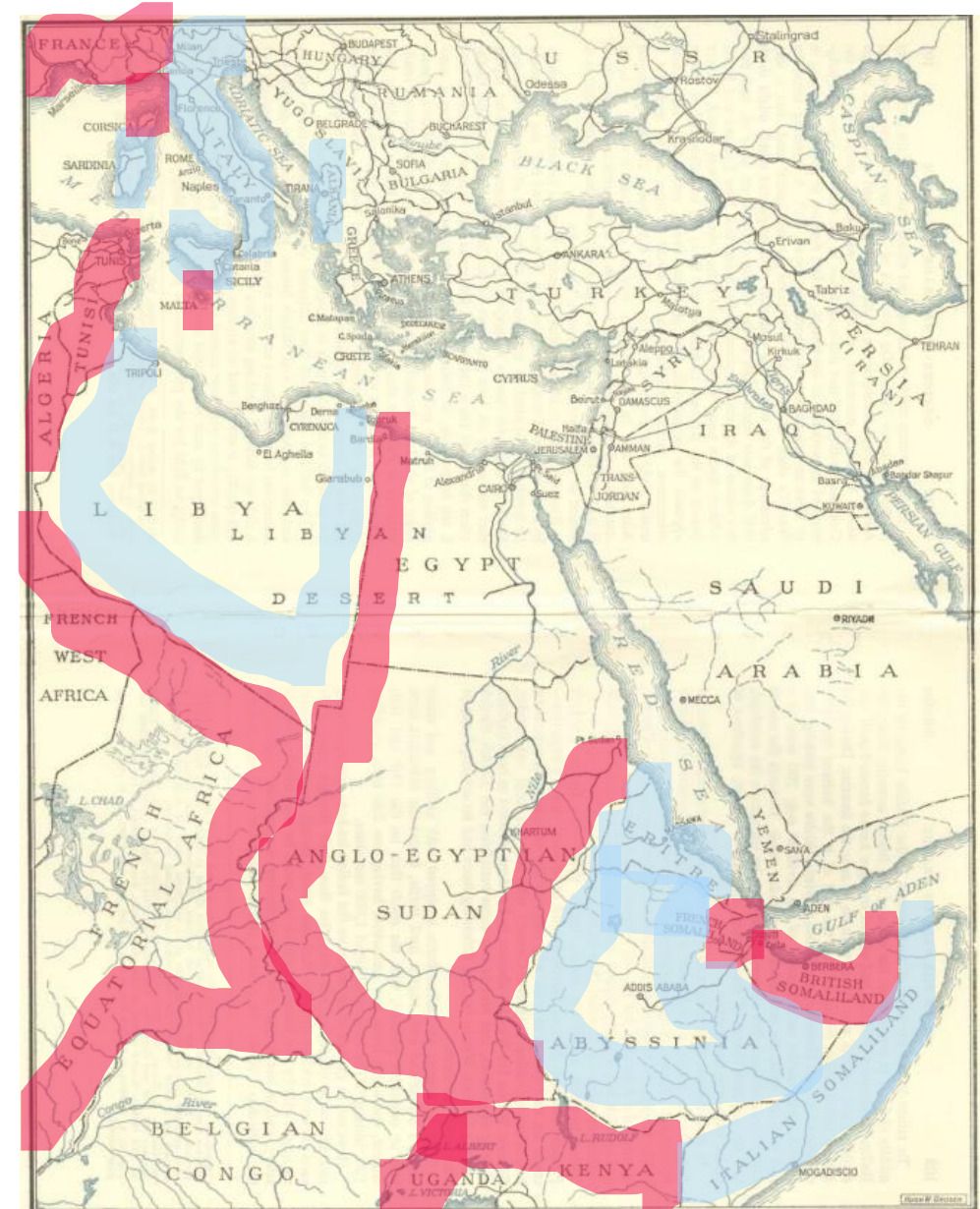


Soldiers of the Black Watch listen to a piper. North Africa 1942.

Introduction

May 1940

- Allied British and French
- Italian – Not a combatant

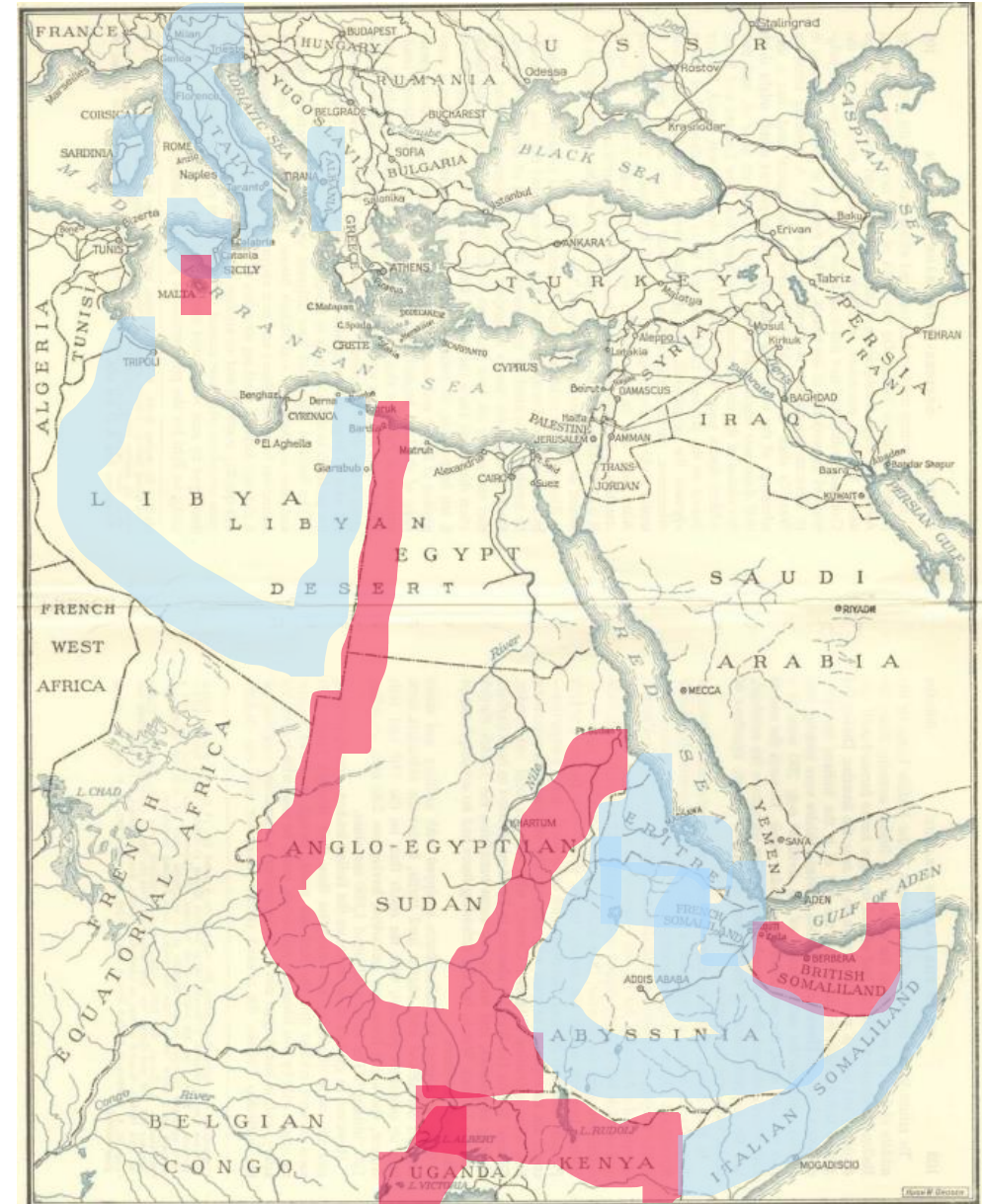


July 1940

- **British**
- **Italian** – Now declared war

The fall of France removed the French fleet from the naval balance in the Mediterranean and removed Tunisia and Algeria as a threat to the Italians in Libya and as a support for shipping in the Sicilian Narrows.

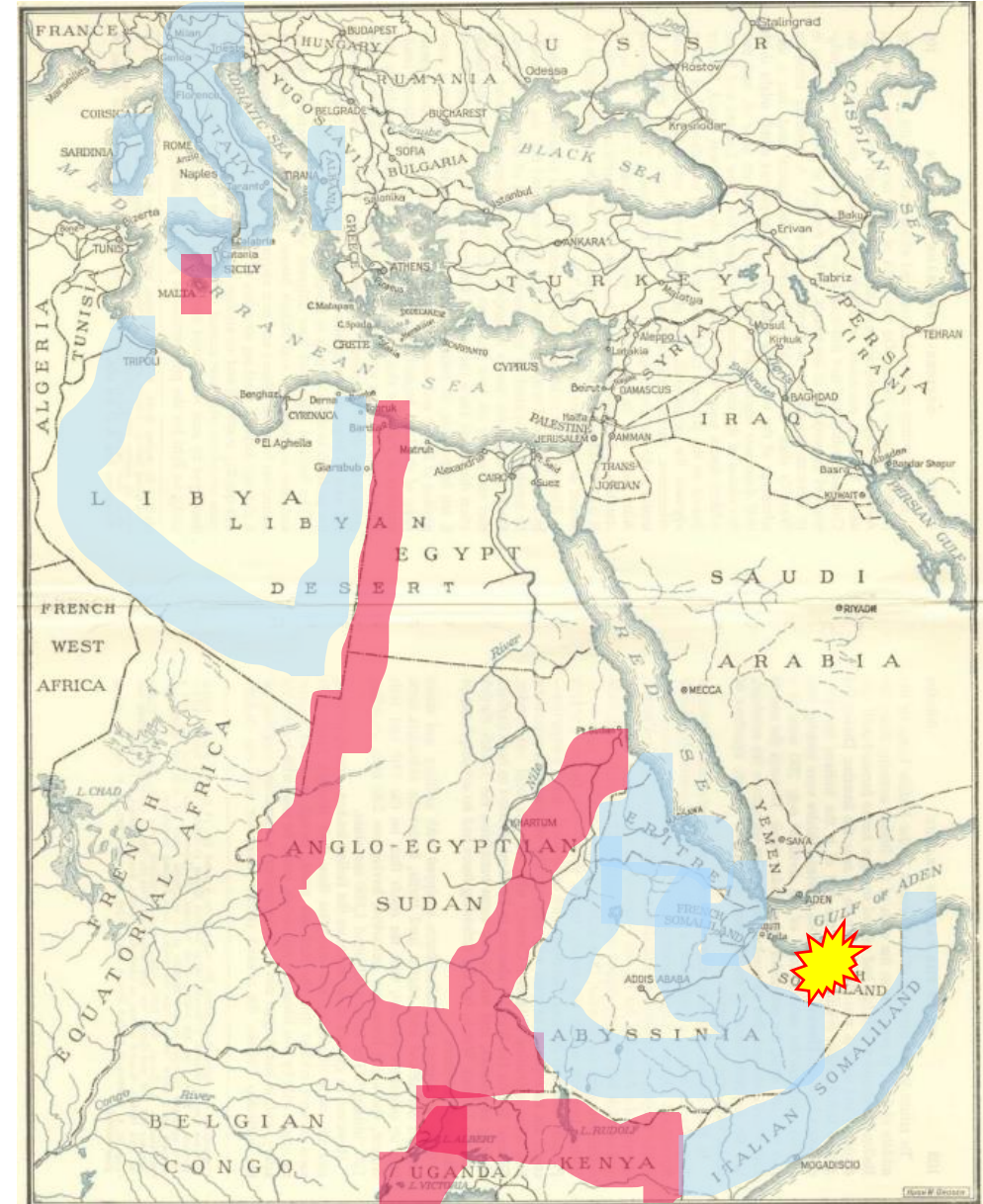
Italy's entry into the war threatened British supplies to Egypt through both the Sicilian Narrows and the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.



August 1940

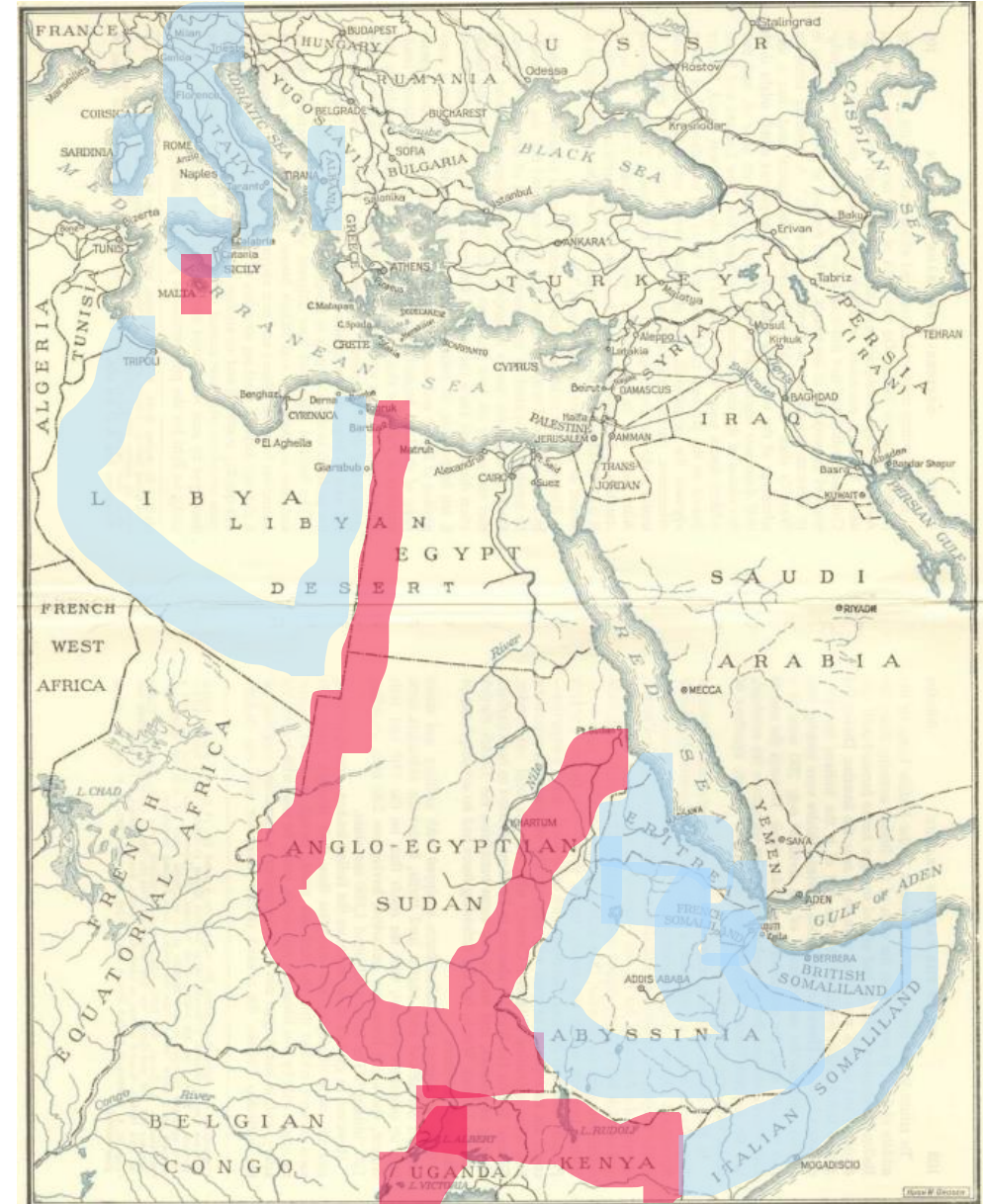
- British
- Italian

Italy invades British Somaliland.



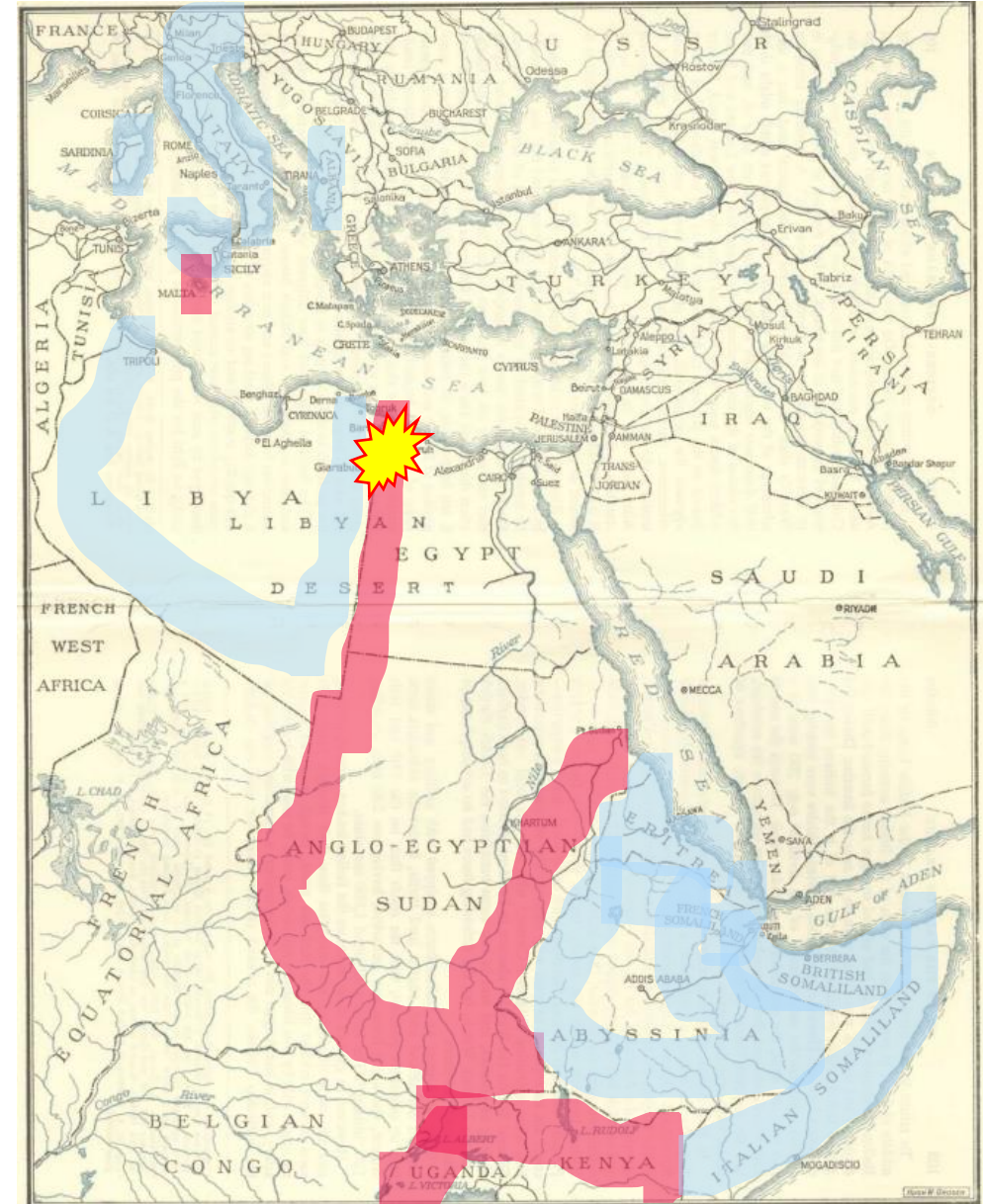
August 1940

- British
- Italian
- Churchill criticised Wavell for abandoning the colony without enough fighting.
- Wavell called it a textbook withdrawal in the face of superior numbers.
- HMAS Hobart orchestrated the evacuation of over 7,000 soldiers and civilians aboard a heterogenous flotilla of vessels and brought off the last of the British troops.



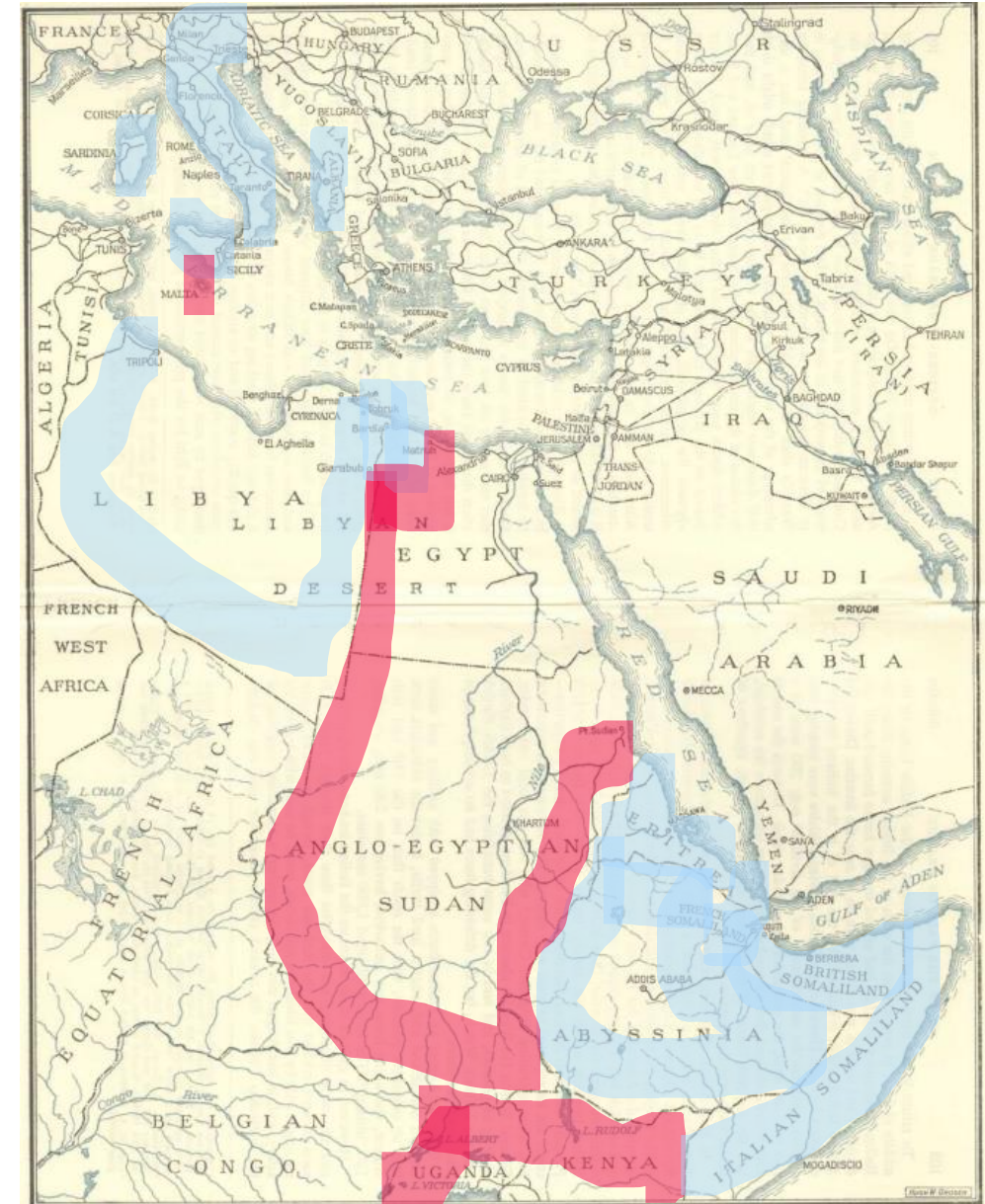
September 1940

- British
- Italian
- On 13 September 1940, the Italians advanced into Egypt. The small British force at Sollum withdrew to the main defensive position east of Mersa Matruh, harassing the Italians as they went.



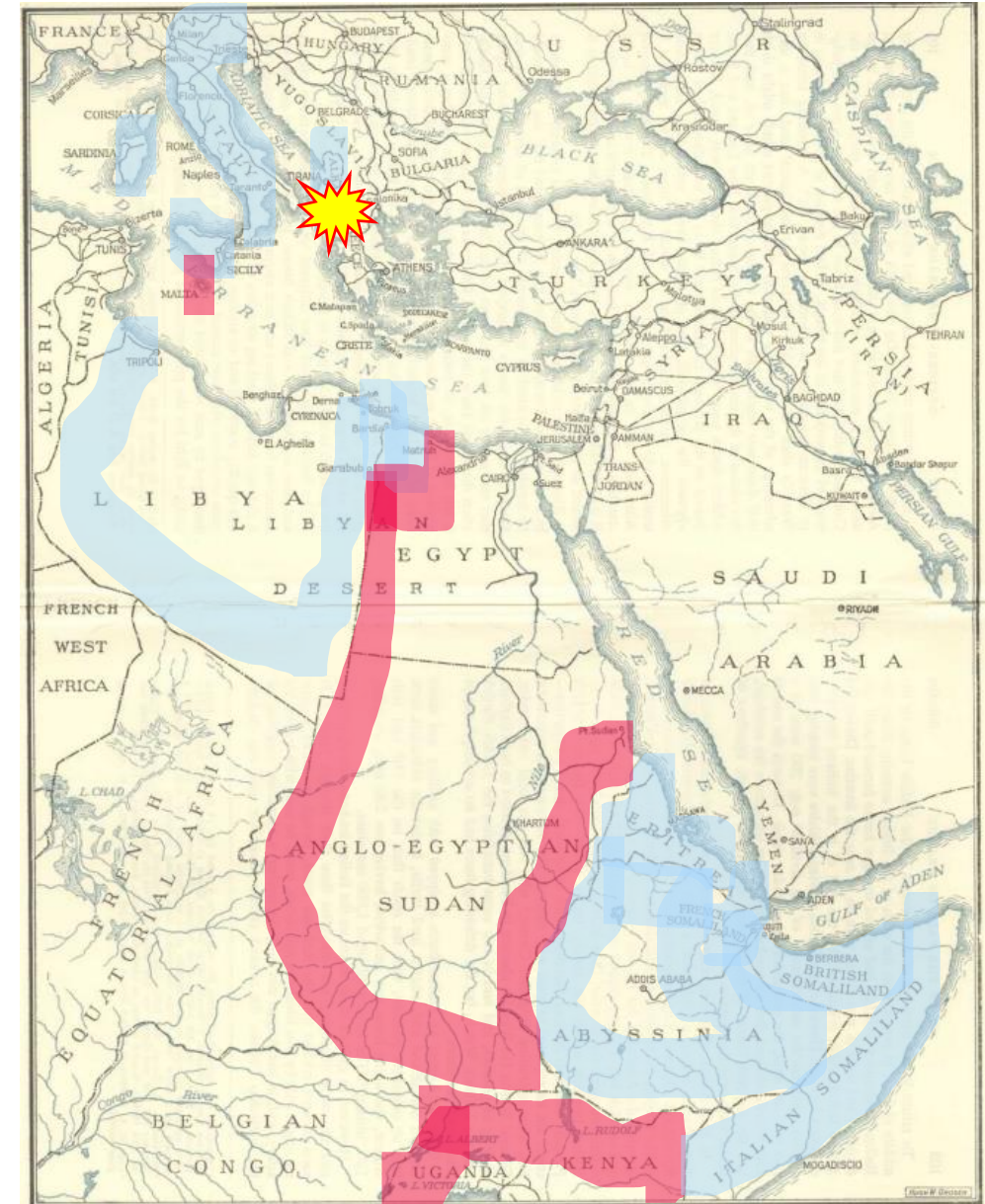
September 1940

- British
- Italian
- The Italians advanced 60 miles in three days and stopped at Maktila, 10 miles beyond Sidi Barrani, dug in and waited. Five fortified camps were built around Sidi Barrani.



October 1940

- British
- Italian
- The Italians invaded Greece on 28 October. The Italians had to contend with the mountainous terrain on the Albanian–Greek border, winter weather and unexpectedly tenacious resistance by the Greeks.
- By mid-November, the Greeks had stopped the Italian invasion just inside Greek territory.
- After completing their mobilization, the Greek counter-attack pushed the Italians back into Albania.



11–12 November 1940

- On the night of 11–12 November 1940 British naval aircraft attacked the Italian battle fleet at anchor in Taranto Harbour.
- 24 Swordfish torpedo bombers, from the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, attacked.
- Half carried torpedoes.
- Despite the shallow water in the port the 12 torpedo armed Swordfish sank three battleships.



A Fairey Swordfish Mk I Naval torpedo aircraft

3 December 1940 - Egypt

- The oasis of Giarabub is twenty miles beyond the Egyptian frontier 150 miles south of the Mediterranean.
- Facing Giarabub sixty miles away on the Egyptian side of the frontier is the larger and more populous oasis of Siwa, the ancient home of an oracle so revered that Alexander the Great visited him, after a laborious pilgrimage.
- Wavell decided to place a force at Siwa which could deny that oasis to the Italians and keep Giarabub under observation.
- In November it was decided to replace the original force with a squadron of the 6th Australian Divisional Cavalry. The 6th Cavalry was then in training with its division at Amiriya.
- On 3rd December Captain Brown's squadron of the regiment arrived. At Amiriya the unit had been partly equipped with machine-gun carriers and some obsolescent tanks, but before the squadron set out for Siwa it was given 30-cwt and 15-cwt trucks which could travel faster than carriers and would not wear out so quickly.
- The Cavalry men harassed the Italians in Giarabub on a daily basis but did not have the strength to overcome the garrison.



December 1940

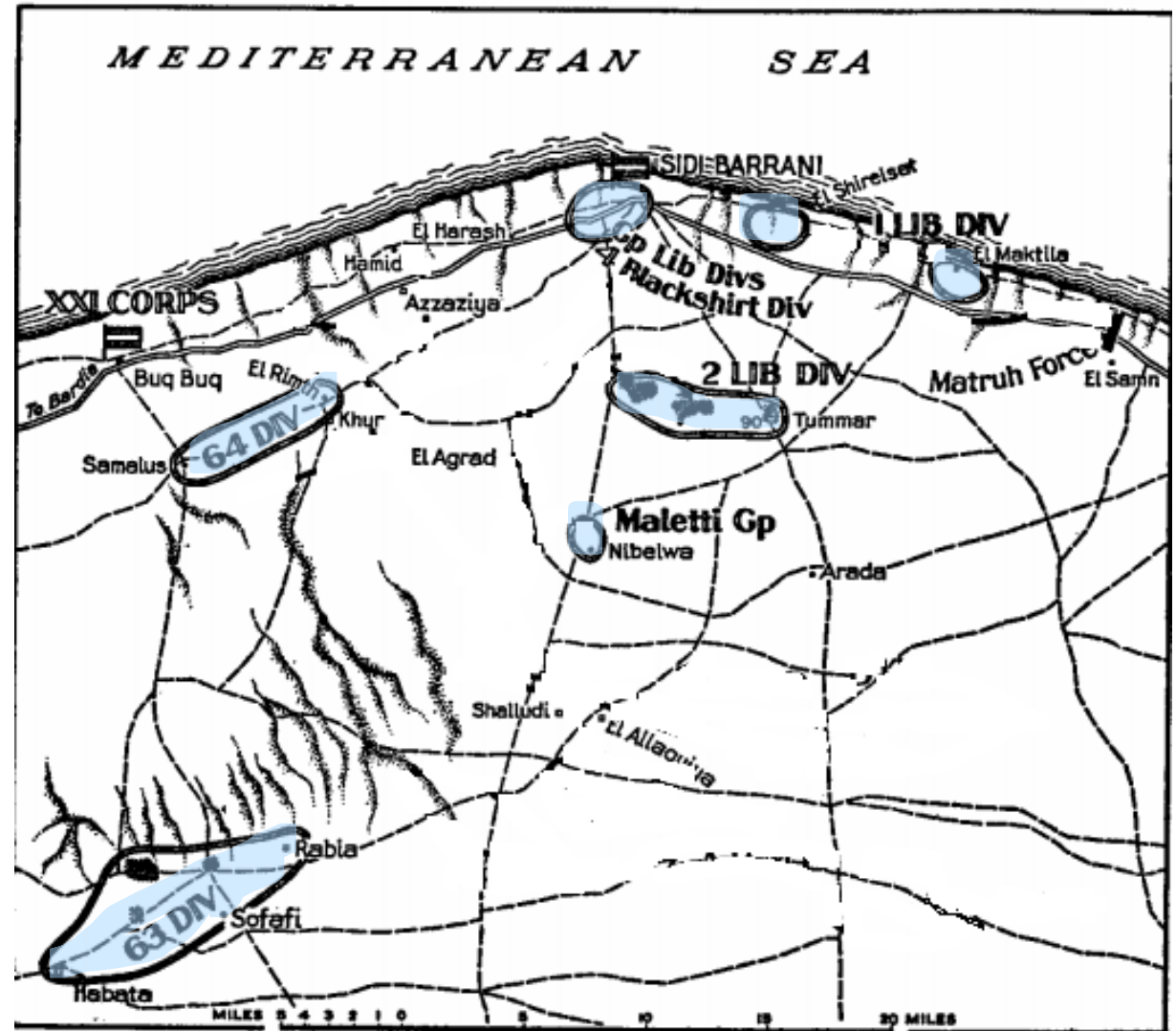
- Wavell, CinC Middle East, was responsible for North and East Africa, Arabia and the Balkans.
- Western Desert Force was formed to defend Egypt from the Italian forces in Libya.
- O'Connor, the WDF commander, had fought in Italy during the first World War, and had been awarded the Italian Silver Medal of Military Valor.



Lieutenant General O'Connor (Western Desert Force) with General Wavell (CinC Middle East) during the assault on Bardia.

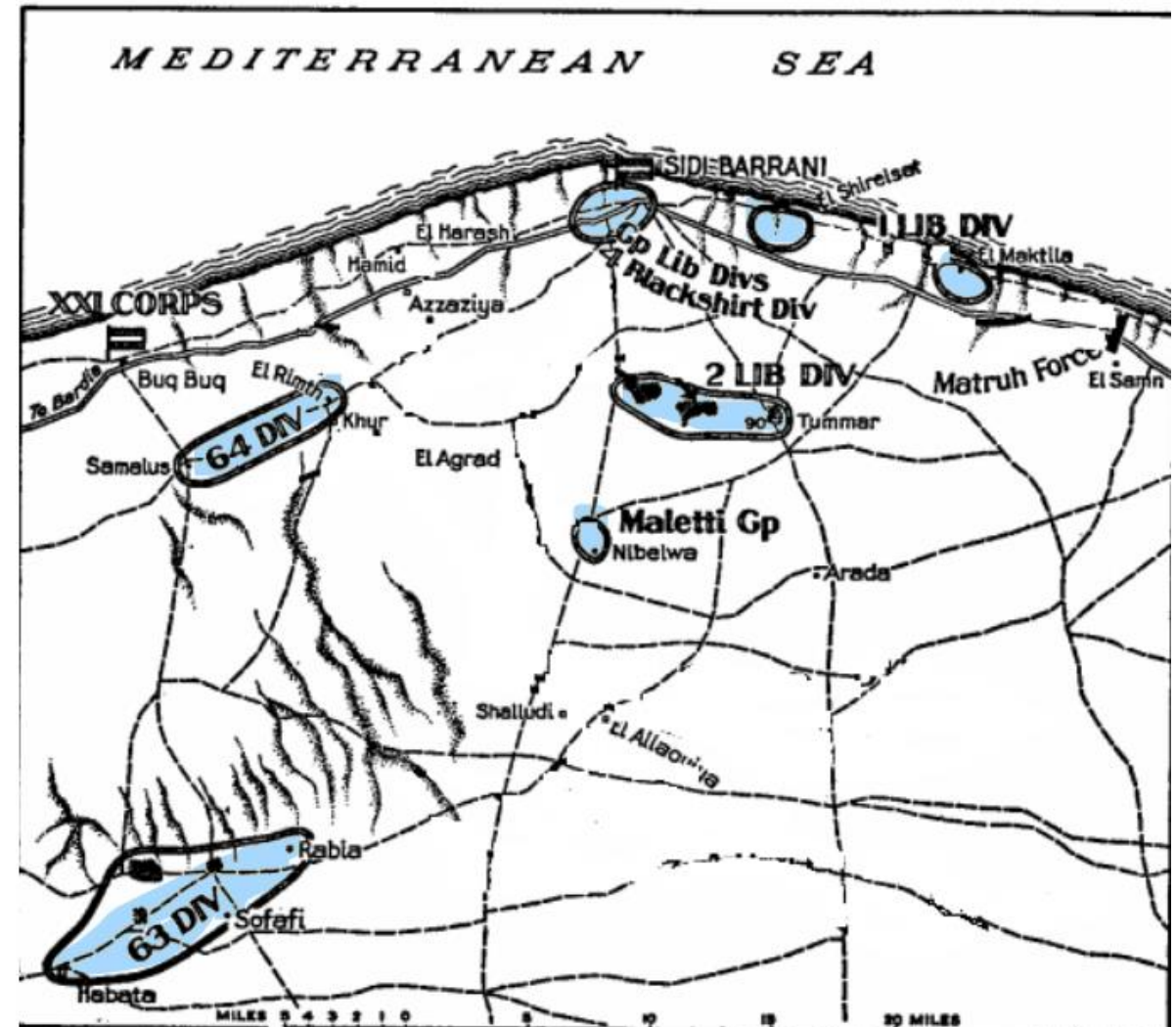
6 December 1940

- General O'Connor's intention was,
 1. to destroy or capture enemy forces in the Nibeiwa - Tummar area, and to advance northwards through the gap towards Sidi Barrani, thus isolating Maktila;
 2. if the situation was favourable, to raid the enemy's communications and dumps in the Buq Buq area; and,
 3. to exploit towards Buq Buq and Sofafi.
- The Matruh Force was to prevent the garrison of Maktila camp moving to assist the Tummar camps.
- The first objective of the 4th Indian Division (with 16th British Brigade and the infantry tanks of the 7th Royal Tanks attached) was Nibeiwa camp, whence they would advance to Tummar West, Tummar East and Point 90 camps and be prepared to advance northwards to cut off Maktila.
- The 7th Armoured Division would protect the left flank of the 4th Indian division, prevent counter-attacks from the Sofafi area; and, if the attacks succeeded, it would advance between Sofafi and Nibeiwa towards Buq Buq.



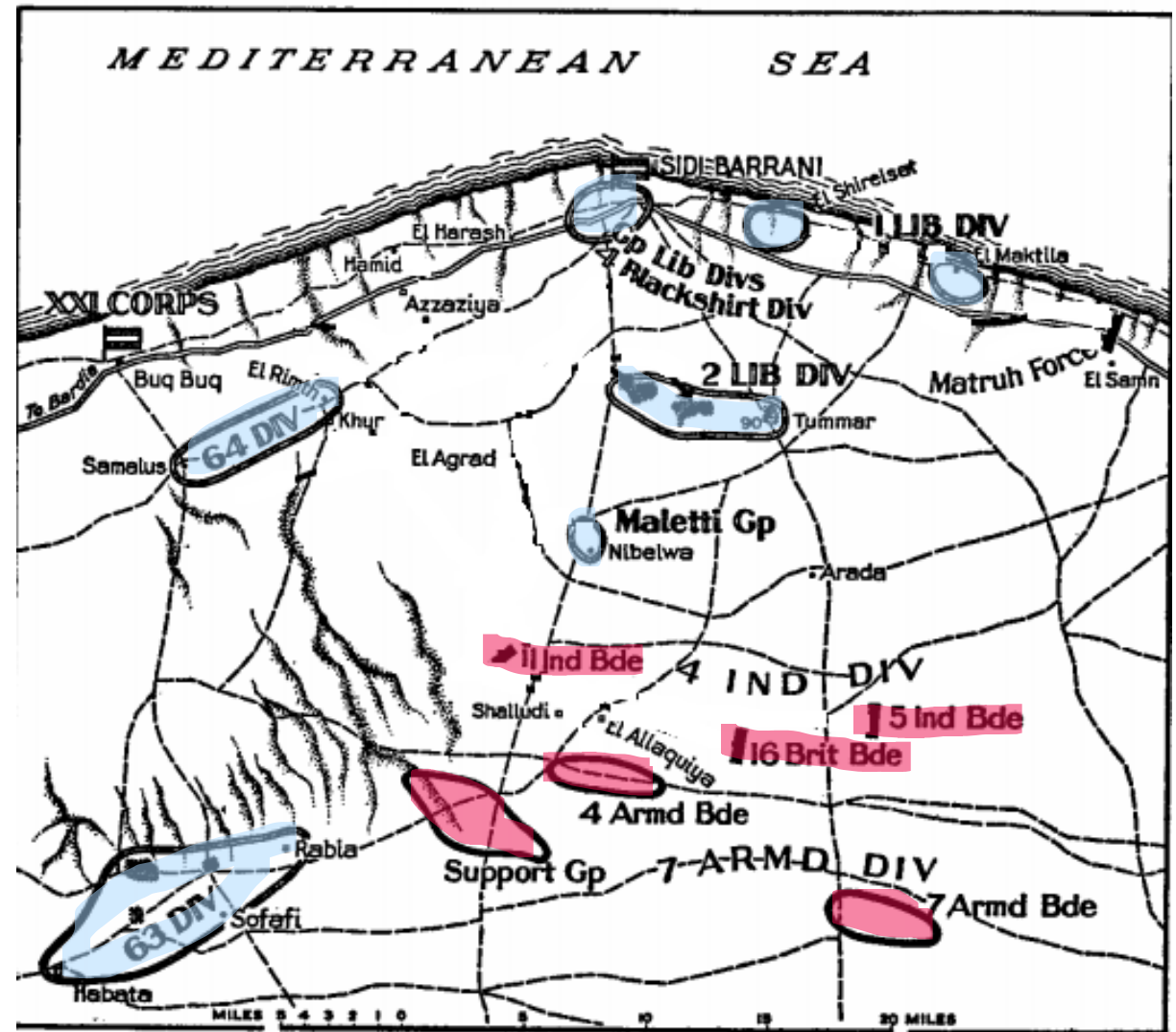
7/8 December 1940 - Egypt

- As soon as the Italian advance had halted the infantry set about locating and reconnoitring the camps put up by the Italians.
- The battalion (2/Rifle Brigade) concentrated in particular on two camps Tummar and Nibeilwa.
- A series of night patrols resulted in the production of a fairly accurate picture of the minefields in the area.
- Two patrols by Charles Liddell with Corporals Brown and Field on the nights of 2nd/3rd and 7th/8th of December were particularly valuable.
- On the 1st night they worked round behind the camp, crawled through the outer perimeter between enemy sentry groups only 50 yards apart and found a gap in the defences. They also located the minefield.
- Returning five nights later they found enemy tanks with sentries patrolling between them stationed apparently in the minefield. These tanks were only 20 yards apart but he managed to crawl between them unseen and located the gap in the minefield.



8/9 December 1940

- On the bitterly cold night of the 8/9th, in the moonlight, the 7th Royal Tanks and the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles (of the 11th Indian Brigade) moved forward to a rendezvous five miles south of Nibeiwa, the sound of their vehicles being drowned by aircraft flying low overhead.
- At 4.45 a.m. on the 9th a second Indian battalion, the 4/7th Rajput Regiment, opened fire on Nibeiwa camp from the east, to distract the enemy's attention. During the morning a second battalion—the 2/Camerons—joined the tank regiment.



9 December 1940

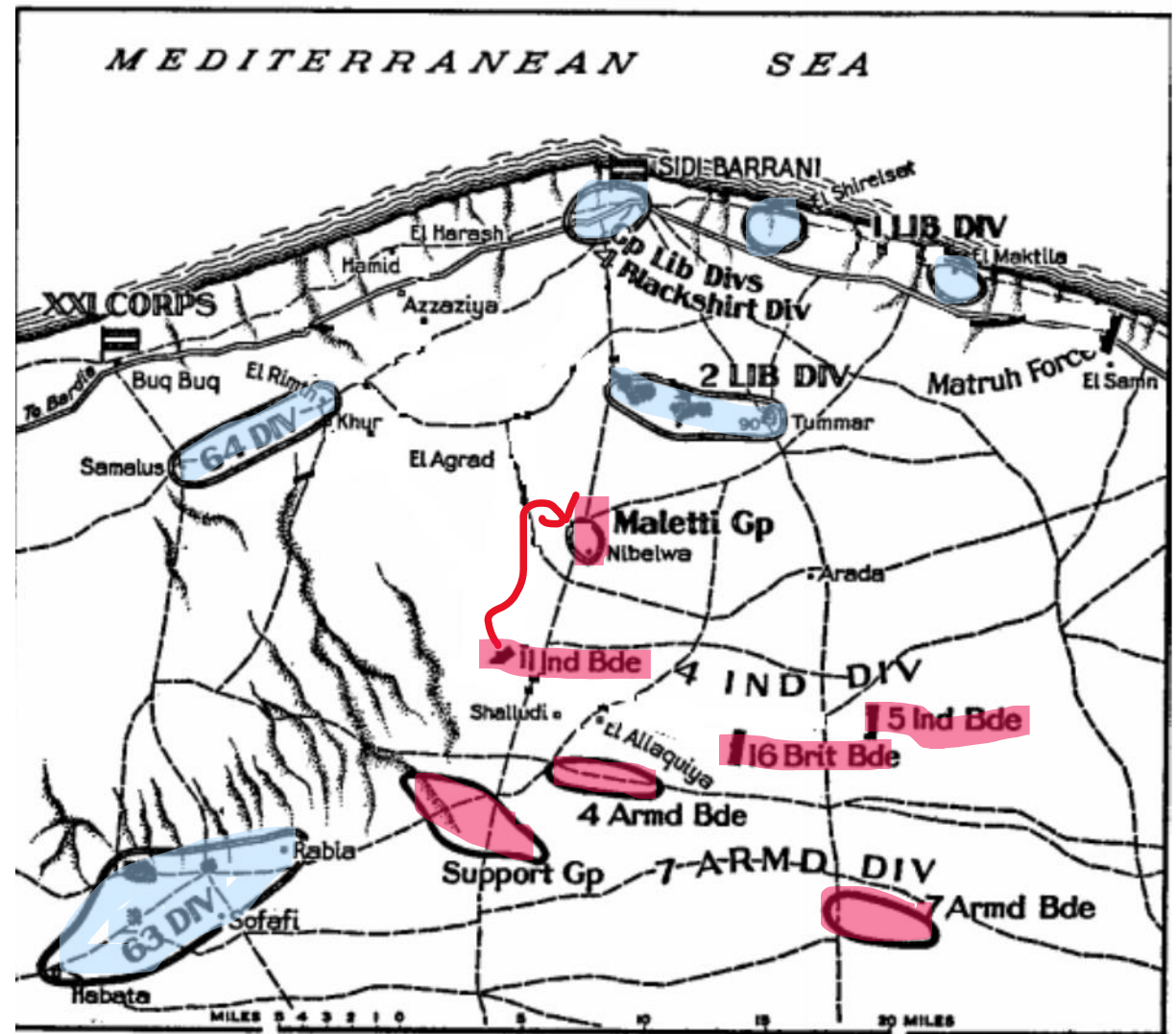
- At 7.15 a.m. the artillery of the Indian division opened fire and the tanks, which had moved north to a point about four miles west of the camp, wheeled and advanced on its north-west corner where there was a gap in the minefield.
- As they neared it they came upon about twenty Italian medium tanks warming their engines outside the perimeter. These they disabled, and at 7.35 a.m. the attacking tanks lumbered into the camp and ranged about it silencing batteries and infantry posts.



A Matilda 2 tank of the 7th Royal Tank Regiment. 25 tons, crew of four, 2 pounder gun, max speed 16mph on road, 9 mph off road.

9 December 1940

- At 7.45 the Camerons followed through the gap. They moved in trucks to within 500 yards and then advanced on foot, being followed at 8 a.m. by the Rajputana Rifles. Half an hour later the camp had virtually been taken, though isolated posts held out until 10.40.
- Two thousand prisoners and thirty-five medium tanks were captured; the attackers lost only fifty-six officers and men, but six of the twenty-eight Matilda tanks that went into the attack were disabled on a minefield when leaving the camp after its capture.



9 December 1940

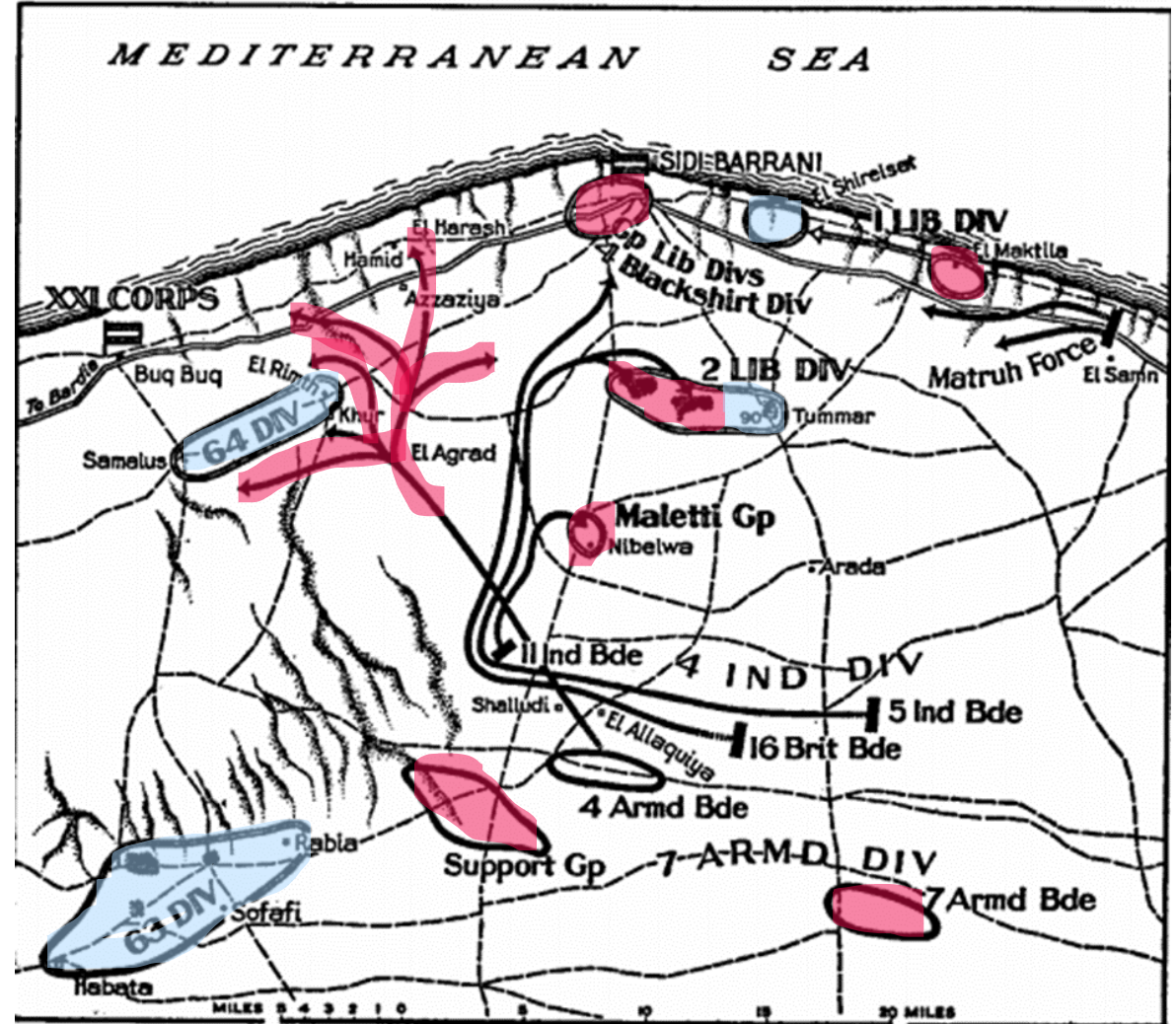
- The 5th Indian Brigade followed the 11th through the gap south of Nibeiwa then turned north to a point west of the Tummar camps, where it awaited the arrival of the 7th Royal Tanks which were to lead the attack on Tummar as they had into Nibeiwa.
- The artillery opened fire at 1.30 and, the tanks, now reduced to twenty-two, advanced in a dense dust storm against the north-west corner of Tummar West. The Italians fought well, particularly the gunners, but again were quickly overcome.
- Twenty minutes after the tanks the 1/Royal Fusiliers were driven forward in lorries and charged forward. They were followed by the 3/1st Punjab.
- At 4.20 the third battalion of the brigade—4/6th Rajputana Rifles —attacked Tummar East, but before they reached it they encountered a strong enemy column advancing to counter-attack towards Tummar West. There was sharp fighting in the course of which the Rajputana killed about 200 and captured 1,000 Italians and, at dusk, the battalion went into leaguer 500 yards north-east of Tummar West.
- The 4th Armoured Brigade had advanced north-west and cut the road between Sidi Barrani and Buq Buq.



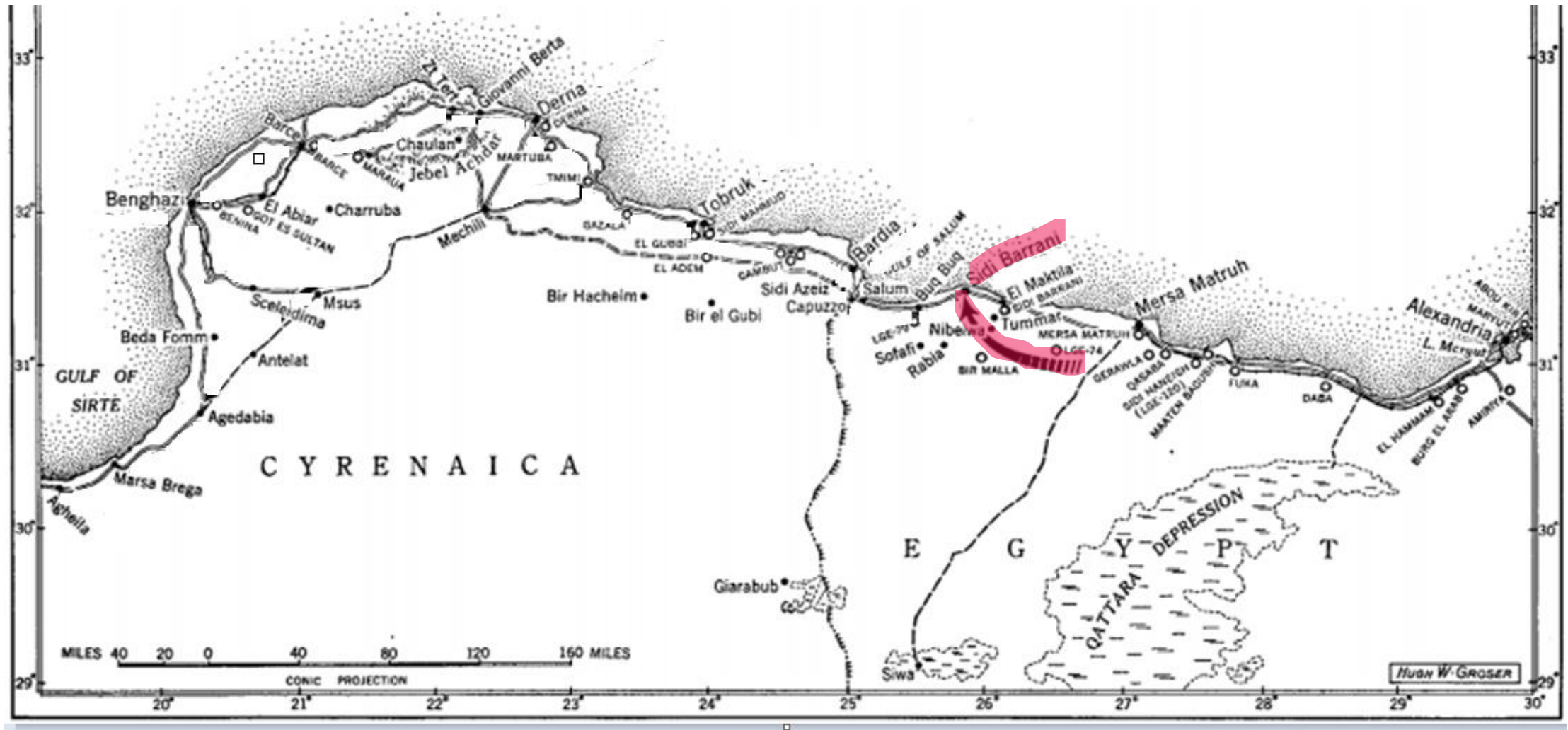
A Matilda 2 tank of the 7th Royal Tank Regiment. 25 tons, crew of four, 2 pounder gun, max speed 16mph on road, 9 mph off road.

10 December 1940

- In the morning the 5th Indian Brigade occupied Tummar East without meeting resistance. In the two Tummar camps 3,500 to 4,000 men had been captured.
- By 10.00 it was evident that the Maktla garrison had withdrawn during the night.
- The 16th British Brigade attacked towards Sidi Barrani alone at dawn on the 10th. Advancing over open country in a dense dust storm it was met by effective artillery fire and was held.
- During the morning, the 11th Indian Brigade with the artillery of the 4th Indian Division and the tanks arrived (now with only eight of their original fifty-seven tanks running) and the advance continued.
- Finally a concerted attack late in the afternoon broke the enemy's resistance, and by 4.40 Sidi Barrani had fallen.

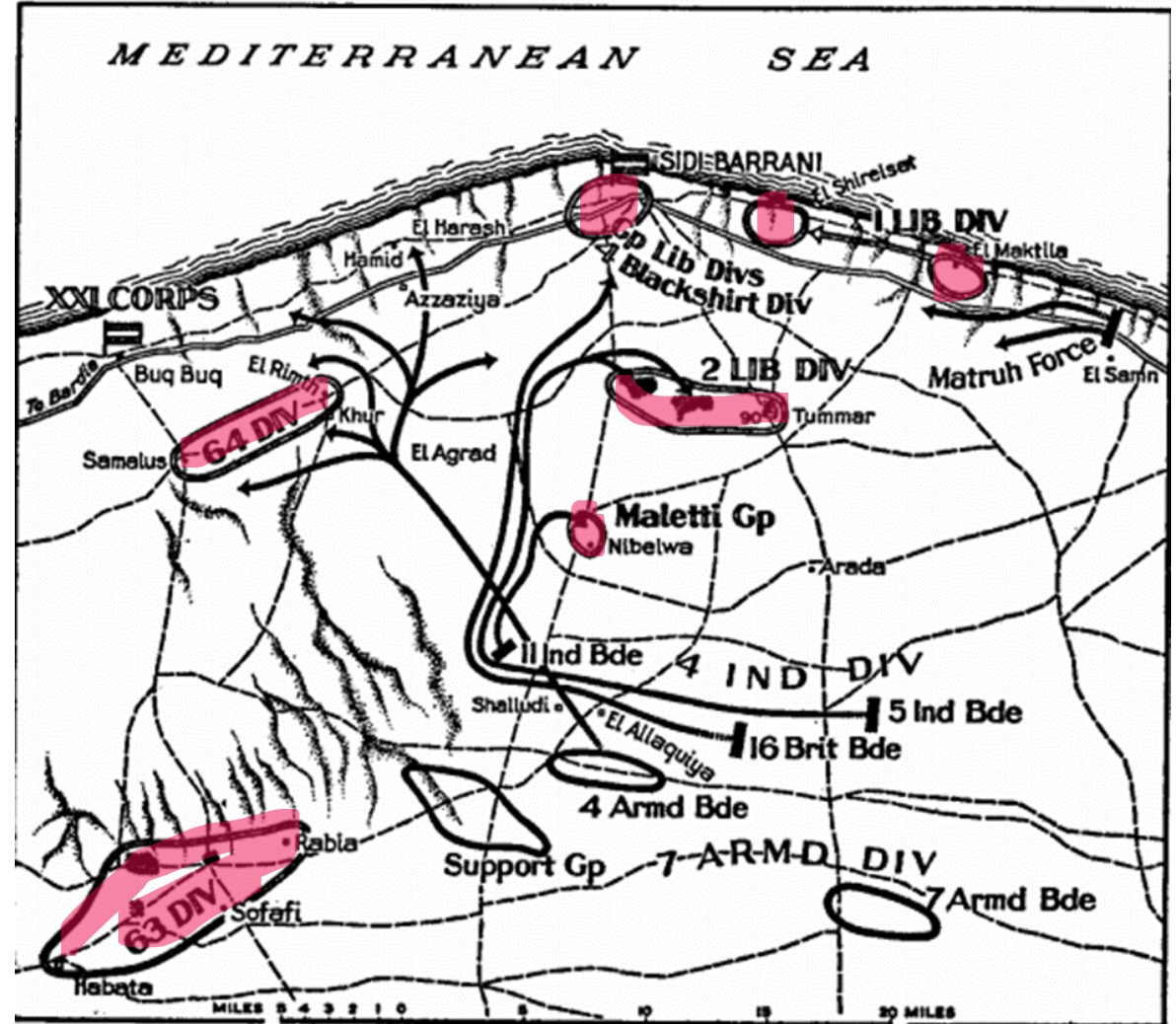


10 December 1940

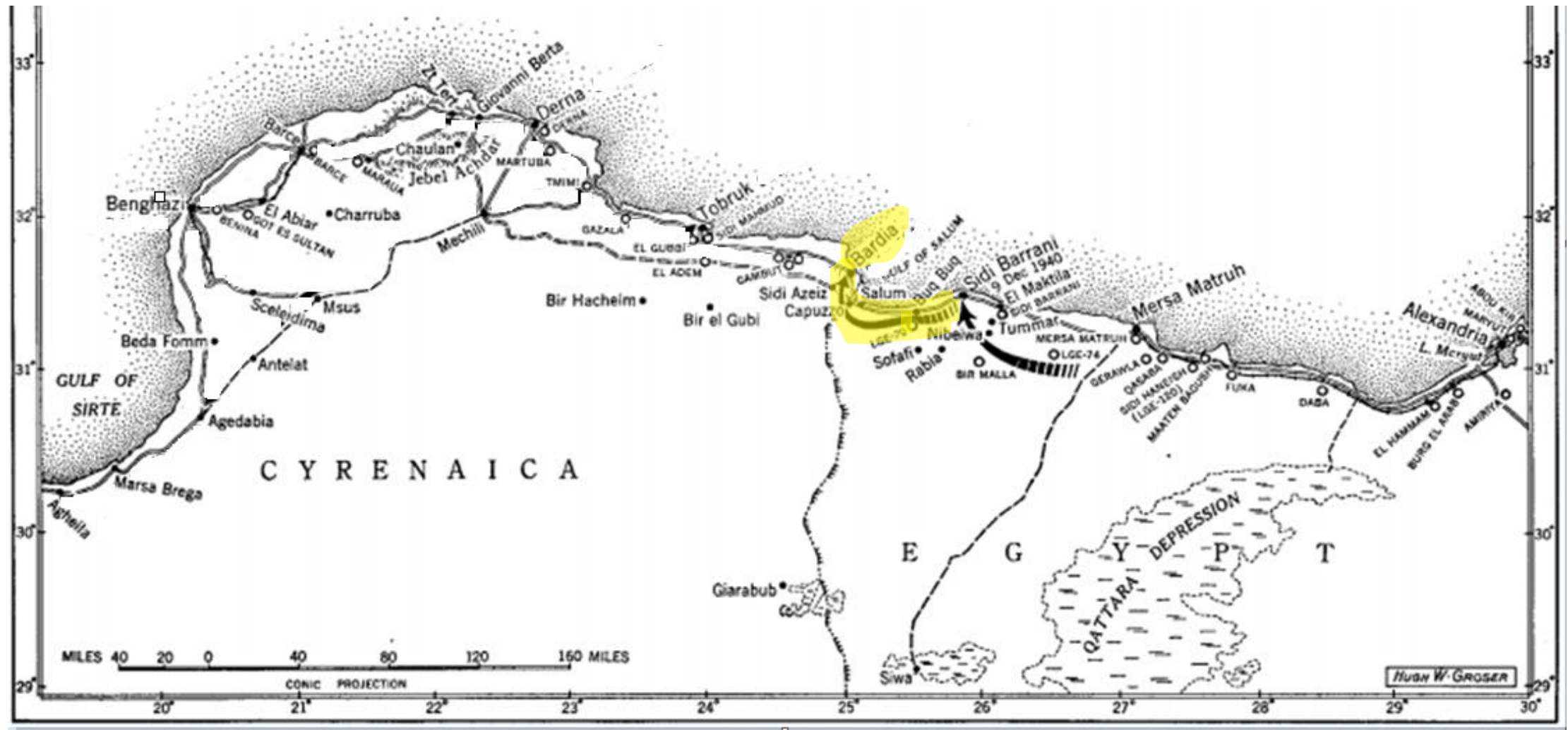


11 December 1940

- Next morning Matruh Force, the 11th Indian Brigade group and tanks attacked the Italians trapped east of Sidi Barrani, and during the day one group after another surrendered; at 1 p.m. contact was established between Matruh Force and the 4th Indian Division.
- The 1,500 to 2,000 men in Point 90 camp surrendered on the approach of the 3/1st Punjab and five infantry tanks, which had been under repair at Tummar West.
- While these isolated survivors of the leading enemy corps—were being overcome, it was discovered that, during the night the enemy had withdrawn from the Khur-Samalus and the Sofafi-Rabia camps.
- The 7th Armoured Brigade took up the pursuit and by nightfall had taken 14,000 prisoners



14 December 1940



14 December 1940

- By 10 a.m. on the 14th 7th Armoured Division patrols were overlooking the Bardia-Tobruk road, and cut telephone wires along it.
- By nightfall a strong detachment of the 4th Armoured Brigade had patrols on the main road.
- In the course of the day bodies of Italian troops were found by the 4th Armoured Brigade and the Support Group to be in Fort Capuzzo, Salum, Sidi Suleiman, Halfaya and Sidi Omar (which was surrounded).
- On 14th December the 4th Indian Division left the battlefield to move to the Sudan in time for an offensive timed for early February.
- General Mackay, GOC 6th Division AIF, had received orders that his division would relieve the 4th Indian on the right flank of the British advance.
- When he arrived at General O'Connor's Western Desert Force headquarters on 14th December for a conference, which General Wavell also attended, Wavell ordered that the 19th Australian Brigade should be ready to embark at Alexandria and move to Bardia by sea to occupy the fortress, if the Italians abandoned it.



MK VIB Light Tanks of 7th Armoured Division on patrol in the desert.

14 December 1940

- The 6th Division was the first division formed within the 2nd AIF, being raised on 28 September 1939. Initially under the command of General Blamey.
- In early 1940, the majority of the 6th Division was sent to Palestine, to complete their training before joining the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France.
- However, France fell to German forces in June 1940, before the Division's training was complete.
- The division consisted of the 16th, 17th and 19th Brigades, each with three infantry battalions.
- In October, the Division (still without the 19th Brigade) had been concentrated in the Amiriya area, west of Alexandria, where it was made responsible for the defence of a position on the edge of the Western Desert, a last line of defence against a possible further Italian advance towards Alexandria.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

001348

PALESTINE. 2/4TH BATTALION ON PARADE. 15/4/1940
(NEGATIVE BY D. PARER).

25 December 1940

- The Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) was a policy designed to train Australian Air Force pilots and air crew for transfer into the RAF.
- Australia planned to provide 28,000 aircrew under the scheme.
- Basic flying courses officially began 29 April 1940.
- Advanced training was to be split between Australia and Canada.
- The first Australian pilots departed for Canada on 14 November 1940, from where they would be transferred to Britain and into the RAF.
- At the end of 1940 there were 537 Australian trainees in Canada.
- The first twenty five Australian graduates, all pilots, reached England on Christmas Day 1940.



Aircrew trained in Australia under the Empire Air Training Scheme depart for Britain before transfer to the RAF.

25 December 1940

- On Christmas Eve, 1940, O'Connor visited Mackay, now commanding the division, and directed him to prepare an attack on Bardia. O'Connor recommended that this be built around the 23 Matildas of the 7th Royal Tanks that remained in working order.
- The attack was to be made with only two brigades, leaving the third for a subsequent advance on Tobruk.
- Mackay did not share O'Connor's optimism about the prospect of an easy victory and proceeded on the assumption that Bardia would be resolutely held, requiring a well-planned attack similar to that required to breach the Hindenburg Line in 1918.
- The plan developed by Mackay involved an attack on the western side of the Bardia defences by 16th Australian Infantry Brigade at the junction of the Gerfah and Ponticelli sectors. Attacking at the junction of two sectors would confuse the defence. The ground was favourable for employment of the Matilda tanks and good observation for the artillery was possible. There was also the prospect that an attack here could split the fortress in two.
- The 17th Australian Infantry Brigade would then exploit the breach in the fortress defences in the second phase.



BARDIA. LOOKING DOWN ON THE HARBOUR AND LOWER TOWN

25 December 1940

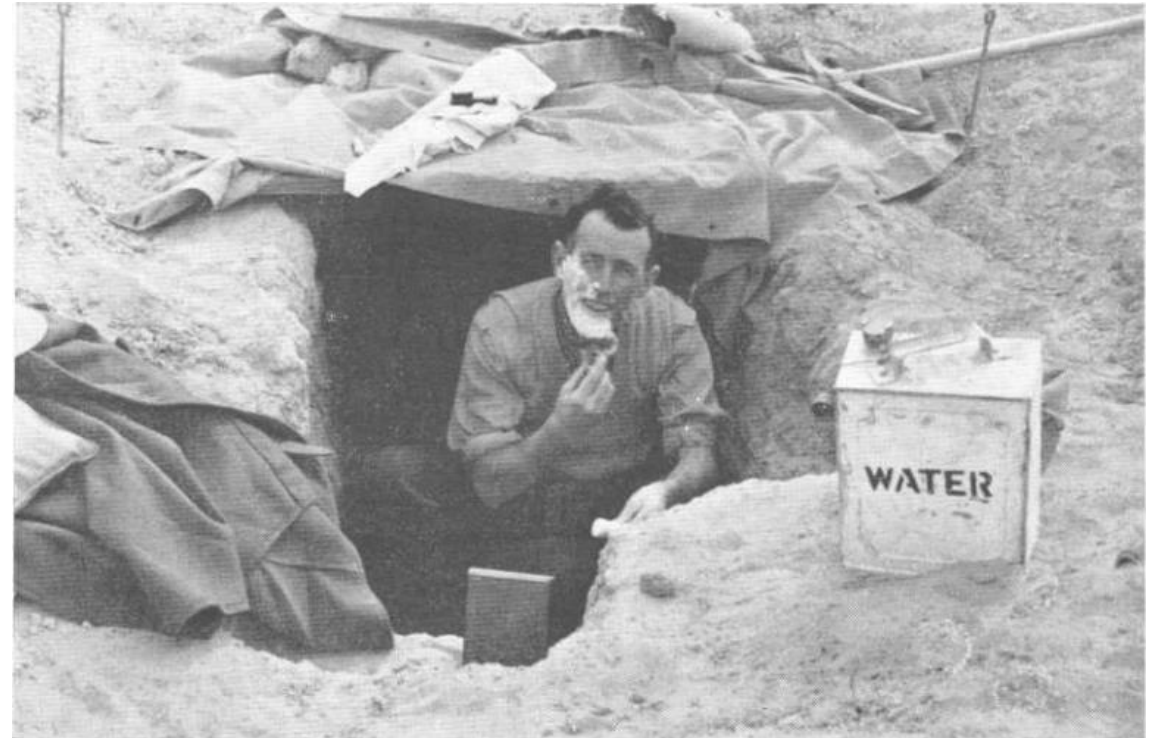
- As it moved into position around Bardia, the 6th Australian Division was still experiencing shortages.
- It had only two of its three artillery regiments and only the 2/1st Field Regiment was equipped with the new 25-pounders. The 2/2nd Field Regiment was still equipped with twelve 18-pounders and twelve 4.5-inch howitzers.
- Only A Squadron of the 2/6th Cavalry Regiment was on hand, as the rest of the regiment was still at Giarabub.
- The 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion had been diverted to Britain and its place taken by a British machine-gun battalion, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers.
- The 2/1st Antitank Regiment had also been diverted, so each infantry brigade had formed an antitank company but only eleven 2-pounders were available instead of the 27 required.
- To make up for this, O'Connor provided Brigadier Herring with fifty two 25 pounder guns, two 60-pounders, eight 6-inch howitzers and eight 6-inch guns from the XIII Corps artillery.
- There were also two antitank regiments, the 3rd and 106th RHA, equipped with 2-pounders and Bofors 37 mm guns.



Senior officers of the 6th Division. Front, l to r: Brigadier Allen, 16th Infantry Brigade; Major General Iven Mackay; Brigadier Robertson, 19th Infantry Brigade. Back, l to r: Colonel Berryman, GSO1; Brigadier Savage, 17th Infantry Brigade; Colonel Vasey, AA&QMG.

26 December 1940

- To defend Cyrenaica against invasion the Italians had fortified the two easternmost towns along the coast—Bardia, fifteen miles across the frontier, and Tobruk, sixty miles farther west.
- They had dug a defensive line in the form of an arc eighteen miles in length round the little harbour and garrison town of Bardia.
- Plans captured at Sidi Barrani showed that they consisted of an almost continuous anti-tank ditch and behind it a double line of underground posts, the front line being linked by rows of barbed wire.
- The posts in the forward line were about 800 yards apart and each was protected by its own anti-tank trench. These shelters offered protection against any but the heaviest shells.
- 400 yards behind the forward line lay a second arc of posts, similar but lacking an anti-tank trench.
- The posts were numbered consecutively from south to north, odd numbers for the outer posts and even numbers for the inner, and the numbers were marked on the maps and on the posts themselves—a convenience for an attacker because it told him exactly where he was.



The men lived in holes dug out of the ground. The C.O. of the 2/2nd Battalion, Lt-Col Chilton, at Bardia, 26th December 1940.

30 December 1940 to 5 January 1941

1 January 1941 - Bardia

- The 16th Brigade had been in the line opposite Bardia since 20th December. Patrolling vigorously to improve intelligence on the defences.
- Although the Italians spent much ammunition, there was not a casualty among the patrols, nor was artillery fire effective. The only casualties had been caused by the intermittent bombing of roads, concentrations of vehicles and of Salum harbour. Up to Christmas Day some twenty men had been killed by bomb fragments.
- On the 27th Saville's 17th Australian Brigade arrived at the front and extended the patrolling to the southern face of the defences.
- At Mackay's urgent request, the division's third Infantry Brigade, the 19th, arrived in the forward area on 1st January.
- On 1st January 11,500 sleeveless leather jerkins, a protection against cold and barbed wire, arrived and were distributed. The next day 350 wire cutters, captured from the Italians, arrived and were distributed to the battalions that would attack next morning.



The 6th Division Intelligence section at work in an Italian underground cistern at Bardia 30th December 1940.

1 January 1941 - Mediterranean

- The dawn of 1941 found a number of RAN ships serving with the Royal Navy outside the Australia Station—
- The light cruiser Perth and the five destroyers Stuart, Vampire, Voyager, Vendetta & Waterhen in the Mediterranean;
- The heavy cruiser Australia in Great Britain with the Home Fleet; and
- The sloops Parramatta and Yarra with the Red Sea Force.
- And, H.M. Ships but manned by Australians, the armed merchant cruisers Kanimbla on the East Indies Station, and Moreton Bay and Arawa in the South Atlantic.
- On the 15th December 1940 Captain Hec Waller RAN, whose ship Stuart was being refitted in Malta, was made Senior Naval Officer Afloat for ships engaged on the operations in support of the army, with Vampire, Vendetta, Voyager, Waterhen, Terror, the gunboats, and a number of minesweepers and anti-submarine trawlers constituting the Inshore Squadron under his command.



Lieutenant Commander Rhoades confers with Captain Waller at sea in the Mediterranean.

1 January 1941 - UK

- No. 10 Squadron RAAF was formed on 1 July 1939 at RAAF Base Point Cook, under the command of Wing Commander Leon Lachal.
- Later that month aircrew and ground staff from the squadron departed for Britain to be trained on the Short Sunderland aircraft which had been acquired to equip the squadron.
- It was intended that the aircrew would fly these aircraft to Australia after completing their training.
- Following the outbreak of war the Australian government offered to leave the squadron in Britain. As a result, No. 10 Squadron was the first RAAF squadron to see active service in the Second World War, when one of its aircraft made a flight to Tunisia on 10 October 1939.
- The squadron's major tasks during the war were escorting convoys, conducting anti-submarine patrols, and air-sea rescue.
- It sank its first U-boat on 1 July 1940.
- At the beginning of 1941 the squadron was operating mainly from RAF Mount Batten at Plymouth with a detachment of 4 aircraft at Oban in Scotland.



No. 10 Squadron Sunderland sets out on patrol in 1941.

1 January 1941 - Egypt

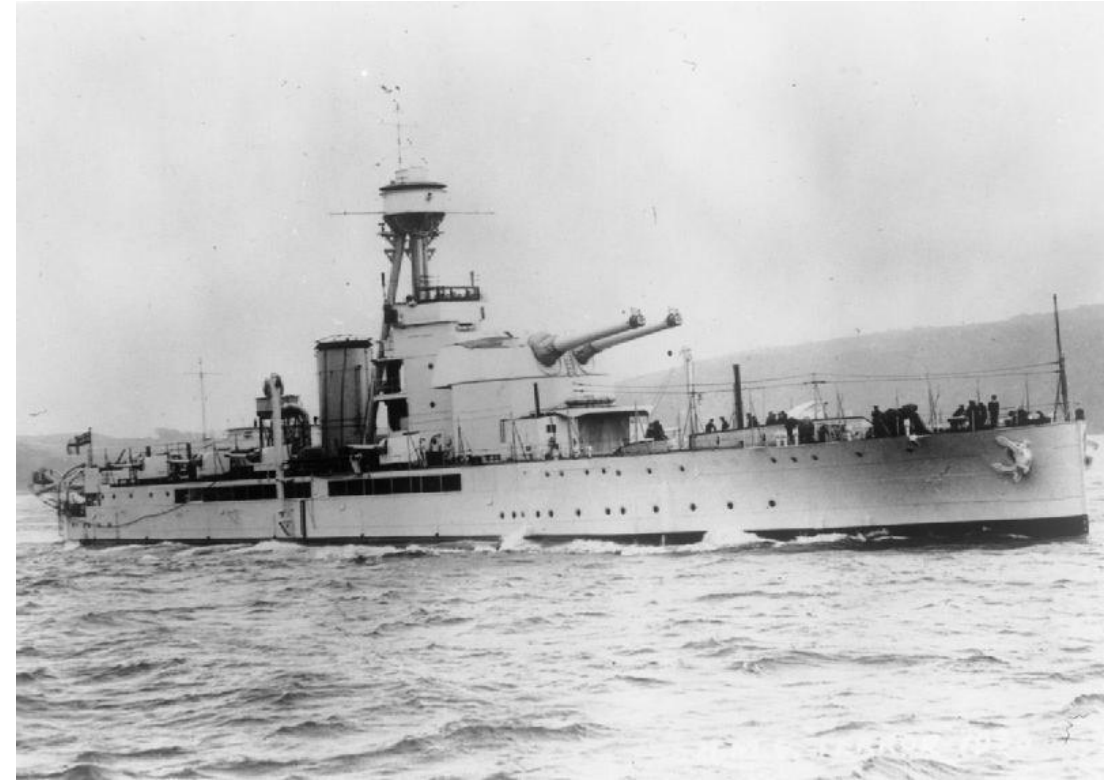
- At the outbreak of War, No. 3 squadron was one of 12 permanent RAAF squadrons.
- It was initially given an army co-operation role, and was deployed to the Middle East in mid-1940, to support the 6th Division of the AIF.
- Commanded by Squadron Leader Ian McLachlan, the squadron's personnel travelled by sea to Egypt, where it was to be provided with aircraft from RAF stocks.
- Initially, it used two obsolete biplane types, the Gloster Gauntlet and Gloster Gladiator, for close air support, along with the Westland Lysander, for reconnaissance sorties, against Italian forces in Egypt and Libya.
- In the course of these operations, the squadron clashed with aircraft from the Regia Aeronautica.
- At the beginning of 1941 the Squadron was based at Bir Malla, with two flights equipped with Gladiators and one equipped with Lysanders.



Gladiator

3 January 1941 - Bardia

- Much depended on moving fuel, water and supplies forward. The 6th Division Quartermaster Colonel Vasey said "This is a Q war".
- Captured Italian vehicles and fuel were used to haul supplies where possible. On 12 December, a Reserve Mechanical Transport company took over 80 Italian 5- and 6-ton diesel trucks that had been captured at Sidi Barrani.
- On 23 December the water carrier Myriel arrived at Sallum with 3,000 tons of water, while the monitor HMS Terror brought another 200 tons.
- Efforts were made to stock 8 Field Supply Depot with seven days' supply of fuel, stores and 500 rounds per gun of ammunition. The effort to do so proceeded satisfactorily despite Italian air raids and blinding sand storms.



Royal Navy monitor HMS Terror underway in
Plymouth Sound

3 January 1941

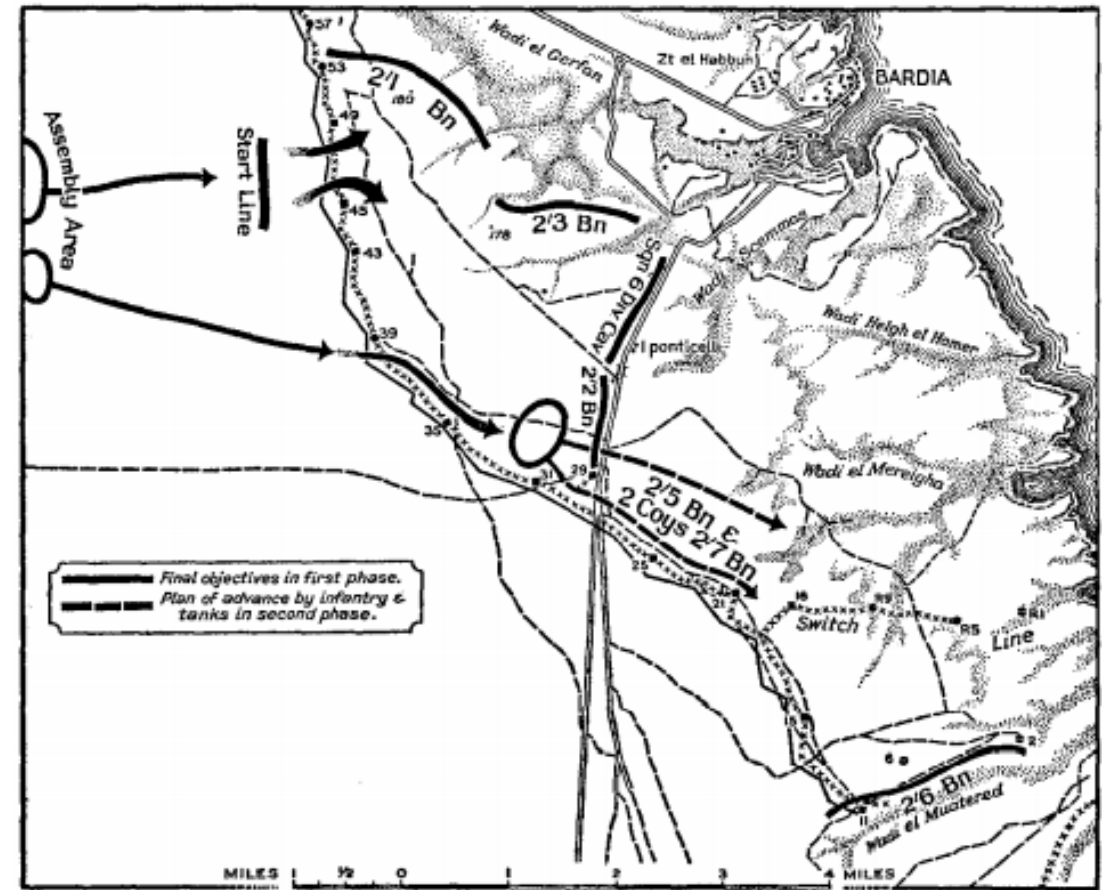
- Air raids on Bardia resumed in the lead-up to the ground assault, with 100 bombing sorties flown against Bardia between 31 December 1940 and 2 January 1941, climaxing with a particularly heavy raid on the night of 2/3 January 1941.
- A naval bombardment was carried out on the morning of 3 January by the battleships HMS Warspite, Valiant and Barham and their destroyer escorts. They withdrew after firing 244 15-inch, 270 6-inch and 240 4.5-inch shells, handing over to HMS Terror and the Insect-class gunboats HMS Ladybird, Aphis and Gnat, which continued firing throughout the battle.
- At one point fire from Terror caused part of the cliff near the town to give way, taking Italian gun positions with it.



Warspite shelling land targets.

3 January 1941

- The artillery opened fire at 0530.
- The artillery density—96 guns for an attack on an 800-yard front—was double that in the Battle of St. Quentin Canal in September 1918, when 360 guns supported an attack on a 7,000-yard front.
- Mackay had insisted that the attack required 125 rounds per gun and had postponed the attack from 2 to 3 January for this ammunition to be brought forward.



The plan of attack.

3 January 1941

- On crossing the start line the 2/1st Infantry Battalion, (Lt Col Eather), came under mortar and artillery fire. The lead platoons advanced accompanied by sappers of the 2/1st Field Company carrying Bangalore torpedoes—12-foot pipes packed with ammonal—as Italian artillery fire began to land, mainly behind them.
- An Italian shell exploded among a leading platoon and detonated a Bangalore torpedo, resulting in four killed and nine wounded.
- The torpedoes were slid under the barbed wire at 60-yard intervals. A whistle was blown as a signal to detonate the torpedoes but could not be heard over the din of the barrage. Eather became anxious and ordered the engineering party nearest him to detonate their torpedo. This the other teams heard, and they followed suit.
- The infantry scrambled to their feet and rushed forward while the sappers hurried to break down the sides of the antitank ditch with picks and shovels.
- They advanced on a series of posts. Posts 49 and 47 were rapidly overrun, as was Post 46 in the second line beyond. Within half an hour Post 48 had also fallen and another company had taken Posts 45 and 44. The two remaining companies now advanced beyond these positions towards a low stone wall as artillery fire began to fall along the broken wire.
- The Italians fought from behind the wall until the Australians were inside it, attacking with hand grenades and bayonets. The two companies succeeded in taking 400 prisoners.
- The 2/2nd Infantry Battalion (Lt Col Chilton) found that it was best to keep skirmishing forward throughout this advance, because going to ground for any length of time meant sitting in the middle of the enemy artillery concentrations that inflicted further casualties.
- The Australian troops made good progress, six tank crossings were readied and mines between them and the wire had been detected. Five minutes later, the 23 Matildas of the 7th Royal Tank Regiment advanced, accompanied by the 2/2nd Infantry Battalion. Passing through the gaps, they swung right along the double line of posts.

3 January 1941

Heavily laden infantrymen advancing on Bardia.



3 January 1941

- At 0750 the 2/3rd Infantry Battalion (Lt Col England), accompanied by the Bren gun carriers of A Squadron, 2/6th Cavalry Regiment moved off for Bardia.
- Major Abbot's company advanced to the Italian posts, and attacked a group of sangers. The Italian defenders were cleared with grenades.
- By 0920 all companies were on their objectives and they had linked with 2/1st Infantry Battalion. However, the Bren gun carriers encountered problems as they moved forward during the initial attack. One was hit and destroyed in the advance and another along the Wadi Ghereidia.
- The 2/3rd were now assailed by half a dozen Italian M13/40 tanks who freed a group of 500 Italian prisoners. The tanks continued to rumble to the south while the British crews of the Matildas "enjoying a brew, dismissed reports of them as an Antipodean exaggeration".
- Finally, they were engaged by an antitank platoon of three 2 pounders mounted on portees. Corporal Pickett's gun destroyed four of them until his portee was hit, killing one man and wounding Pickett. The survivors got the gun back into action and knocked out a fifth tank. The portee was again hit by fire from the sixth tank, fatally wounding another man; but it too was soon knocked out by another 2 pounder.
- By midday, 6,000 Italian prisoners had already reached the provosts at the collection point near Post 45, escorted by increasingly fewer guards whom the rifle companies could afford to detach. The Italian perimeter had been breached and the attempt to halt the Australian assault at the outer defences had failed.

3 January 1941

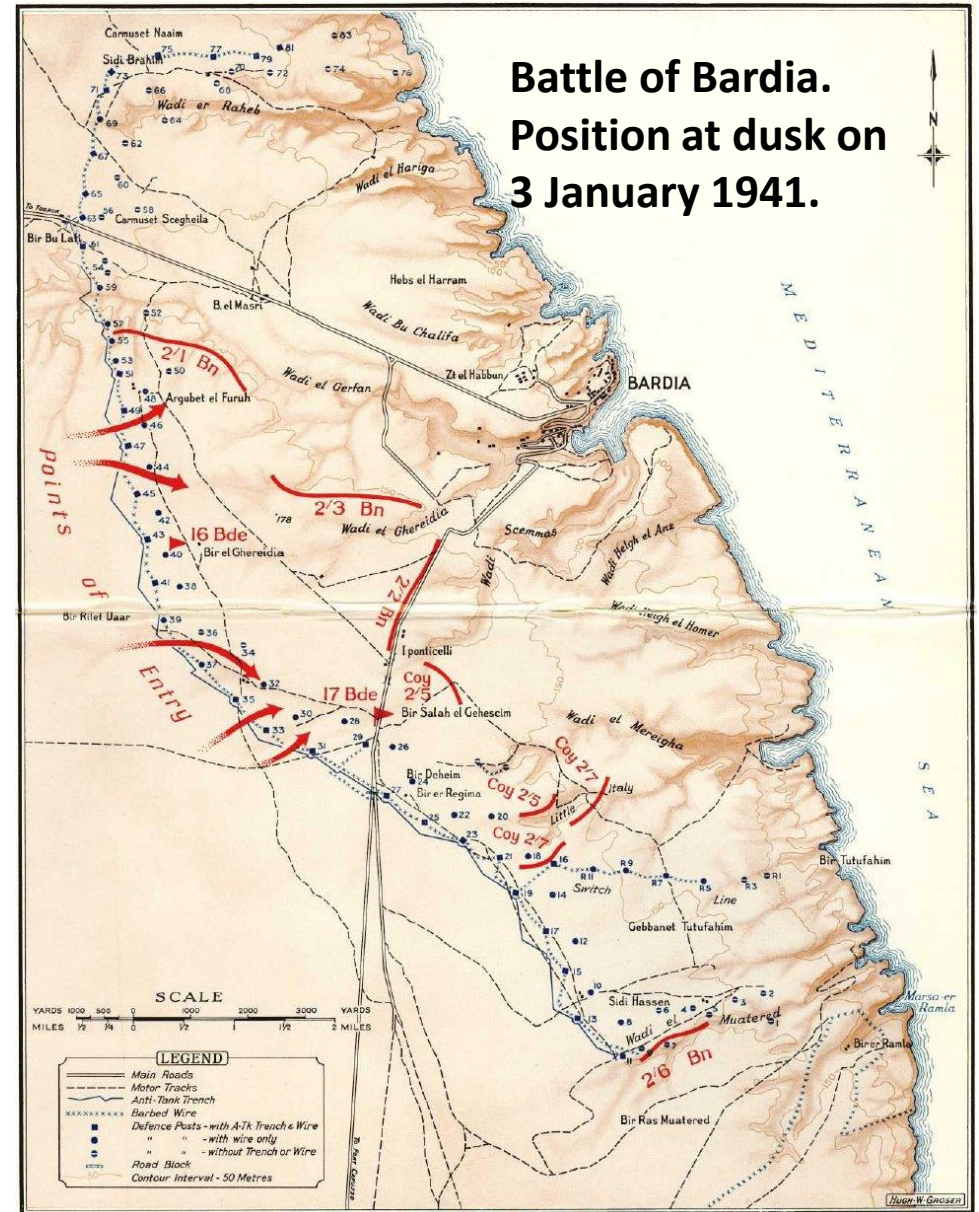
- Major Wrigley's 2/5th Infantry Battalion of 17th Infantry Brigade, reinforced by two companies of the 2/7th Infantry Battalion, now took over the advance. The battalion's task was to clear "The Triangle", a map feature created by the intersection of three tracks north of Post 16. Wrigley's force had a long and exhausting approach much of it under Italian shellfire.
- Awaiting its turn to move, the force sought shelter in Wadi Scemmas. Wrigley called a final coordinating conference for 1030, but at 1020 he was wounded and his second in command, Major Sell took over. At the conference the forward observer from the 2/2nd Field Regiment reported that he had lost contact with the guns. A wounded British tank troop commander also reported that one of his tanks had been knocked out and the other three were out of fuel or ammunition. No tank support would be available. Sell decided that the attack must be carried out without them.
- The artillery barrage came down at 1125, and five minutes later the advance began. Captain Smith's D Company came under effective fire from machine guns and field artillery 700 yards to the north east. Within minutes, all but one of the company's officers and all its senior NCOs had been killed or wounded. C Company's Captain Griffiths pulled his company back to the Wadi and called on a detachment of 3-inch mortars and a platoon of Vickers machine guns of the 1st Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers to fire at the Italian positions. This proved effective, and Griffith's company and a platoon of A Company worked along the Wadi Scemmas, eventually collecting 3,000 prisoners.

3 January 1941

- Meanwhile, Captain Green's B Company of the 2/7th Infantry Battalion had captured Posts 26, 27 and 24. After Post 24 had been taken, two Matildas arrived and helped to take Post 22.
- As the prisoners were rounded up, one shot Green dead, then threw down his rifle and climbed out of the pit smiling broadly. He was immediately thrown back and a Bren gun emptied into him. Lieutenant Macfarlane, the second-in-command, had to prevent his troops from bayoneting the other prisoners.
- The incident was witnessed by the Italians at Post 25 some 450 yards (410 m) away, who promptly surrendered. With the help of the Matildas, Macfarlane was able to quickly capture Posts 20 and 23. At this point, one tank ran out of ammunition; anti-tank fire already had blown off the track of another in the attack on Post 20. Nonetheless, Posts 18 and 21 were captured without armoured support, using the now-familiar tactics of grenades, wire cutting and assault. With darkness approaching, Macfarlane attempted to capture Post 16, but the defenders beat him off. He retired to Post 18 for the night.
- Upon hearing of the losses to the 2/5th, Brigade Major Brock sent Captain Savage's A Company of the 2/7th Infantry Battalion to take "The Triangle". Savage attacked the objective, 3,000 yards away with fire support from machine guns. The company captured eight field guns, many machine-guns and nearly 200 prisoners on the way, but casualties and the need to detach soldiers as prisoner escorts left him with only 45 men at the end of the day.
- Lt Col Godfrey's 2/6th Infantry Battalion was supposed to "stage a demonstration against the south west corner of the perimeter". Godfrey decided instead to launch an attack, in defiance of his clear instructions, and against all basic military logic and common sense. Although poorly planned and executed, Godfrey's attack managed to capture Post 7 and part of Post 9, but Post 11 resisted stubbornly.

3 January 1941

- On the afternoon of 3 January, Berryman met with Allen, Jerram and Frowen at Allen's headquarters at Post 40 to discuss plans for the next day. It was agreed that Allen would advance on Bardia and cut the fortress in two, supported by Frowen's guns, every available tank, the Cavalry's Bren gun carriers and the 2/8th Infantry Battalion, which Mackay had recently allocated from reserve. Allen gave orders accordingly.
- That evening, Berryman came to the conclusion that unless the Italian defence collapsed soon, the 16th and 17th Infantry Brigades would become incapable of further effort and the 19th Infantry Brigade would be required. Mackay was more sanguine about the situation, and reminded Berryman that his orders had been to capture Bardia with only two brigades. While they were discussing the matter, O'Connor and Harding arrived at 6th Division headquarters, and O'Connor readily agreed to the change of plan.
- That evening, Brigadier Savige came forward to the 2/5th Infantry Battalion to determine the situation, which he evaluated as "extremely confused; the attack was stagnant."



4 January 1941

- Savige adopted a plan of Walker's for a night attack, which began at 1230. Macfarlane advanced on Post 16. He sent a platoon around the flank to silently cut the wire on the western side, while he led another platoon against the northern side. A Bren gunner opened fire prematurely, alerting the defenders, but Macfarlane's men were able to overrun the post.
- The same tactic was used to capture Post R11. Macfarlane was supposed to capture Post R9, but was unable to find it in the dark. His troops attempted to capture it at dawn, but the defenders were alert and they responded with heavy fire. With the help of a 2-inch mortar, the second attempt was successful.
- Meanwhile, Captain Halliday's D Company moved southwards against Post 19. He drew the defenders' attention with a demonstration by one platoon in front of the post while the rest of the company moved around the post and attacked silently from the rear. This maneuver took the defenders by surprise and D Company captured the post—and 73 prisoners—at 0230.
- Halliday repeated this tactic against Post 14, which was taken at 0400 with 64 prisoners. Capturing the two posts cost one Australian killed and seven wounded.
- A third attempt against Post 17 failed: the previous attacks had alerted the post and D Company came under heavy mortar and machine gun fire. A furious battle raged until the post fell shortly before dawn. Another 103 Italians were captured at a cost of two Australians killed and nine wounded. Between casualties and men detached as prisoner escorts, D Company strength fell to 46 men, and Halliday elected to halt for the night.

4 January 1941

- The 2/1st Infantry Battalion began its advance on schedule at 0900, but the lead platoon came under heavy machine gun fire from Post 54, and Italian artillery knocked out the supporting mortars. 3 RHA engaged the Italian guns and the platoon withdrew.
- Colonel Eather then organised a formal attack on Post 54 for 1330, following a bombardment of the post by artillery and mortars. The Italian guns were silenced when an Australian shell detonated a nearby ammunition dump. The Australians then captured the post. About a third of its defenders had been killed in the fighting. The remaining 66 surrendered.
- This prompted a general collapse of the Italian position in the north. Posts 56 and 61 surrendered without a fight and white flags were raised over Posts 58, 60, 63 and 65, and the gun positions near Post 58. By nightfall, Eather's men had advanced as far as Post 69 and only the fourteen northernmost posts still held out in the Gerfan sector.

4 January 1941

- The 2/2nd, supported by the three Matilda tanks and the guns of the 7th Medium Regiment, advanced down the Wadi Scemmas towards an Italian fort on the southern headland of Bardia. After some hours of climbing, the 2/2nd reached the headland and attacked the fort at 1645. One of the tanks made straight for the gate of the fort. The Italians opened the gate, and the tanks moved inside, taking the garrison of 300 prisoners. Inside the fort were two 6 inch guns, two field guns and five other guns.
- D Company then followed a goat track that led to lower Bardia.
- Two carriers of the 2/5th patrolling near the coast captured 1,500 prisoners.
- Captain Vickery, a forward observer from the 2/1st Field Regiment, attacked an Italian battery in his Bren gun carrier and captured 1,000 prisoners.
- By the end of the second day, the remaining garrisons in the Gerfan and Ponticelli sectors were completely isolated.



Troops from the Australian 2/2nd Infantry Battalion rush through the streets of Bardia.

4 January 1941

- Colonel England's 2/3rd was supported by 104 RHA and a troop of the 7 RTR. The battalion came under artillery fire, mostly from a battery north of Bardia that was then engaged and silenced by 104 RHA.
- The advance resumed, only to come under machine gun and artillery fire from Wadi el Gerfan.
- An eight-man section under Lance Corporal Squires was sent to reconnoitre the wadi but attacked a battery position instead and returned with 500 prisoners. The wadi was found to contain large numbers of Italian soldiers from technical units who, untrained for combat, surrendered in large numbers. One company captured over 2,000 prisoners, including 60 officers.
- The tanks and the remainder of A Squadron continued along the road to Bardia under intermittent artillery fire, followed by C Company of the 2/3rd Infantry Battalion. The column entered the town at 1600, its tanks firing the occasional shot.



Troops from the Australian 2/2nd Infantry Battalion rush through the streets of Bardia.

5 January 1941

- On the morning of 5 January, the 19th Infantry Brigade launched its attack on the Meriega sector, starting from the Bardia road and following a creeping barrage southward with the support of six Matilda tanks, all that remained in working order.
- The company commanders of the lead battalion, the 2/11th, did not receive their final orders until 45 minutes before start time, at which point the start line was 3 miles away.
- As a consequence, the battalion arrived late, and the intended two company attack had to be carried out by just one: Captain Ralph Honner's C Company, albeit with all six Matildas at his disposal.
- Honner's men had to literally chase the barrage, and had only just caught up with it before it ceased. As they advanced, they came under fire from the left, the right, and in front of them, but casualties were light. Most positions surrendered when the infantry and tanks came close, but this did not reduce the fire from posts further away.
- By 1115, C Company had reached the Switch Line and captured Post R5 and then R7. B Company, following on the left, cleared Wadi Meriega, capturing two Italian Generals, among others.
- At this point, Honner stopped to consolidate his position and allow Lieutenant Lt Col Ivan Dougherty's 2/4th to pass through. However, Honner took the surrender of Posts 1, 2 and 3 and his men did not stop advancing.
- Meanwhile, the Italian garrisons in the north were surrendering to the 16th Infantry Brigade and the Support Group of the 7th Armoured Division outside the fortress.

5 January 1941

- An estimated 36,000 Italian soldiers were captured at Bardia, 1,703 were killed and 3,740 were wounded.
- A few thousand (including General Bergonzoli and three of his division commanders) escaped to Tobruk on foot or in boats.
- The Allies captured 400 guns, 12 medium tanks, 115 L3s, and 708 vehicles.
- Australian losses totalled 130 dead and 326 wounded.
- Before Bardia fell Wavell had decided that Tobruk also should be taken. Lack of vehicles and the consequent shortage of food, water, ammunition and petrol in the forward area was a cause of anxiety to the British staffs. If the harbour of Tobruk was secured most of the needed supplies could be carried forward from the base in Egypt by sea.
- Even before resistance at Bardia ceased General O'Connor ordered the 7th armoured brigade forward to isolate Tobruk.



Italian soldiers captured during the Battle of Bardia.

5 January 1941

- R.A.F. bombers attacked every airfield east of Derna to reduce the likelihood of Italian air intervention, while fighters strafed the Tobruk-Bardia road, gave protective cover for the 7th Armoured Division, and flew offensive patrols to prevent enemy aircraft reaching the battle area.
- Enemy air opposition was almost negligible until 5th January when the battle was over.
- No. 3 Squadron RAAF was retained to provide cover for the troops attacking Bardia. Seventy - seven sorties were flown in the three days but its aircraft were not once challenged by enemy fighters.



Seven Gladiators of No. 3 Squadron RAAF making a low pass in loose formation over the Squadron's mobile operations room at their landing ground near Sollum, Egypt, circa 1941.

Video

- [Fall of Bardia 1940 | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C188687)
- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C188687>
- The advance of the AIF from Salum to Bardia with shots of infantry advancing and Australian and British Artillery Bombardment.
- Italian soldiers surrendering, abandoned Italian equipment and enemy dead litter the desert.
- Units identified are: 2/2 Infantry Battalion and 6th Division Engineers.
- 15 minutes