

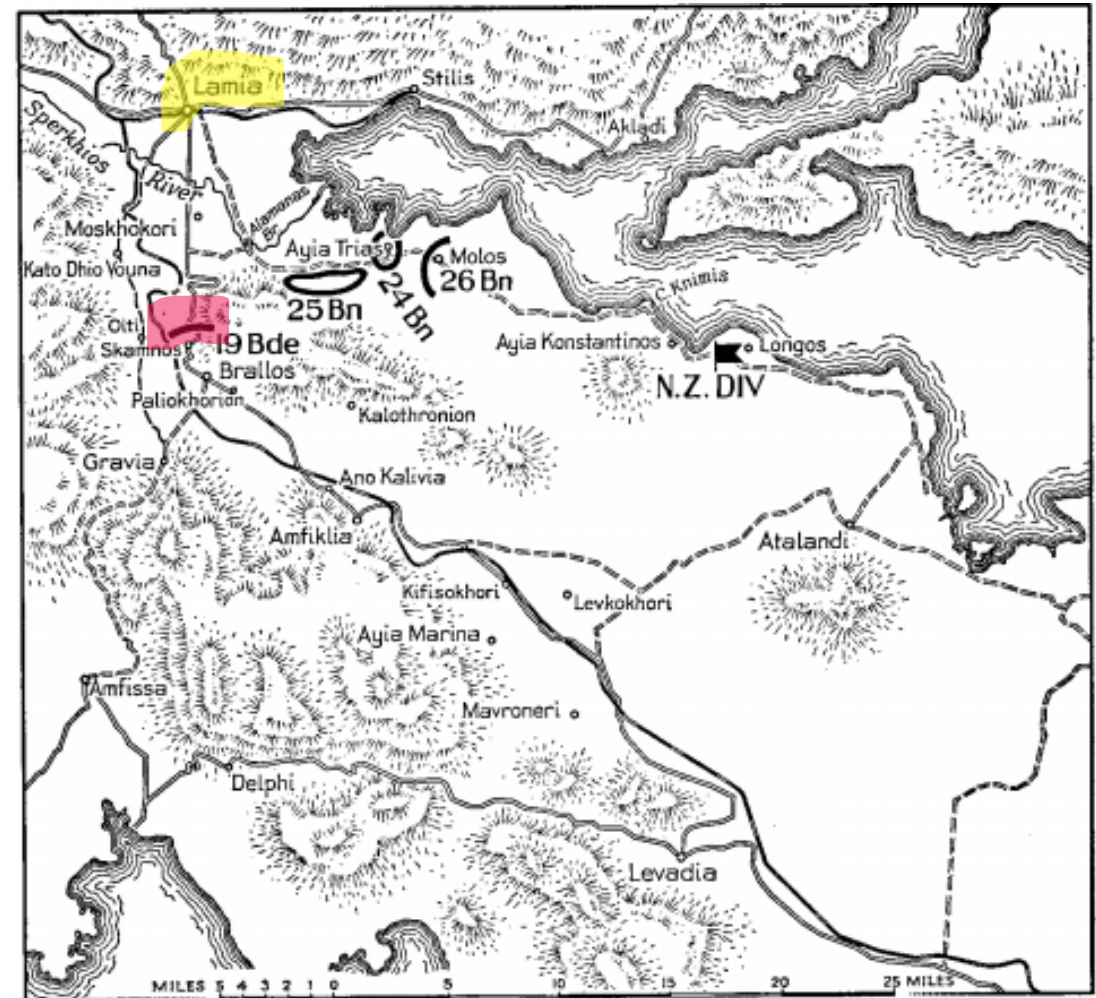
# Australia's War: 80 years ago this week

## 21 April 1941



# 21 April 1941 - Greece

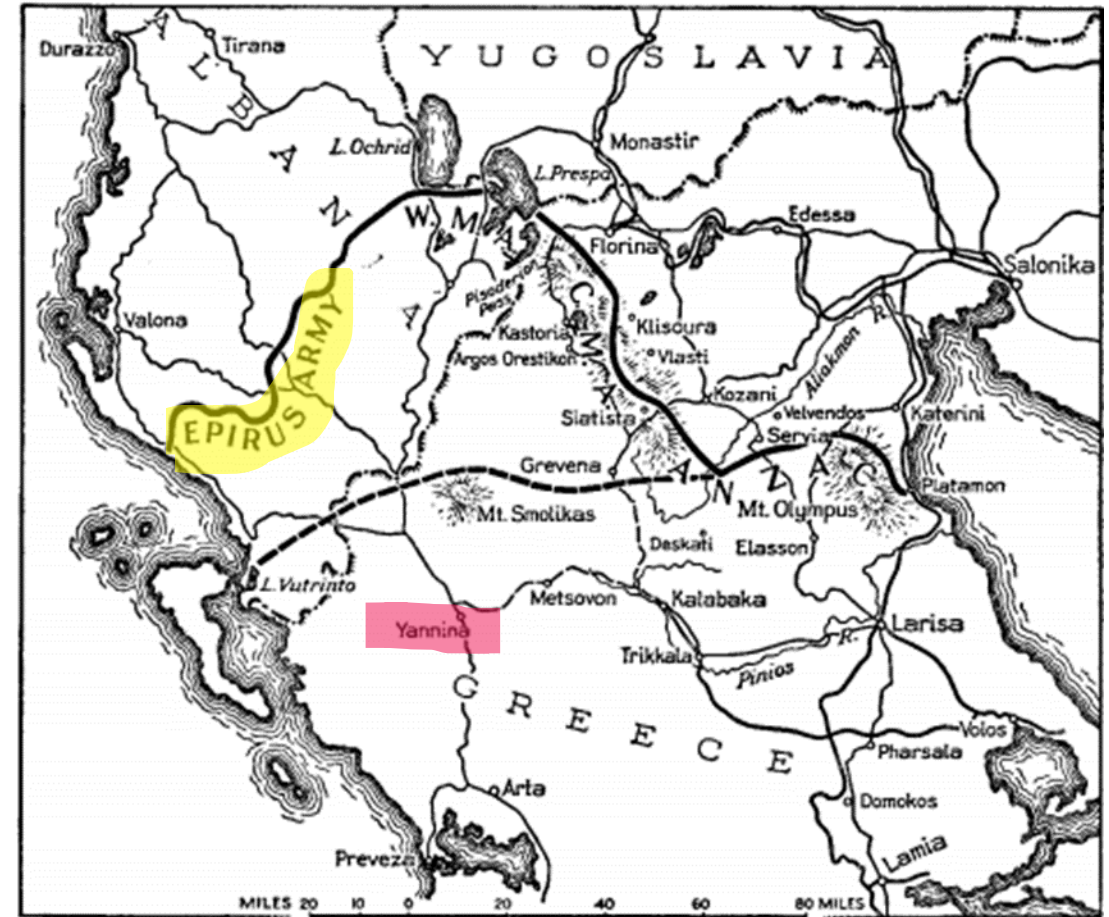
- When the 2/2nd Field Regiment was climbing the **Brallos Pass**, Brigadier Herring, commanding the 6th Divisional Artillery, had two guns pulled out and sited on the forward slope of the escarpment about two-thirds of the distance up the slope to cover the demolished bridge over the Sperkhios River.
- They were placed 15 feet apart on a mere ledge at the side of the road in the area held by the 2/4th Battalion.
- About 6 p.m. on the 21st the first German vehicles emerged from Lamia and began moving south along the straight road on which the guns had been carefully ranged.
- The gunners opened fire at 10,900 yards and, in three rounds, hit and stopped the leading truck, whereupon the remainder hastily retired to Lamia.
- Throughout the night these gunners, and observers perched farther up the slope, saw the lights of seemingly hundreds of vehicles moving down the pass into **Lamia**.



Morning, 24th April.

# 21 April 1941 - Greece

- Meanwhile, at 2 o'clock on the morning of the 21st, Wavell arrived at Blamey's headquarters and informed him that the force was to be evacuated as soon as possible.
- At that stage it was considered that embarkation would not begin before 27th April.
- That day Tsolakoglou signed an agreement to surrender the Greek Epirus Army and it was learned in Athens that the Germans had reached Yannina.
- This placed the whole British left rear under threat. At a conference between Wilson, Baillie-Grohman and Blamey, on the evening of the 21st, it was decided that embarkation should begin at the earliest possible date, "which was likely to be the night of the 24th-25th April".



The front line on 15th April and the shorter line proposed by General Papagos.



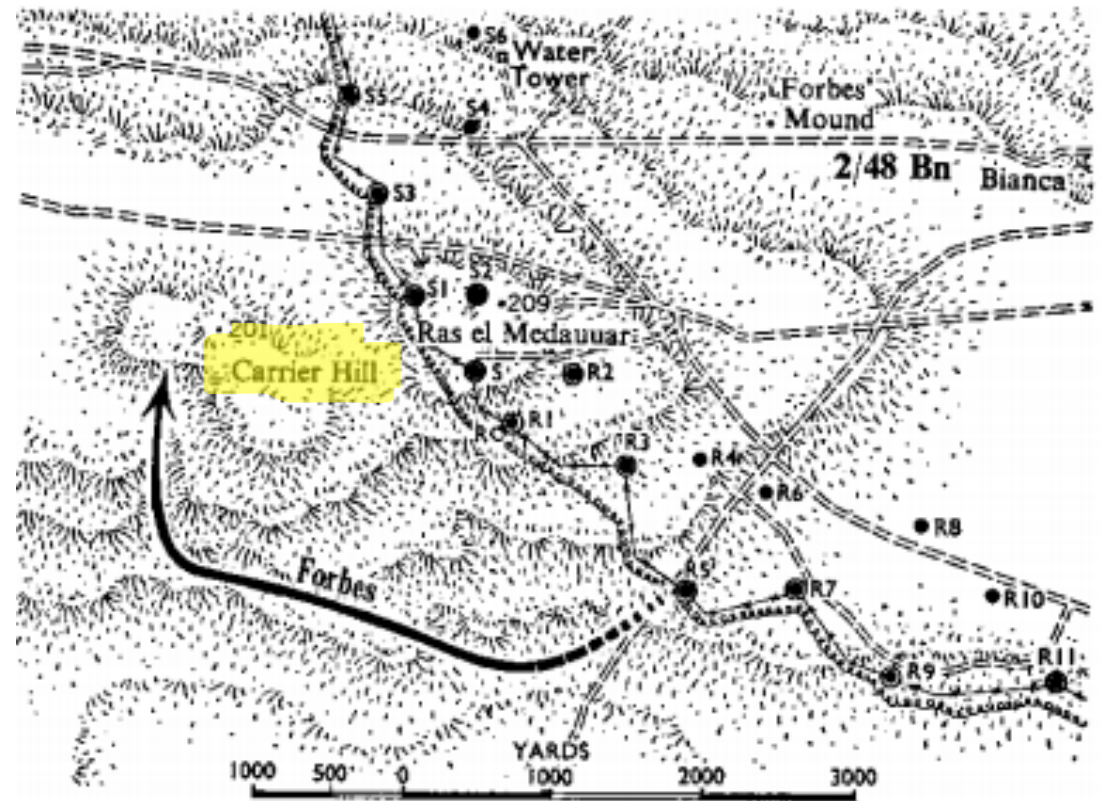
# 21 April 1941 - London

- Churchill wanted to add two more ships to the convoy to carry 100 additional cruiser tanks, but met with opposition from the Chief of the General Staff, General Dill (photo), who was concerned over the shortage for home defence.
- Eventually it was decided to add one additional ship containing 67 of the latest cruiser tanks, making a total to be transported through the Mediterranean of 295 tanks.
- The operation was called "Tiger".



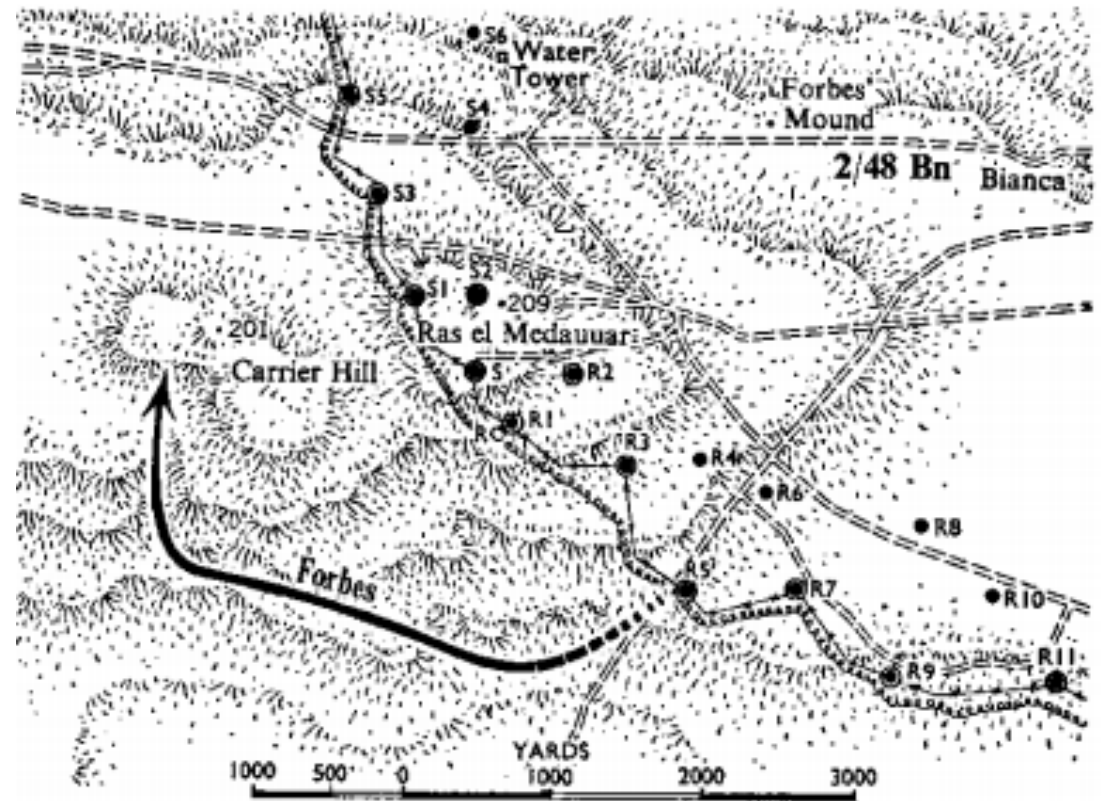
# 22 April 1941 - Libya

- General Morshead planned an offensive counter-stroke. Three raids designed to unsettle the besiegers and if possible capture a substantial number of them were to be mounted simultaneously.
- The most important was to be carried out by the 2/48th Battalion.
- 1,000 yards from the perimeter, there was a small hill, known as **Carrier Hill**, from which most of the western plateau within the perimeter, could be observed; it provided a constant threat to the defenders for, small though it was still there was sufficient dead ground there to conceal an assault force close to the defences.
- On the 20th a carrier patrol scouting in that direction reported that a substantial infantry force was dug in behind the hill, with about 40 vehicles and 4 tanks. A battery of 75-mm guns was also known to be there. Morshead decided to raid the locality with the object of capturing its garrison and destroying the guns.



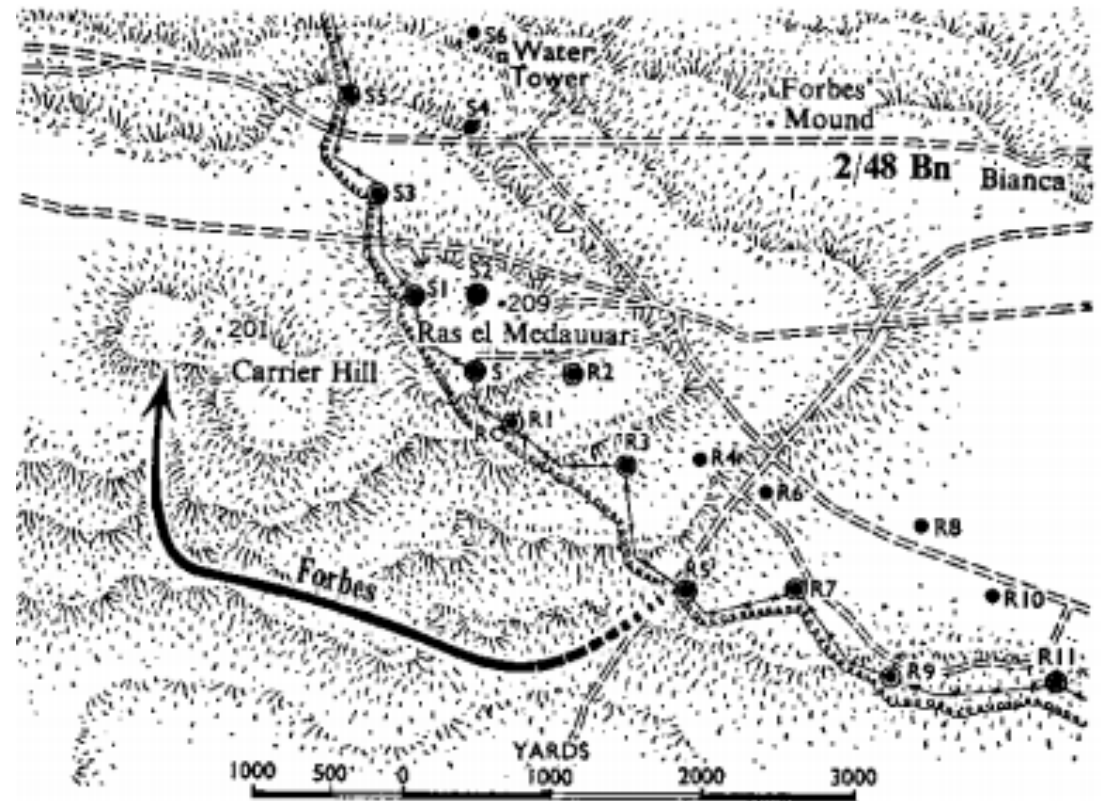
# 22 April 1941 - Libya

- At 6.40 a.m. on the 22nd the raiders set off. Captain Forbes, led the attack in person, at first in a carrier and then on foot. The operation went according to plan, except that the tanks moved too fast for the infantry and lost contact. The tanks moved out, the carriers and then the infantry followed and the anti - tank guns brought up the rear.
- The enemy put down a heavy artillery barrage when he saw the raiders debouch, but the force moved out under perfect control; every man got through the wire. An hour later the tanks and the carriers had reached the far side of Carrier Hill. The following infantry heard them engaging the enemy to the east.
- The carriers, under Sergeant Batty, rejoined the infantry as they were coming up to the rising ground on the hill's south side, and described the enemy positions to Captain Forbes. Ordering the carriers to approach the enemy battery from the rear Forbes took two of his platoons, commanded by Lieutenant Jenkins and Lieutenant Kimber, out to the left in a wide arc to outflank the battery from the south-west while Lieutenant Wardle's platoon swung out to the right to come in on the other flank. The two parties closed in on either side in line abreast.



# 22 April 1941 - Libya

- When the Australian infantry suddenly appeared on each side from dead ground, the Italian battery, which had been endeavouring to engage the tanks, was taken completely by surprise.
- The leading infantry charged it with the bayonet while others engaged in a fire fight with the Italian garrison.
- Batty's carriers circled the position at a range of less than 50 yards, directing intense and accurate fire at the enemy gun crews.
- For a short time the Italians stood to their positions and engaged the Australians with infantry weapons at short range but could not halt them, and the sight of the assaulting infantry coming forward with fixed bayonets soon proved too much for the Italians. Generally they surrendered though isolated pockets continued to resist.
- An hour later the entire Italian garrison had been rounded up and were on their way to Tobruk. The Italian prisoners numbered 368. The booty included four 20-mm antitank guns, machine-guns, motor transport, motor cycles — and gun-sights.
- The 2/48th Battalion's casualties were two killed and seven wounded, one mortally.



# 22 April 1941 - Libya

- The second raid executed simultaneously by the 2/23rd Battalion (Lt-Col Evans) was also of company strength commanded by Captain Rattray. Rattray divided his company into two forces, intending that they should advance by approximately parallel routes and if possible link up after taking their first objectives. Captain Barlow was to take out two troops of the 18th Indian Cavalry about three miles to protect Rattray's right flank.
- The party on the right advanced along a wadi that led westward from the perimeter. The enemy held strong positions at the head of the wadi from which intense machine-gun fire was brought to bear on the advancing Australians. Rattray was forced to take cover in a side wadi. The enemy heavily shelled and mortared it. Rattray then left the wadi and attacked across the open plateau. As the Australians appeared over the skyline, the Italians turned their guns upon them; but spirited attacks with bayonet and grenade carried the raiders right into the Italian sangars, where the occupants received them waving white handkerchiefs.
- Rattray's party next strove to advance southwards to converge from a flank on the enemy opposed to the left party, but intense fire from both flanks on the bare, flat ground made a further advance impracticable. Rattray returned with 40 prisoners.
- Lieutenant Hutchinson, commanding the left-hand party, was having a hard fight. Advancing south of the Derna Road the party assaulted an anti-tank/anti-aircraft battery, behind which were two batteries of field guns. The infantry advanced in bounds to within throwing distance of the enemy sangars, hurled in grenades, then charged with the bayonet. The Italian defenders ran out with their hands up and were dispatched to the perimeter. Four hours after Hutchinson's party sallied forth that morning, those who were left returned to the perimeter. Eighty per cent had become casualties: 24, including Hutchinson did not return, 22 of those who did had been wounded. But much had been accomplished. A prisoner captured later in that area said that of his company of 100 men only 10 had remained after the raid.
- Rattray's and Hutchinson's patrols captured 87 men, 3 anti-aircraft guns, 5 machine-guns and 4 mortars.
- The third sortie on the 22nd, by the 20th Brigade in the southern sector, was unsuccessful. The plan was to attack and destroy a battery of enemy field guns with a mixed force of an infantry company (from the 2/17th Battalion), a squadron of cruiser tanks, two troops of light tanks and a company of the 2/1st Pioneers, supported by a battery of the 1st R.H.A. The force set off before dawn, but when daylight came found itself under heavy fire from three sides. It was compelled to withdraw. One light tank was knocked out by a well-concealed anti-tank gun. With the help of gunfire, skilfully directed by Major Goschen, the withdrawal was executed with little loss.

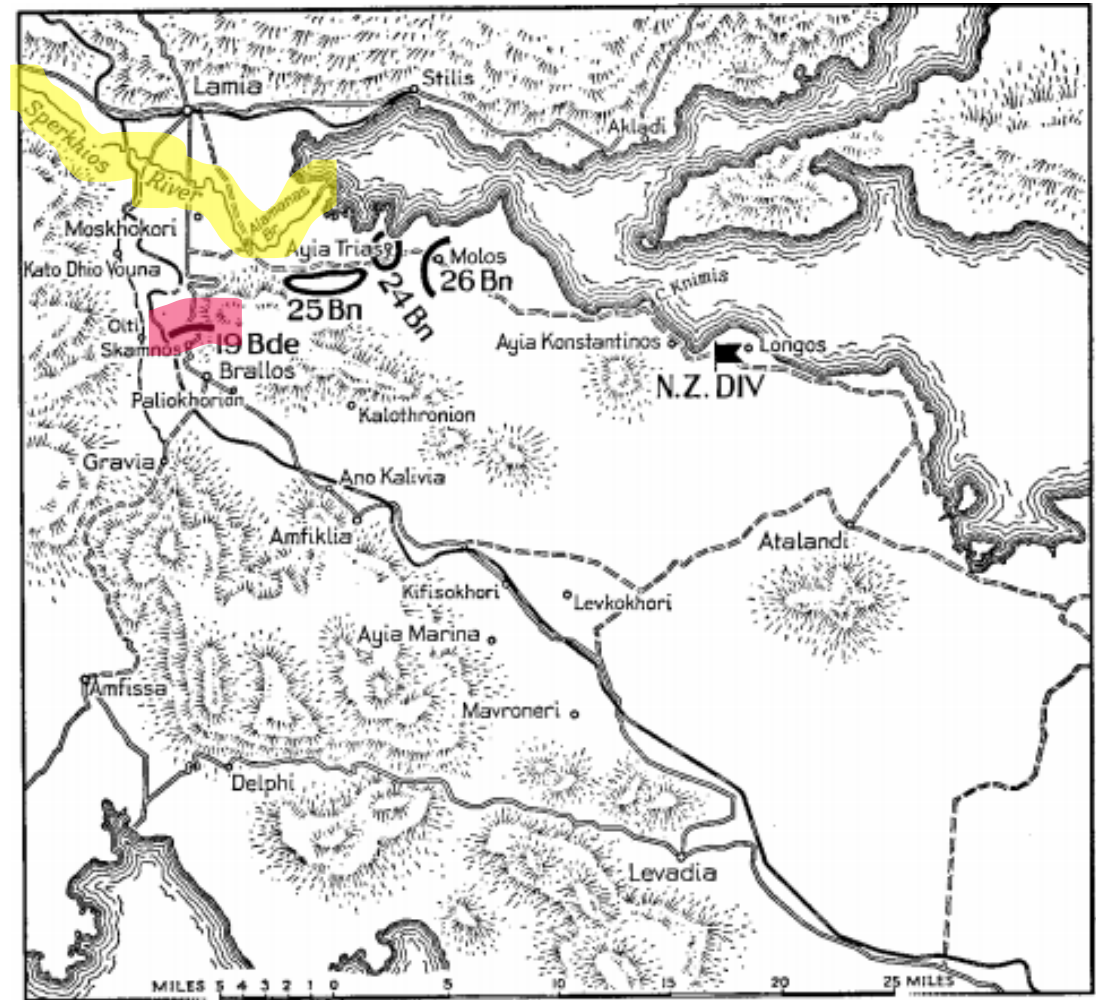


# 22 April 1941 - Libya

- In a raid on the harbour on the 21st by a force of 24 bombers escorted by 21 fighters, the quay was hit, two ships were sunk and two were put out of action.
- It was little consolation for such severe losses that the few Hurricanes of Nos. 73 and 274 Squadrons intervened with great success and shot down four enemy aircraft.
- Morshead called a conference next day to devise counter-measures, attended by his commander of anti-aircraft artillery, Brigadier Slater, and by the two senior R.A.F. commanders. Slater proposed to change the method of fighting the heavy anti-aircraft guns from predictor laying on individual machines to an umbrella barrage. This was agreed to. It was also decided to form the nucleus of an observation corps, with three observation posts in a wireless network, to combat dive-bombing attacks on the forward troops.

# 22 April 1941 - Greece

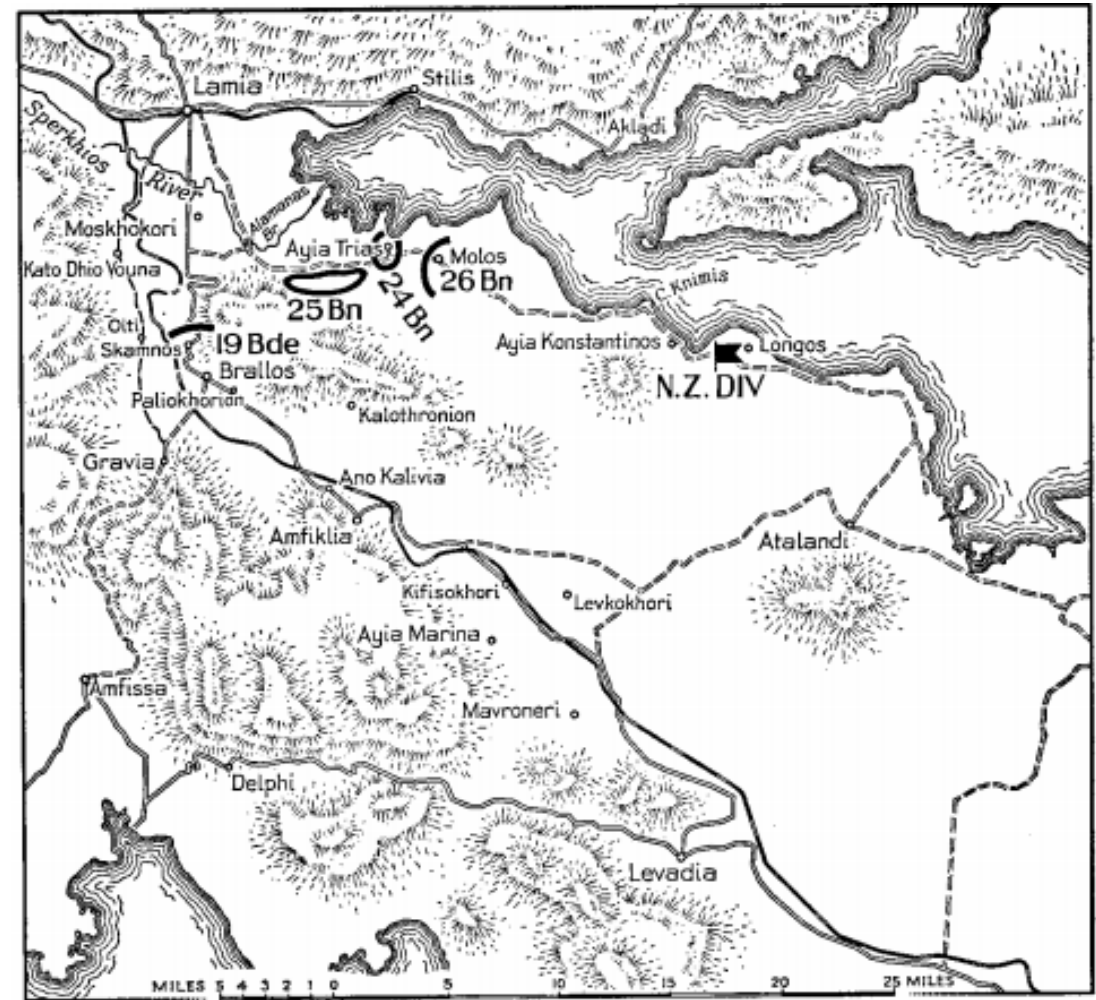
- On the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> at the **Brallos Pass** four enemy medium guns opened fire from beyond the range of the 25-pounders, and a column of vehicles began moving towards the **Sperkhios**.
- Each time vehicles came within range the Australian guns opened fire and the German mediums replied, their shells bursting closer and closer until they were landing within 15 feet of the gun pits.
- A shell hit a truck carrying smoke shells which exploded and covered the Australian guns with smoke. A trailer carrying HE shells was set on fire and the shells began to explode. A dump of charges exploded, setting the scrub ablaze.
- Enemy field guns were brought forward to the Sperkhios and began to fire, and the Australian guns replied.
- By 1 o'clock one Australian gun was out of action through oil leaking from the recuperator.
- Lt Anderson now saw that about twenty trucks had come forward to the foot of the escarpment and were unloading infantrymen there. He and his men lifted the trail of the gun on to the edge of the pit so as to depress it enough to fire down the face of the hill and, using a weak charge lest the recoil caused the gun to somersault, fired more than fifty rounds into the enemy infantry. This drew heavier shelling from the German medium guns.



Morning, 24th April.

# 22 April 1941 - Greece

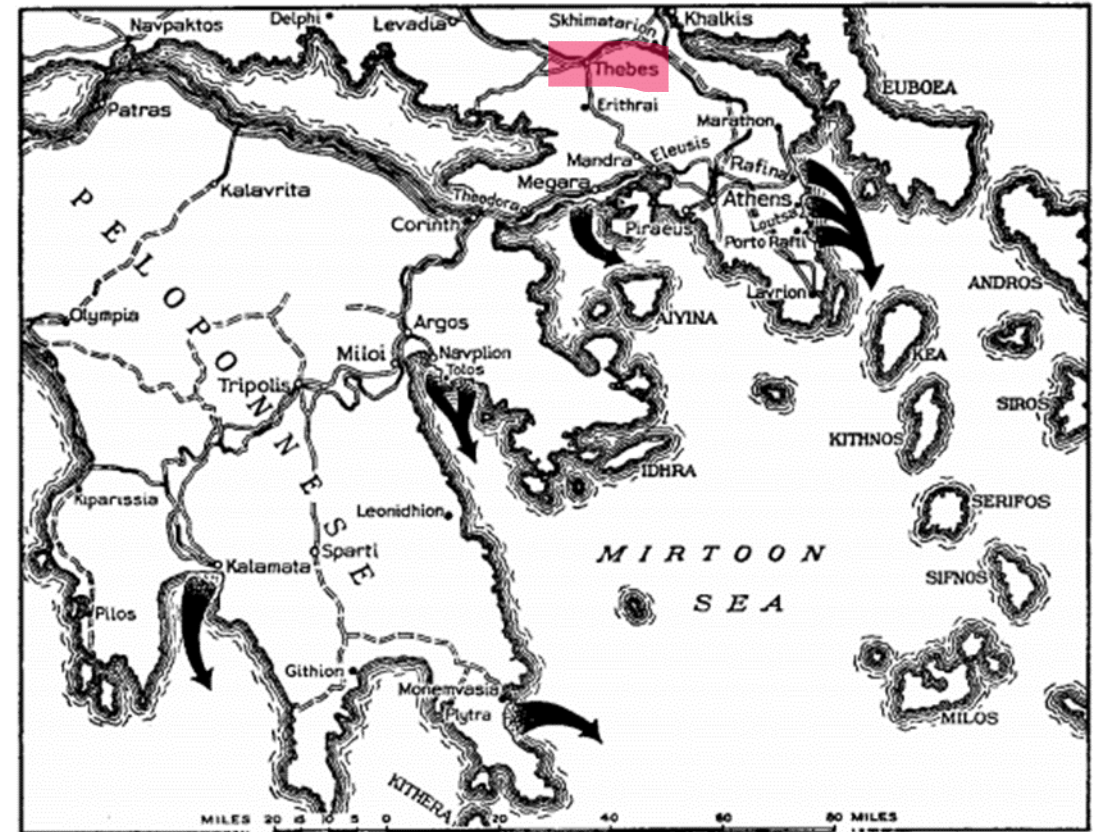
- The Australian crews took shelter, and when they returned found that the carriage of the remaining gun had been hit and would not operate.
- It was then 4 p.m. The duel had lasted eight hours, and although more than 160 shells had burst round the two exposed guns and dozens of rounds of their own ammunition had been exploded, not a man on the scarred and smoking ledge had been hit.
- Anderson sent half his men back up the hill with the sights and breech-block of the damaged gun and with the remaining crew tried to put the other gun into action. The German guns now opened fire with deadly accuracy.
- Five men were killed and three wounded, one fatally, leaving only eight unwounded, including Anderson.
- At dusk, after the wounded men had been carried out, Anderson and Gunner Brown returned to the guns and brought away the sights and striker mechanism, and the discs and paybooks of the dead.



Morning, 24th April.

# 22 April 1941 - Greece

- German air superiority showed itself in massed attacks on ships, and on the 21st and 22nd April twenty-three vessels were sunk in Greek waters.
- At a conference between Wilson, Blamey, and Baillie-Grohman on the roadside near **Thebes** the night of 21/22, Wilson informed Blamey that as a result of the surrender in Epirus he had decided to accelerate the program. It would be Blamey's task to deliver the first troops to the beaches by dawn on the 24th, for embarkation on the night of the 24th-25th.



The embarkation beaches.



# 22 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- On 22nd April) Creswell sailed the first DEMON convoy, "AG.13", the three "Glen" ships and Ulster Prince, escorted by Calcutta, Phoebe , Stuart and Voyager.
- Glenroy ran aground leaving Alexandria, and took no further part in the operation.
- Three hours after the convoy sailed, Creswell learned that embarkation might start on the 24th instead of the 28th, and this was confirmed at 7 p.m. on the 22nd.



MV Glenearn

## 23 April 1941 - Libya

- On the next day, the 23rd, air activity was almost continuous and more ships were hit.
- Three of the garrison's dwindling force of aircraft were shot down, and two were damaged.
- But of 13 aircraft that raided the harbour and landing ground, 6 were brought down.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

020737

TOBRUK, LIBYA. ONE OF THE BOFORS 40MM ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS IN ACTION ON THE HARBOUR FRONT.

# 23 April 1941 - Greece

- The advanced date of the operation resulted in greater use of Crete as a staging point, and the reduction of embarkation beaches to eight: Rafina and Porto Rafti, east of Athens; Megara, west of Athens; Miloi, Navplion, and Tolos, at the head of the Gulf of Navplion; Monemvasia, in the south-east; and Kalamata in the south-west of Morea.
- Embarkations took place in the moonless period, but in anticipation of air attacks Baillie-Grohman laid down that ships should reach their embarkation points one hour after dark and leave by 3 o'clock the following morning.
- Apart from that, he merely indicated the numbers to be embarked and the dates and places of embarkation. Movements of ships were controlled by Pridham-Wippell, who had an over-all view of the situation afloat which Baillie-Grohman lacked.



The embarkation beaches.

# 23 April 1941 - Greece

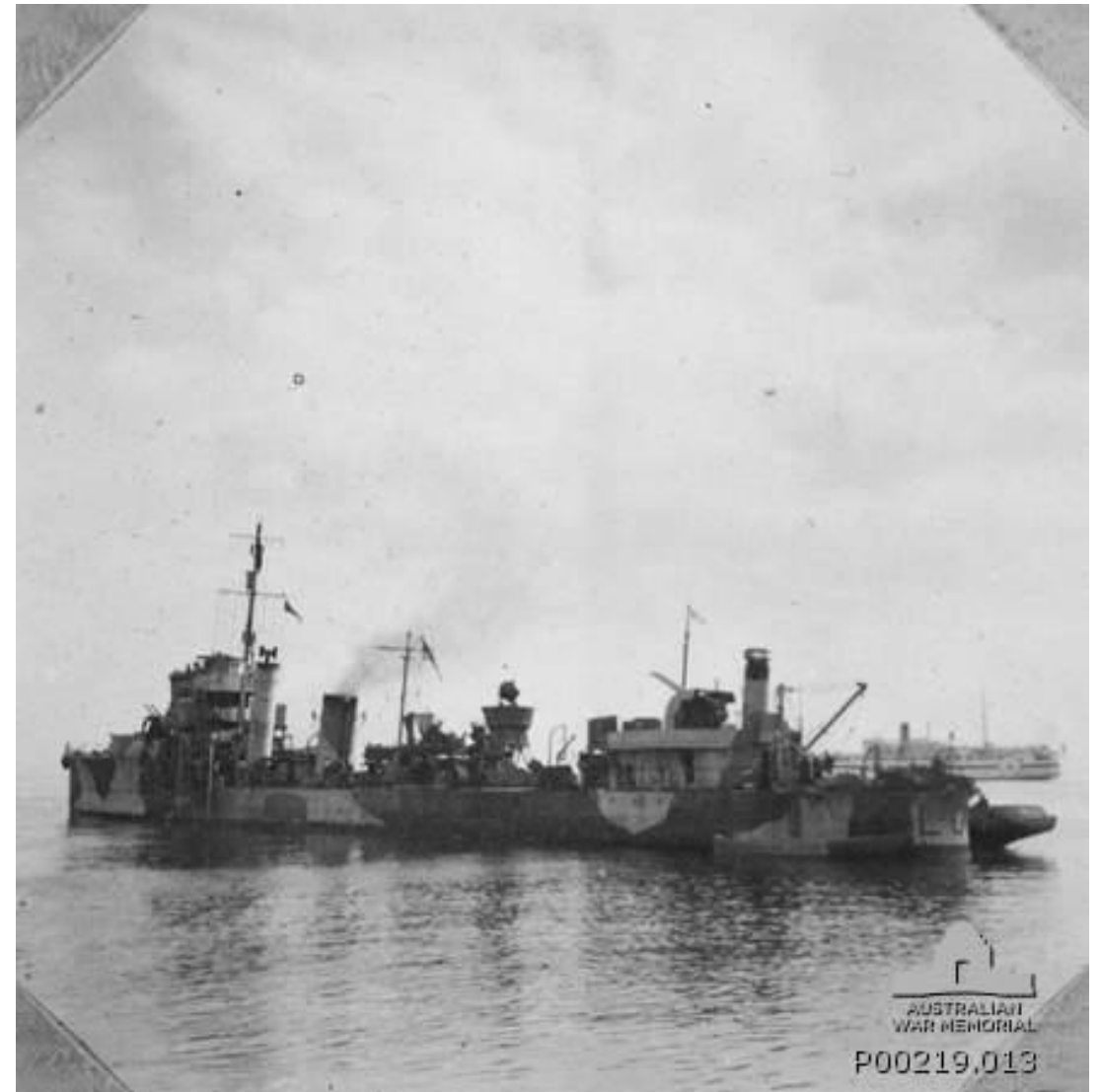
- On the 23rd the 19th Brigade withdrew to its new position at Brallos. A rearguard was formed by two companies of the 2/1st Battalion on top of the pass overlooking the Lamia plain.
- In the Thermopylae sector the British medium guns, under intermittent attack by dive bombers, engaged German artillery east of Lamia. In the evening a German advance towards the Sperkhios bridge was stopped by the forward detachments of the 22nd and 23rd Battalions, which withdrew during the night. Thinning out had continued during the day.
- The Luftwaffe struck again and destroyed thirteen Hurricanes on the ground at Argos. D'Albiac ordered the remainder to Crete.
- At Athens the officers of the British Base in Athens paid all outstanding accounts, handed the supply depot over to the Greeks and the canteen stores to the American Red Cross. The Pioneer Corps companies (mostly Palestinians, Arabs and Cypriots under middle-aged British officers) were taken by train to Argos and Navplion. A party of New Zealand nurses and 400 walking wounded were sent to Argos, and other wounded to Megara.



# 23 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- A further convoy, "ANF.29", Delane, Pennland and Thurland Castle escorted by Coventry, Wryneck (photo), Diamond and Griffin, sailed on the 23rd.

Royal Navy destroyer HMS Wryneck,  
with a tug in background,  
Mediterranean Sea, probably Sollum,  
Egypt



# 23 April 1941 - Greece

- Wilson's order for withdrawal from Greece was issued on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- The embarkation areas were Rafina ("C" Beach), Porto Rafti ("D" Beach), Megara ("P" Beach), Theodora ("J" Beach), Navplion ("S" and "T" Beaches).
- The first groups were to leave on the 24th-25th, the last on the 26th-27th.
- As many guns as possible were to be brought out; those remaining were to be made useless by removing the breech-blocks, and all gun sights and such technical equipment as could be carried were to be brought away.
- No fires were to be lit.
- Officers and men must wear full equipment but not packs; they might carry hard rations in greatcoat pockets, but no other articles would be allowed aboard the lighters.



The embarkation beaches.

# 23/24 April 1941 - Greece

- On the night of the 23rd-24th the withdrawal of the 17th Brigade from its position on the left of the line and the movement of the combined 16th and 17th Brigades to Megara to await embarkation were achieved remarkably smoothly.
- Despite the fact that the forward battalions were deployed over a six mile front and had to scramble out of extremely rough country, the time-table was adhered to.
- At daybreak Colonel Prior of Mackay's staff halted the column at Eleusis, where there was good cover and, all that day (the 24th), the men of "Allen Group" lay concealed and resting in olive groves on each side of the Athens road.
- Mackay had ordered that dimmed lights should be used in the withdrawal.
- The diarist of the provost company of the 6th Division wrote:
  - Orders were that Div troops would pass starting point at the junction of the Atalandi-Athens roads 15 minutes after N.Z. troops had passed through about 0000 hrs, and 16 Bde about 0300 hours. The N.Z. troops and vehicles coming through had no lights and march discipline was poor, consequently there was considerable delay . . . and the end of the column did not pass until 0130 hrs . . . much congestion at Levadia due to Greek troops trying to cut in. From then on only trouble occasioned by odd groups of vehicles. Traffic control excellent and an average speed of 20 M.I.H. (miles in the hour) was maintained until camping area was reached near Eleusis. Distance covered [by 6 Div troops] was 72 miles and all troops reached their destination by 0700 hours . . . . A very remarkable performance considering the heavy traffic on the road, entirely due to good traffic control.

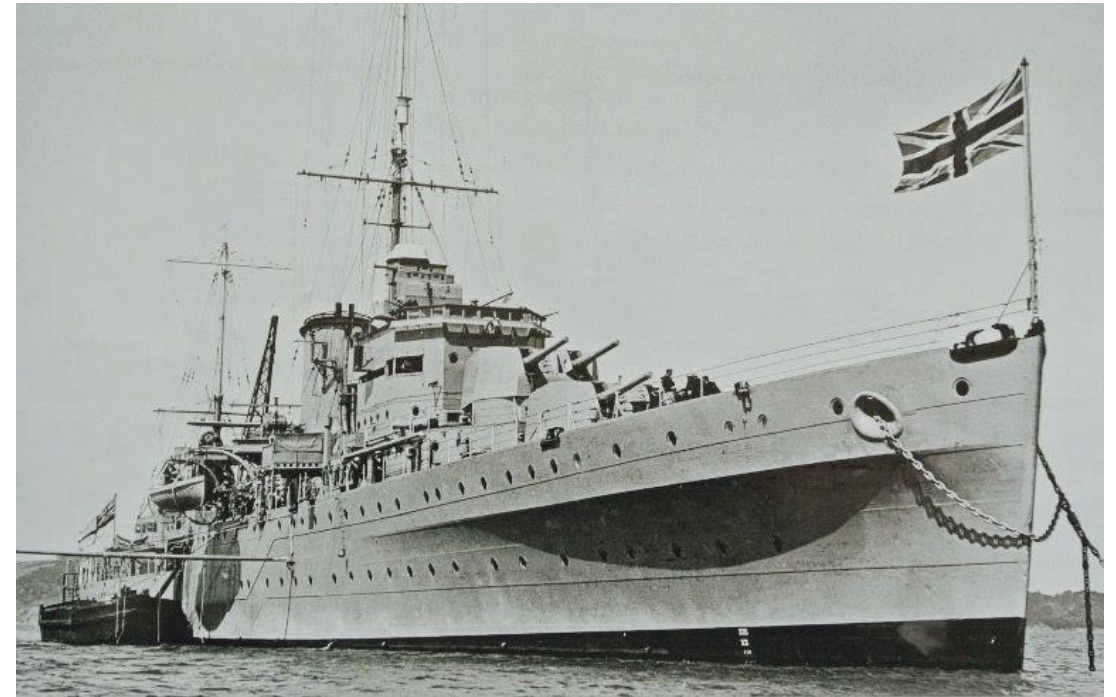
# 24 April 1941 - Libya

- On 24th April at the end of the morning stand-to, as soon as it was light, the fiercest artillery barrage the defenders had yet known rained down upon the forward posts in the western sector between Ras el Medauuar and the Derna Road.
- About 7 a.m. large bodies of infantry were observed about 1,000 yards from the wire advancing in close formation. The British field gunners and machine-gunners and—as the attackers closed in—the Australian infantry in the perimeter posts, firing their light automatics, made the most of the opportunity presented. The enemy made two main thrusts.
- One, on the right, came in upon Captain Spier's company of the 2/23rd Battalion. About 600 men were involved. When the first British artillery concentrations fell, the enemy fanned out, went to ground and began moving forward in waves and bounds. The artillery replied with sweep and search fire. Some enemy doubled forward to escape it, worked around the left flank where there was some cover and made for home. The rest were pinned to the ground. Fire from the forward posts quickly checked each attempt at forward movement. The 2/23rd mortar platoon came into action to engage enemy pockets; those that remained began to withdraw in small groups. Spier sent out two patrols, and each returned with a few prisoners. The last glimpse of the enemy was of a group of stragglers observed retreating hurriedly over the sky-line at 9.45 a.m.
- The thrust on the left, which came in over the northern shoulder of Ras el Medauuar, was made across more exposed ground. Under cover of darkness and a dawn artillery bombardment about a battalion of enemy infantry appeared before the wire opposite Posts S1 and S3, which were occupied by a platoon under Lieutenant Kimber. About a company established itself in the perimeter wire between the two posts. Kimber's posts were brought under fire but returned it with all weapons while from behind the artillery joined in the deadly work. After about 20 minutes there was a fluttering of white flags. Kimber lost no time in sending out one of his sections. They brought in 107 prisoners, including two officers and several Germans. The Italians left some 40 dead on the battlefield.
- 30 or 40 Germans made a further thrust about midday to the south of Ras el Medauuar between Posts R3 and R5, against Major Loughrey's company. Fire from the posts forced them to ground about 300 yards from the wire. A patrol was sent out and in a brief running fight as the enemy withdrew several Germans were killed, and seven, including an officer, were captured.
- These operations provided useful information to British Intelligence of enemy build-up in the Tobruk area.



# 24 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- The following day (24th) two more convoys were sailed, "AG.14" of Costa Rica, City of London, Dilwara, Salween, Slamet and Khedive Ismail, escorted by Carlisle, Kandahar and Kingston; and "AG.15" which included Ionia, Corinthia, Itria, and Comliebank, escorted by Kimberley, Vampire and Auckland.
- At 7.15 on the 24th April , Pridham-Wippell in Orion, with Decoy, Hasty, Havock and Defender, sailed from Alexandria.



HMS Orion

## 24th April 1941 - Greece

- On 24th April the capitulation of the Greek Army had been confirmed.
- General Papagos resigned.
- One of the last orders to the Greek troops had been to keep off the roads of southern Greece to facilitate the movement of the British force.
- That day King George and some of his Ministers left Athens in a flying-boat for Crete to re-establish the government there.



King George II of Greece

# 24th April 1941 - Greece

- Anzac Corps ceased to function at midnight on the 23rd-24th. At that time Blamey reported to Wilson in Athens and was ordered to embark next morning in a flying-boat for Alexandria. He chose his son Tom to fill the one remaining seat on the aircraft carrying him out of Greece.
- Control of the embarkation passed to Wilson's headquarters.
- Mackay and Freyberg received an order from that headquarters that they and their staffs were to embark that night.
- The officers and men of Mackay's headquarters set off for their appointed place of embarkation, late that afternoon. Mackay was flown to Crete early next morning. The remainder sailed in a cruiser during the night.
- When the order reached Freyberg his forward troops were in the midst of a hard fight against German tanks at the Thermopylae Pass. Freyberg cabled back to G.H.Q., Athens, and told them "I was being attacked by tanks, fighting a battle on a two-brigade front, and asked who was to command the New Zealand troops if I left. I was given the answer of "Movement Control". I naturally went on with the battle. After that I never received an order as to my disposal." Australia's War 14 April 41 ©Jerry McBrien Wk 10



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

# 24th April 1941 - Greece

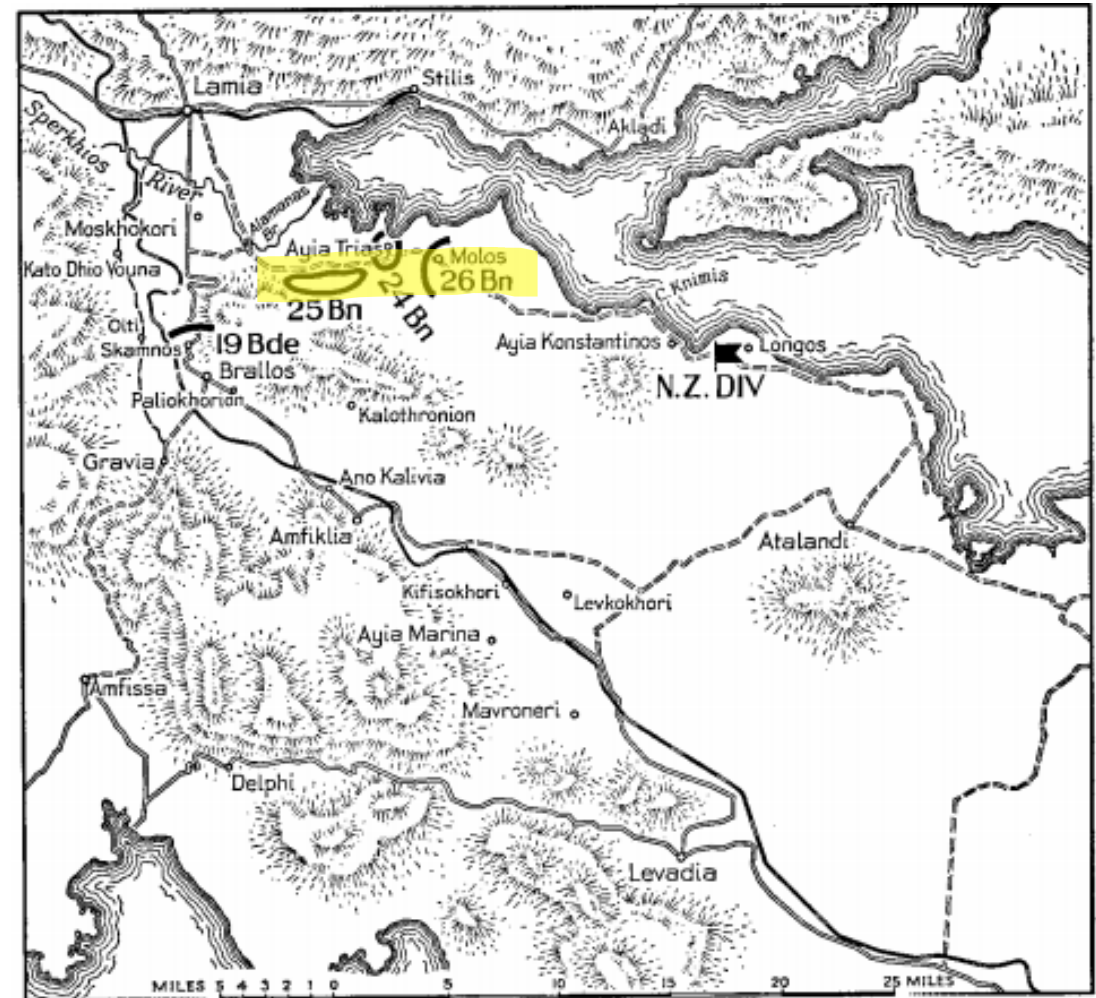
On the 24th the plan of embarkation was revised with the object of moving farther south, reducing the numbers to be lifted from Theodora, Argos and Navplion, and making more use of destroyers and of the comparatively distant beach at Kalamata.

<b>April</b>	<b>Athens Beaches</b>	<b>Megara</b>	<b>Navplion</b>	<b>Tolos</b>	<b>Kalamata</b>
<b>24th-25th</b>	<b>5 Bde</b>	—	<b>Corps R.A.F. etc.</b>	—	—
<b>25th-26th</b>	<b>19 Bde part 1 Armd Bde</b>	—	—	—	—
<b>26th-27th</b>	<b>6 Bde part 1 Armd Bde</b>	<b>4 Bde</b>	<b>Base details 3 R Tanks 4 Hussars</b>	<b>Base details</b>	<b>16 Bde 17 Bde 4,000 base</b>



# 24th April 1941 - Greece

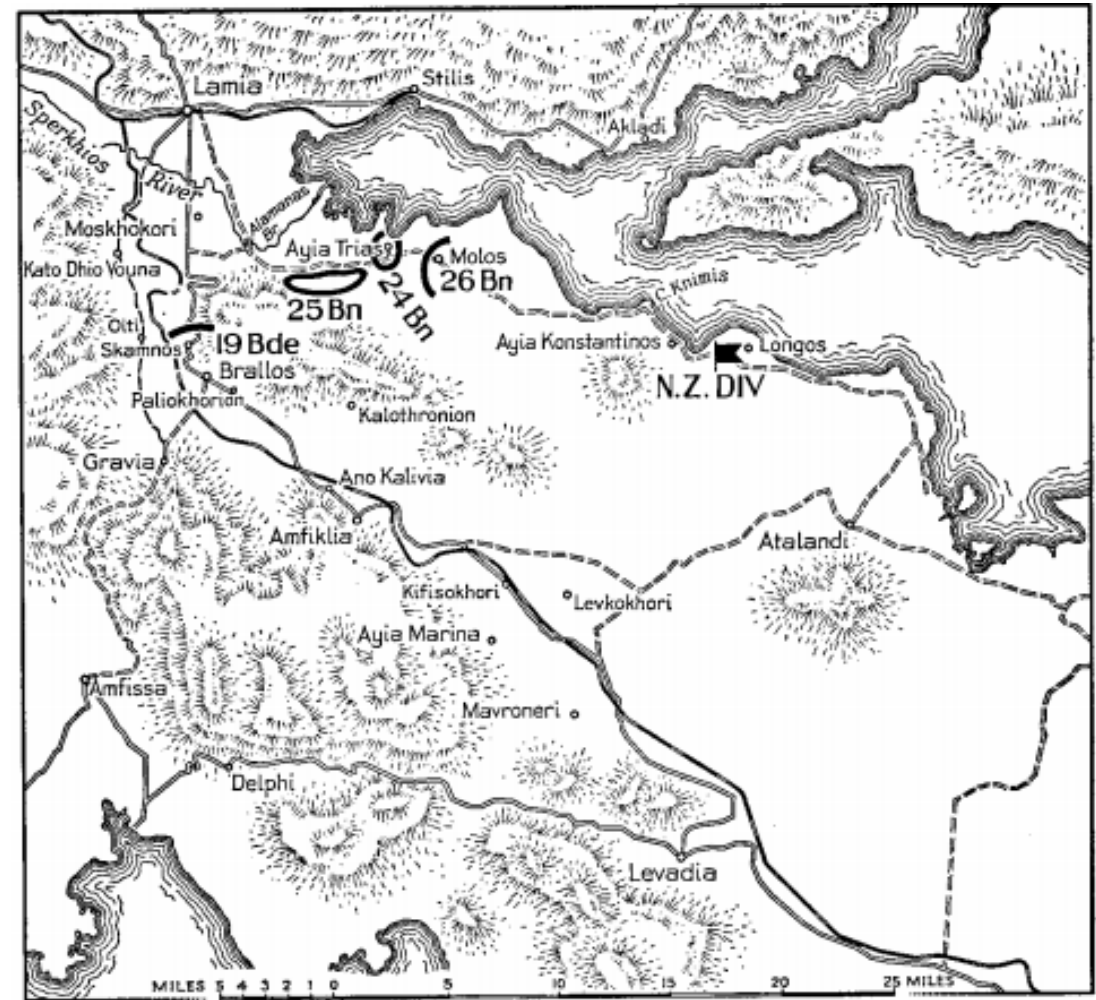
- In the **Molos bottleneck** the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Battalions were supported by a medium regiment, four field regiments (three New Zealand, one Royal Horse Artillery), two anti-tank regiments and a light anti-aircraft battery.
- The fight began in earnest about 2 p.m. on the 24th, when two German tanks moving across the swamp land in front of the 25th were knocked out at long range by field guns.
- Motor-cyclists and cyclists, followed by four tanks, then drove along the road. The infantry moved into the hills south of the road when the 25th Battalion fired on them; soon the left of that battalion was under heavy fire from the hills west and south-west and was gradually pushed back.
- About 3 p.m. a group of tanks pushed along the road followed by lorry-loads of infantry and more tanks. Heavy and accurate artillery fire was brought down, but within an hour tanks were getting close to the 25th.



Morning, 24th April.

# 24th April 1941 - Greece

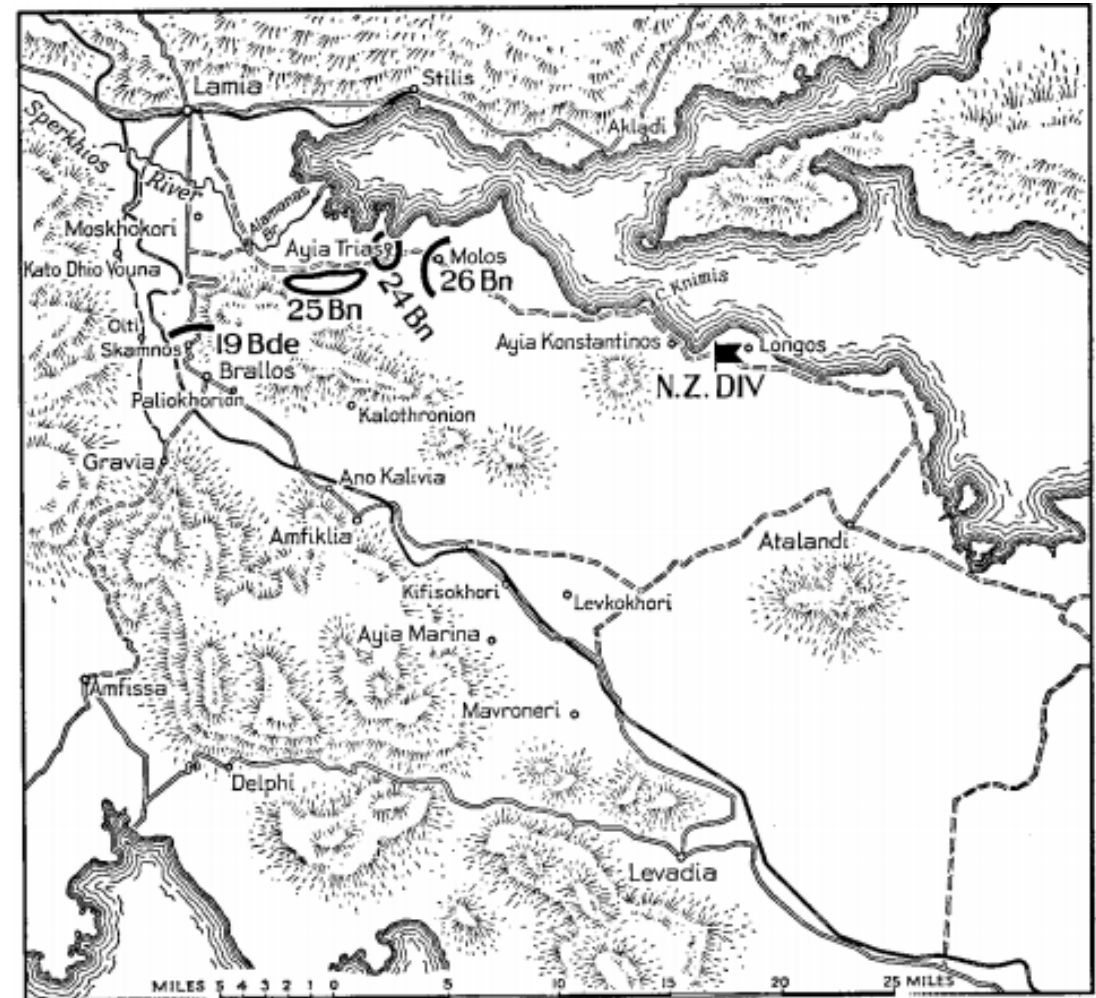
- One thrust at 4 p.m. was pushed back, but another heavier one followed and tanks advanced into the infantry positions.
- Numbers of these were hit by field gunners of the 5th Field Regiment, the foremost troop of which was largely in front of the infantry.
- One gun under Lieutenant Parkes hit tank after tank at ranges from 400 to 600 yards. With burning hulls in front of them and behind them, some of the surviving tanks could not move but were shielded by the derelicts and screened by smoke and turned their fire onto the 25th Battalion, which suffered heavily.
- At this stage Brigadier Miles, commanding the artillery, ordered defensive fire by three regiments on the road by Thermopylae and this defeated all further attempts to bring tanks forward.
- Towards the end of the day, however, penetration to the rear of the 25th became threatening. It was countered by sending two carrier platoons into the hills and two companies, one from the 26th and the other from the 24th, to extend the 25th's flank.



Morning, 24th April.

# 24th April 1941 - Greece

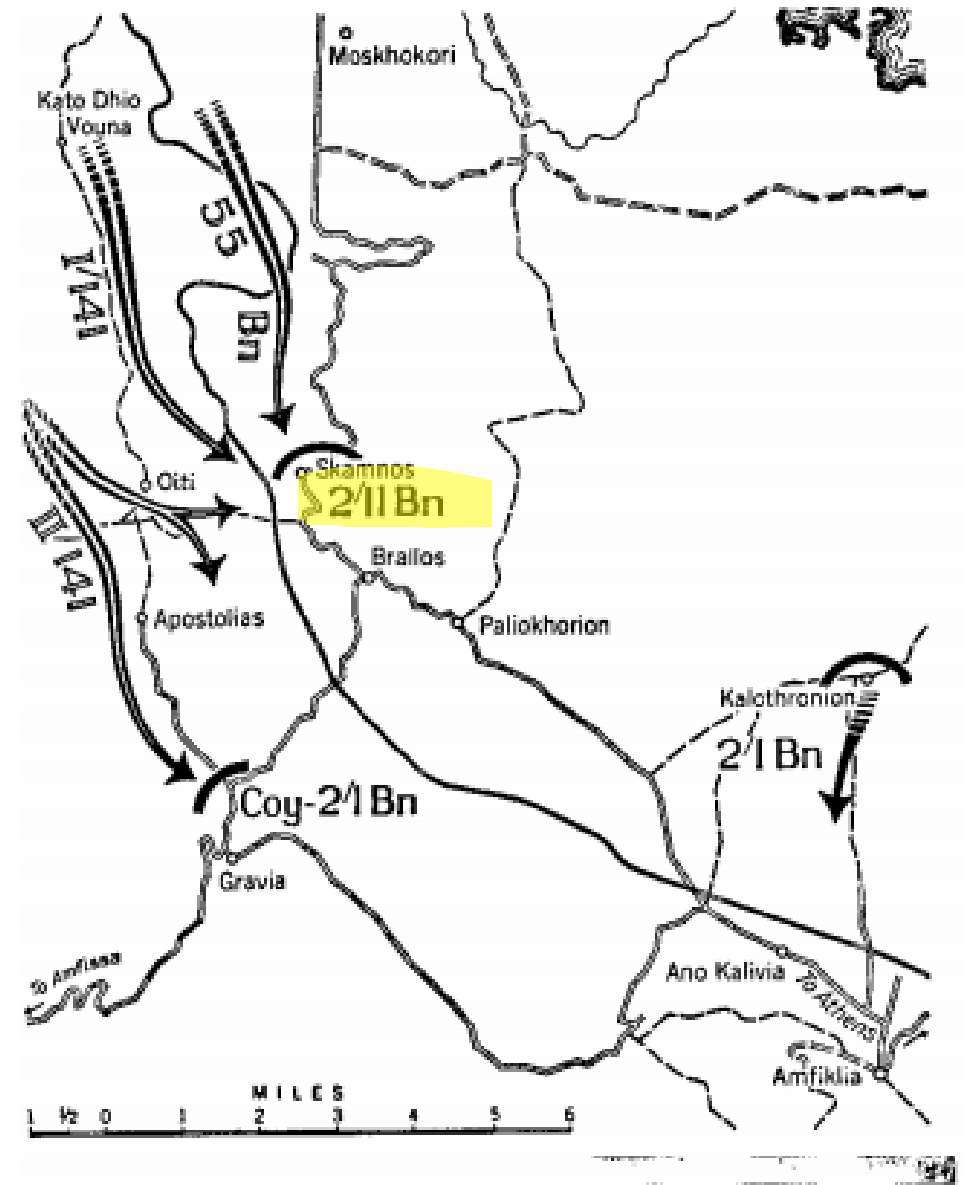
- In the afternoon Freyberg had received news that the trucks of the ammunition column which were to carry out some of the infantry could not be found. He immediately told Miles that as many of the infantry as possible were to be carried on the artillery vehicles, and the remainder would march.
- After dark the enemy infantry pressed forward with determination and the artillery duel continued.
- At 9.15 p.m. the news arrived that the ammunition vehicles were on the way, and soon afterwards the troops began to thin out and board them.
- The medium and field guns were destroyed, the last of them—guns of the 2nd Royal Horse Artillery—at 11.50.
- By midnight the last vehicles were clear of Molos and the long column was moving south through the rearguard at Cape Knimis and thence to Atlandi.



Morning, 24th April.

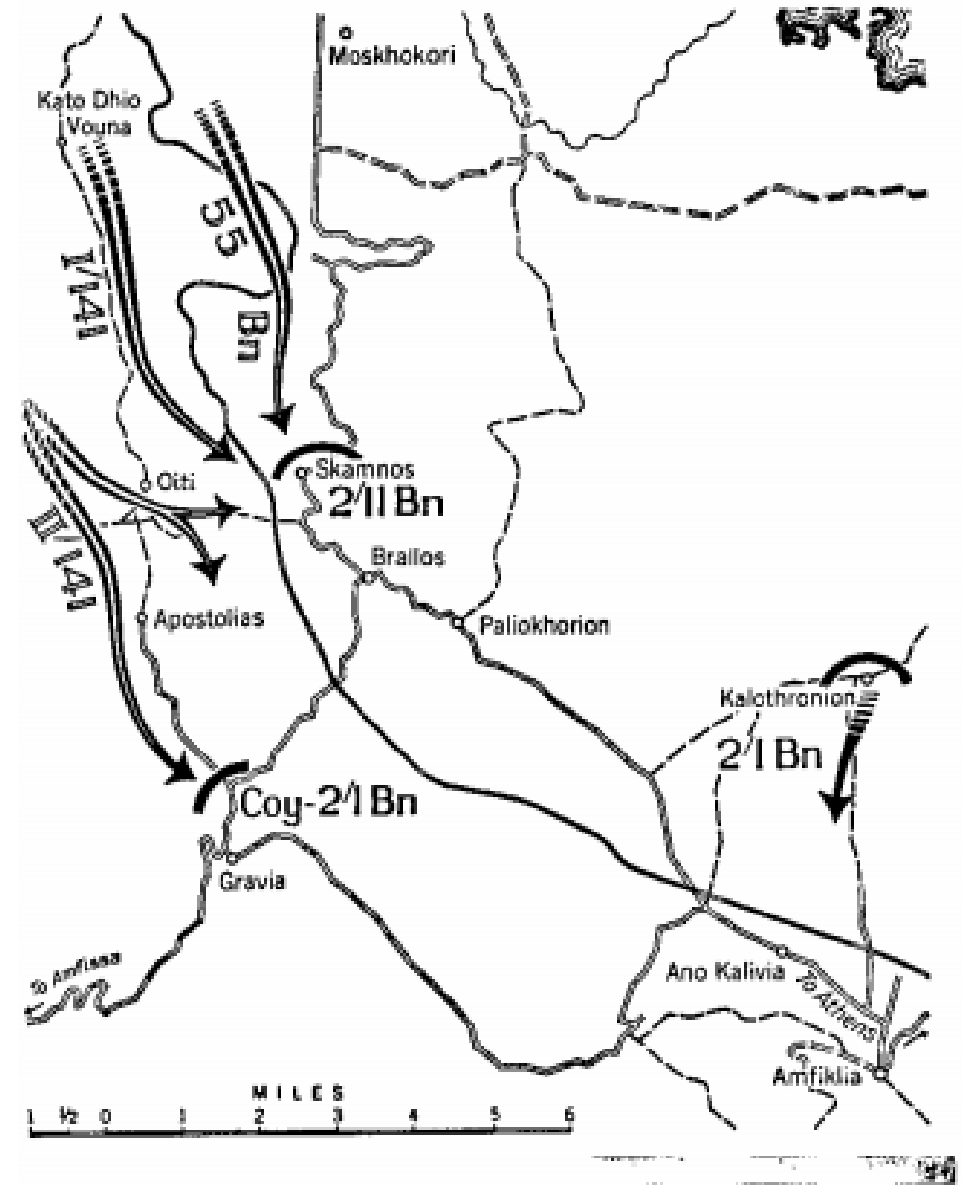
# 24th April 1941 - Greece

- Meanwhile on the left flank the 19th Brigade had also been attacked.
- At 11.30 machine-gunners attached to the 2/11th began firing on advanced enemy infantry on the near side of the railway line; there was intermittent fire throughout the day.
- At 4.50 the enemy began showering mortar bombs on the left company of the battalion, killing or wounding the commander (Wood), all the section leaders and eight others in one platoon, and disabling one of the supporting Vickers guns.
- At 5.40 after exchanges of fire in which Germans were shot on the edge of the scrub at 30 yards' range, the forward companies were withdrawn.
- Sandover brought his reserve company forward to a hill to the south of the vacated ground which it and the attached machine-gunners covered with fire.
- On the western flank German infantry had appeared to the west of Gravia about 6 p.m., and there Captain Embrey's detached company of the 2/1st exchanged fire with them until dusk.



# 24th April 1941 - Greece

- About 6 o'clock Vasey, fearing a break-through on the 2/11th's front, decided to accelerate the withdrawal by ordering the 2/1st, 2/4th and the attached troops to embus at 8 p.m., not 8.30 as planned; and told Sandover that he need hold his positions till 9 p.m. only, not 9.30 p.m.
- The 2/11<sup>th</sup> were firmly in position but in danger of attack on either flank. However, the German infantry seemed to tire, and whereas at 8 o'clock they were still thrusting hard, half an hour later there was no real pressure on the West Australian posts.
- Sandover ordered the two forward companies to begin withdrawing at 8.50 and abandon their positions at 9, falling back through the companies deployed astride the road to the rear.
- The 2/2nd Field Regiment had been ordered to destroy its guns at Brallos, but later in the afternoon Cremor was ordered to preserve them and move them south, each with thirty rounds of ammunition. At that stage there were not thirty rounds a gun remaining, and they were still in action. So that some shells would be left, firing was reduced to one round from each gun every five minutes—enough merely to remind the enemy that they were still there. At 8.30 p.m. the guns were withdrawn.





# 24th April 1941 - Greece

- On the 24th the large yacht Hellas arrived at Piraeus. Her captain said that she could carry 1,000 passengers; she took on board some 500 British civilians, mostly Maltese and Cypriots, and about 400 wounded and sick men from the 2/5th Australian and 26th British General Hospitals.
- Crammed alongside them were 75 New Zealanders of 4 Reserve Mechanical Transport (RMT) Company's Workshops Section and a similar number from 28 (Maori) Battalion.
- At 7 p.m. German aircraft attacked, hit her with two bombs and set her on fire. The only gangway was destroyed and passengers and wounded men were trapped in burning cabins. Eventually the ship rolled over.
- Estimates of the number who died range from 500 to 742. Among them was Colonel Kay, commander of the 2/5th Hospital, who was organising the embarkation of patients.



The Ira M (later known as the Hellas) in an Italian port, c. 1930s.

# 24 April 1941 - Greece

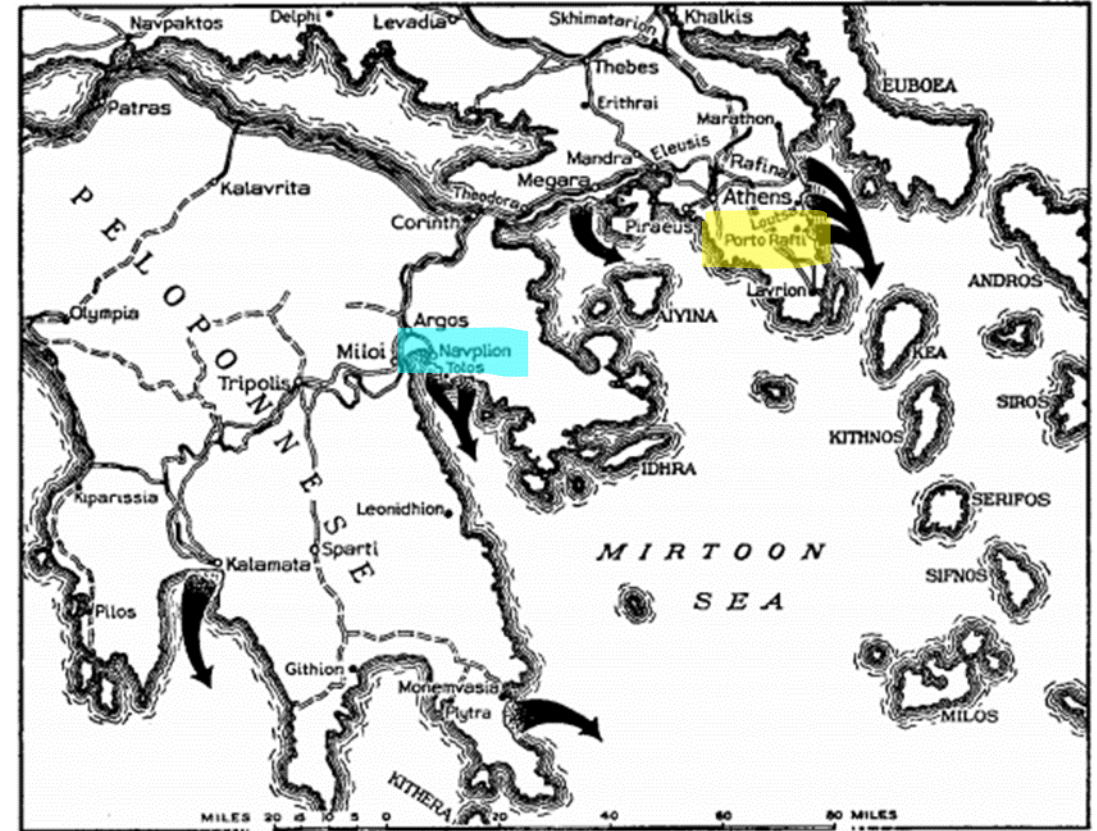
- To minimise ship losses to air attack "W" Group radically changed the evacuation plan to embark more men at beaches farther south. Inevitably this necessitated prolonging the period of embarkation.
- The new orders now required the 4th Brigade to hold at Erithrai 24 hours longer and move to the south bank of the Corinth Canal on the 26th-27th; and the 6th Brigade to move from the Athens area to Tripolis in the Peloponnese, to block the roads leading north-west and south-west.
- In eastern Attica Brigadier Charrington was ordered to establish a rearguard to hold the high ground north of Tatoi, thus guarding the Athens beaches from the north, until dusk on the 26<sup>th</sup> then withdraw to Rafina for embarkation on the 26th-27th.
- That night 26/7<sup>th</sup>) 8,000 troops of many units were to embark at Kalamata and a similar number at the Argos beaches.
- The New Zealand troops after the night of the 26th-27th (when the 4th Brigade and Isthmus Force would be on the south bank of the Corinth Canal and the 6th Brigade round Tripolis) were to withdraw "with all possible speed on any or all of": Monemvasia, Plytra, Githion and Kalamata and embark from them on the 28th-29th and 29th-30th "in approximately equal proportions".
- Those left over at the Argos beaches on the 26th-27th were to "proceed as quickly as possible" to Monemvasia, Plytra or Kalamata.
- On the 25th-26th the 19th Brigade Group would be embarked from Megara and not the Athens beaches.



The embarkation beaches.

# 24/5 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- Convoy "AG.13" reached Suda Bay at 1 a.m. on the 24th. Phoebe, detached some hours earlier, joined Perth, patrolling in the Kithera Channel.
- At 10.20 a.m. on the 24th the convoy, its escort strengthened by Hyacinth and Salvia, left Suda Bay for the first embarkations, at **Porto Rafti** and **Navplion**. At 5 p.m. Calcutta, Glengyle, and Salvia parted company for Rafti, while Glenearn and Ulster Prince with Stuart, Voyager and Hyacinth went to Navplion. Perth and Phoebe were ordered to assist the embarkations at Rafti and Navplion respectively.
- Perth reached Porto Rafti at midnight on the 24th.



The embarkation beaches.

# 24/5 April 1941 - Greece

- On the night of 24th-25th April at **Porto Rafti** the embarkation of the 5th New Zealand Brigade Group and other units totalling about 5,750 was achieved without a hitch.
- The troops lay under cover until after dark, when they were marched to the beach and ferried to Glengyle and the cruiser Calcutta in two landing craft.
- The ships took them aboard at 1,500 an hour until, about 2 a.m., there were some 5,000 in the transport and 700 in the cruiser and they sailed.





# 24/5 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- Shortly after parting company, as Phoebe was joining from the south, the Navplion ships were attacked by two German dive bombers. The first missed Glenearn with four bombs close astern. The second, though hotly engaged by Stuart and Voyager, scored a direct hit on Glenearn's forecastle, wrecked the cable gear and anchors, started a fire, and forced the ship to stop while the fire was subdued.
- Ulster Prince, with Voyager and Hyacinth, were sent on ahead and reached Navplion at 9.15 p.m., feeling their way cautiously in the darkness. Hyacinth entered the harbour and embarked 113 troops alongside.
- Ulster Prince grounded at the harbour entrance, got off under her own power, but grounded again trying to go alongside. This time she remained hard and fast.
- Phoebe, Glenearn and Stuart arrived at 9.45 and lay off the harbour with Voyager, and embarkation proceeded by "A" lighter, caiques and boats, while in the harbour Hyacinth tried vainly, by towing, to refloat Ulster Prince, whose quota of troops was embarked in Phoebe.



The Greek Flower class corvette APOSTOLIS, formerly the Royal Navy HMS Hyacinth, underway, at sea shortly after her transfer to Greece in 1943.



# 24/5 April 1941 - Greece

- At 6.30 a.m. on the 24<sup>th</sup> Major O'Loughlin found the little town of Navplion crowded with men and vehicles. Having selected eight dispersal areas and placed officers and N.C.O's in charge of them he sent the officers into the town to find unit commanders and instruct them to lead their units out to one of the dispersal areas.
- By 10 a.m. the town had been emptied of organised bodies and their vehicles, and contained only small groups, stragglers and abandoned trucks.
- Between 7,000 and 8,000 men collected in the Navplion area during the 24th, though only 5,000 had been planned for.
- After dark in bands of fifty they marched through the streets, which had been bombed and machine-gunned during the day and were strewn with glass; and at 10.30 began to embark in barges and ships' boats.
- However, by 3 a.m., despite the loss of the Ulster Prince, 6,600 men (1,600 more than planned) had been embarked in the ship Glenearn, the cruiser Phoebe, the destroyers Stuart and Voyager, and the sloop Hyacinth.
- The troops included Australian Corps and 6th Division headquarters, the 4th Survey Regiment, 16th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, base troops, and about 150 Australian and New Zealand nursing sisters.



On a ship evacuating troops from Greece to Crete.

(Australian War Memorial)

# 24/5 April 1941 - Mediterranean

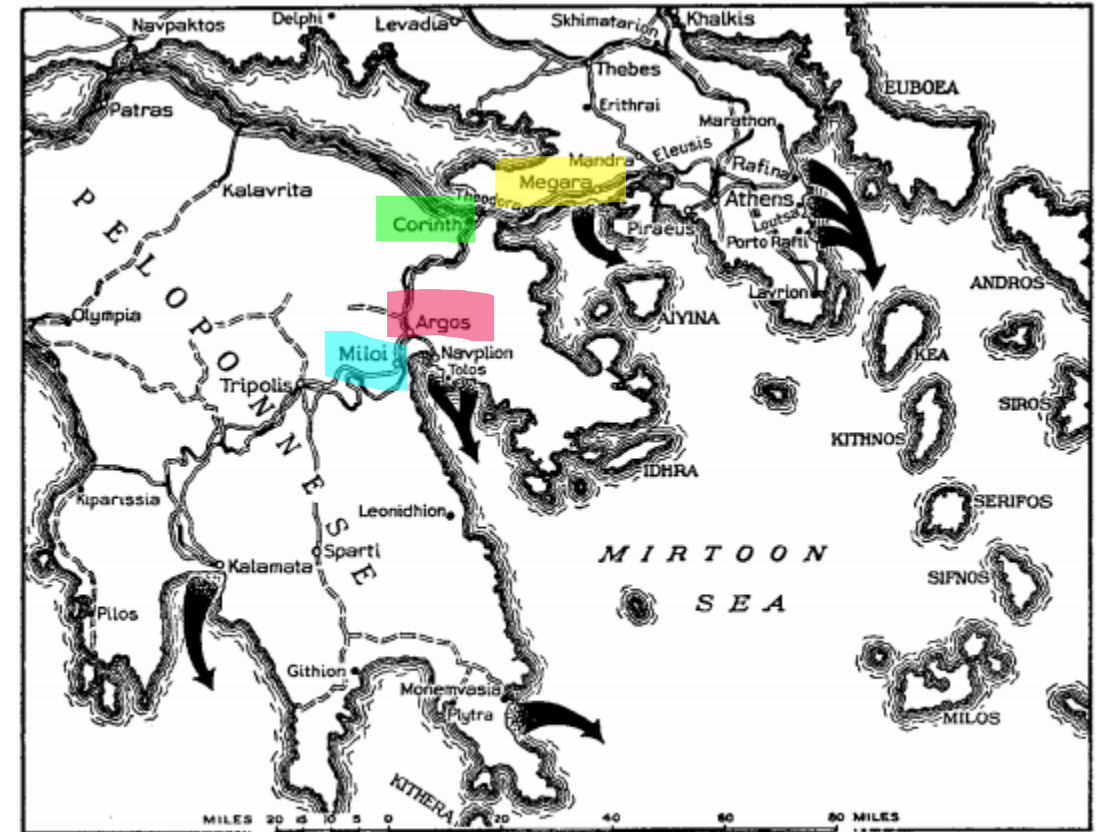
- Voyager embarked 301, of whom 160 were Australian, New Zealand and British nursing sisters, one of whom nearly lost her passage.
- The caique was surging in a choppy sea, and she missed her footing and fell between the two ships. Ordinary Seaman Webb, of Voyager, immediately jumped in and held her up until a line could be passed and both hauled to safety. His action, wrote Morrow, "probably saved the sister's life as she was weighed down with equipment and there was a grave danger of them both being crushed between the ships".
- Shortly before 4 a.m. embarkation was completed and the ships, except Ulster Prince, sailed. At 8 a.m. they joined forces with the Porto Rafti group, and course was shaped for Suda Bay.
- The ships, which carried a total of 12,435, were unsuccessfully attacked by dive bombers at midday on the 25<sup>th</sup> and reached Suda Bay during the afternoon.



HMAS Voyager off Suda Bay, Crete, 1941

# 24/5 April 1941 - Greece

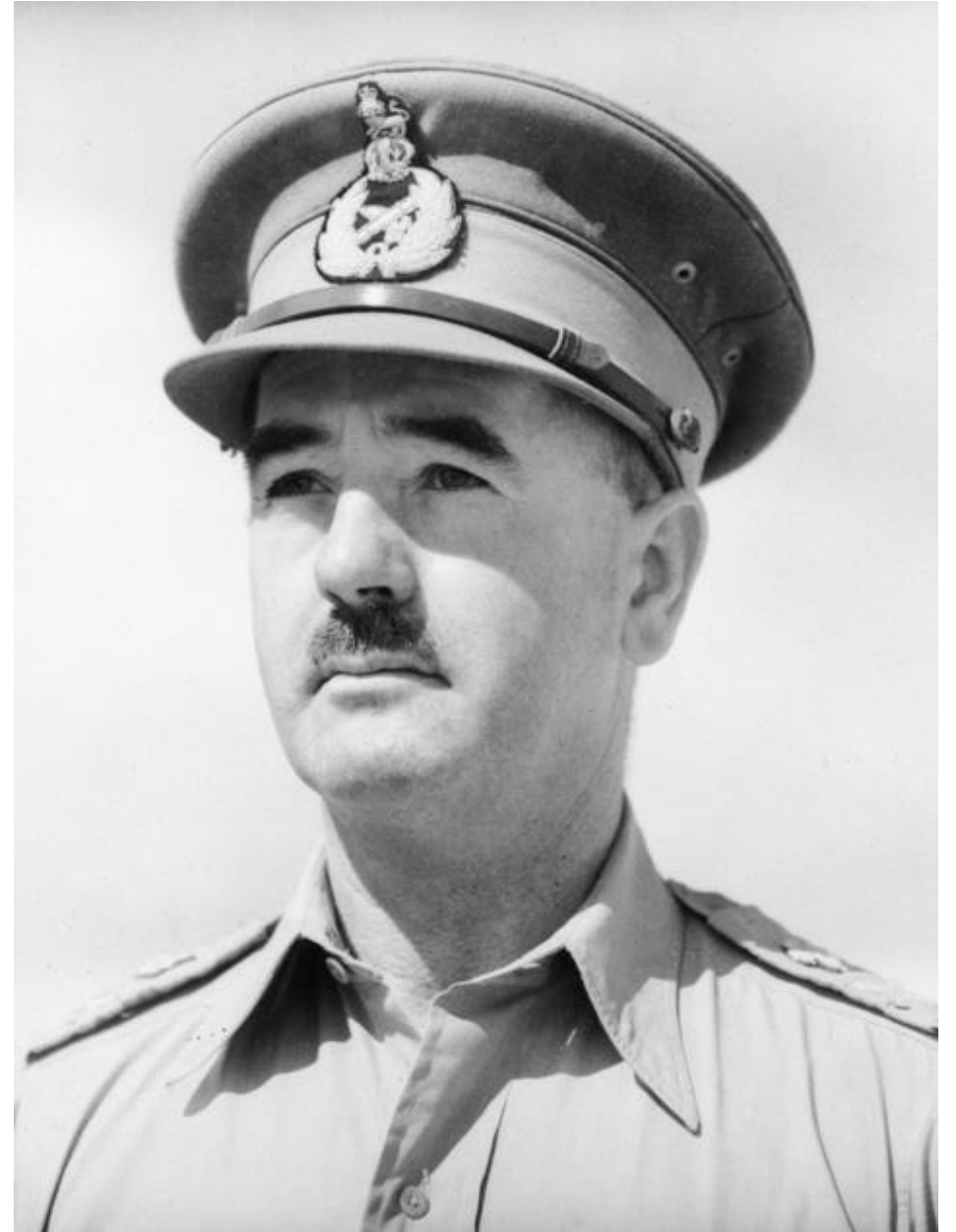
- During the night of the 24th-25th Allen Group (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Brigades and attached troops) moved out from Megara under orders to go to the Argos area for embarkation.
- As the column was passing over the Corinth bridge most of the 2/6<sup>th</sup> was detached to join other mixed units guarding the bridge and the Argos airfields against possible attack by German armour from the north or against paratroops.
- Allen Group arrived at Miloi from Eleusis early on 25th April and again dispersed for the day.



The embarkation beaches.

# 25 April 1941 - Libya

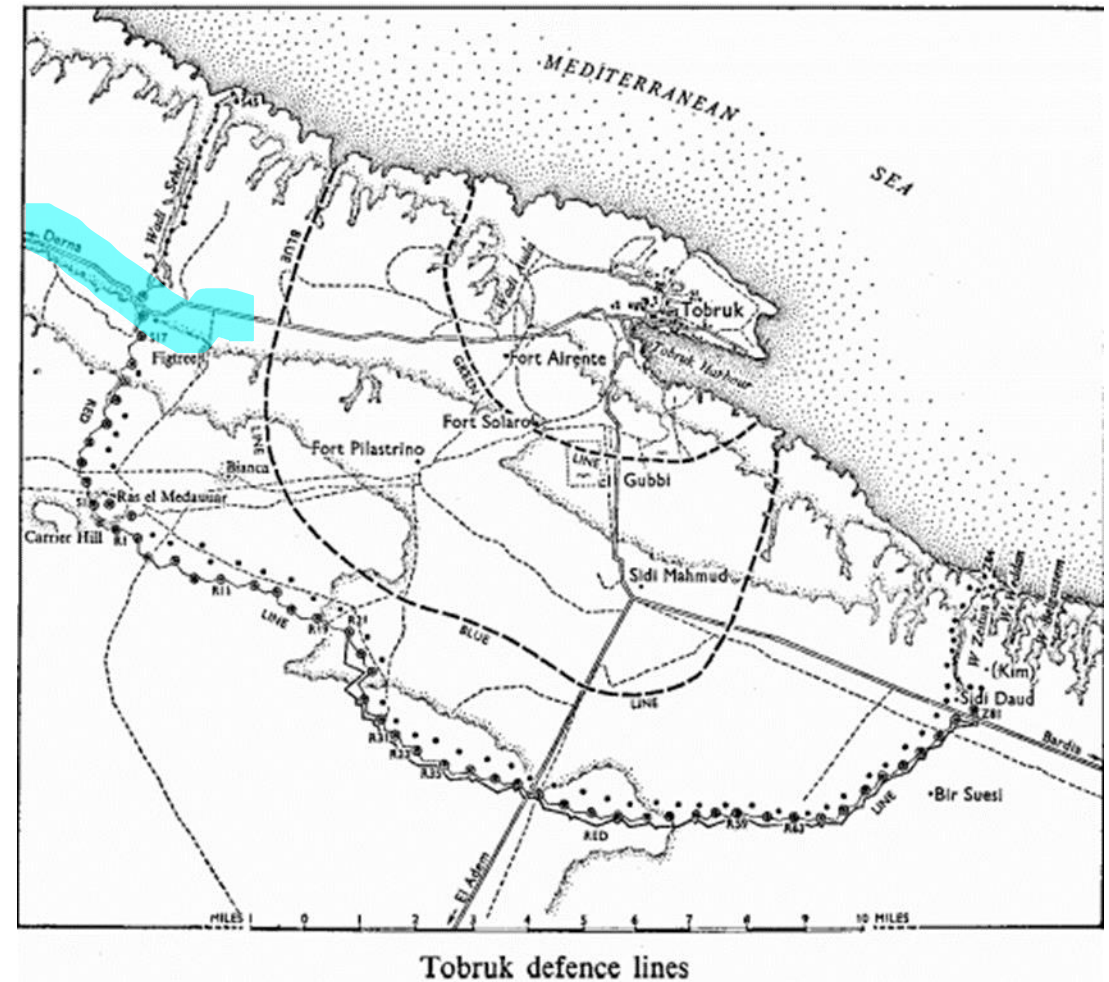
- In the week following the raids on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the garrison of Tobruk concerned itself with strengthening its defences against a renewed onslaught, which documents captured in the raid confirmed to be in course of preparation.
- Morshead was warned by HQ Middle East that another German armoured division might be expected to appear before Tobruk about 1st May.
- Two measures were immediately put in hand. Minefields outside the perimeter were lifted and re-laid in the wire in front of the posts and a system of inner minefields was planned to a design which would confine the forward and lateral movement of an armoured penetration in any sector, boxing the tanks in between the perimeter and the second line of defence (the Blue Line).
- Morshead (photo) directed that the work on this minefield and on the Blue Line defences behind it was to be completed in readiness to meet an enemy attack on the sector by the 27th.
- On the 25<sup>th</sup> the enemy made two obvious attempts to explode the minefield near the El Adem Road in front of the 2/13th Battalion, one by a bombing attack from the air, one by shelling from tanks; the Chestnut Troop of the 1st R.H.A. engaged the tanks with customary accuracy, forcing them to withdraw.
- A long instruction on defensive arrangements and defects was issued from Morshead's headquarters on the 25th. "It must be impressed on all," it stated, "that future attacks are certain to be carried out with extensive artillery preparation and air attack." On no account must there be any pause in the task of improving the defences.





# 25 April 1941 - Libya

- On 25th April the defenders scored another success in the struggle to dominate the western approaches to the perimeter. A series of daylight patrol actions by the 2/23rd Battalion dislodged the enemy from outposts near the Derna Road.
- About noon, taking advantage of the midday mirage, a reconnaissance patrol from "B" Company 2/23rd was sent out to locate the posts north of the road and find whether they were occupied. The patrol surprised a platoon of Germans digging defences. In a short encounter one German was killed and one Australian wounded.
- Two patrols from "A" Company went out along the two escarpments south of the main road. One captured an enemy officer and a sergeant; the other brought in 30 of the enemy, some ammunition and some medical equipment, and located about a dozen enemy vehicles loaded with ammunition in a wadi. That night Evans sent out patrols to the trucks. They destroyed eleven.





# 25th April 1941 - Greece

- By the early morning of the 25th the whole of "W" Group had moved through the rearguard at Erithrai and, again, miles of cratered roads separated it from the advancing German army.
- The convoys from Molos drove with full lights on, down the main road and through the main rearguard at Erithrai. By midday the column had travelled 100 miles and was passing through Athens.
- In Athens the long column of battered, muddy trucks, many bearing the scars of battle, had "a most pathetic, touching reception".
- No one who passed through the city with Barrowclough's brigade will ever forget it. Nor will we ever think of the Greek people without the war recollection of that morning—25th April, 1941. Trucks, portees and men showed plainly the marks of twelve hours battle and the 160 miles march through the night. We were nearly the last British troops they would see and the Germans might be on our heels; yet cheering, clapping crowds lined the streets and pressed about our cars, so as almost to hold us up. Girls and men leapt on the running boards to kiss or shake hands with the grimy, weary gunners. They threw flowers to us and ran beside us crying: "Come back—you must come back again—Good-bye—Good luck."
- "They appeared heart-broken," wrote Freyberg, "that our efforts to help them had brought disaster upon our force."

# 25/6 April 1941 - Greece

- Waterhen and Vendetta left Suda Bay for Megara at 2.30 p.m. on the 25th. The night was still, dark and clear. The Australian destroyers reached Megara at 10 p.m. and joined Thurland Castle, Coventry, and Wryneck of "ANF.29" at the centre of the beach, where embarkation was proceeding with an "A" lighter and other landing craft, seven caiques, and boats as ferrying craft.
- Here Vendetta embarked 100 troops in her whaler and skiff. With Decoy, Hasty, and Wryneck, the Australians were then ordered to close a pier at the eastern end of the beach, from which they embarked with their boats.
- At about 3.45 a.m. on the 26th the main embarkation force sailed. Boats' crews reported the beach cleared at 4 a.m., and Vendetta weighed and proceeded to join Waterhen, lying off awaiting her. Just then a large caïque appeared, and Vendetta embarked about 30 troops from her, and learned from her coxswain that some 250 wounded remained on the beach, stranded owing to the breakdown of the "A" lighter.
- Coventry was still in visual signalling distance, and Lieut - Commander Rhoades in Vendetta asked permission to remain and embark them. This was not granted, and at 4.15 both ships sailed to join the main body at the entrance to the Gulf of Athens.

# 25/6 April 1941 - Greece

- The only formation to be embarked on the 25th-26th was the 19th Brigade Group from Megara.
- About midday Wilson's staff decided that the brigade group plus the 1,100 wounded at Megara could not all be embarked there that night, and ordered Vasey to retain enough vehicles to carry the surplus men to the Marathon beaches.
- Most of the vehicles had already been destroyed in accordance with earlier orders but enough remained to carry 300. The 19th Brigade Group had slept under the olive trees during the day.
- That night, carrying personal weapons, they were ferried to the transport Thurland Castle, the cruiser Coventry, and the destroyers Havock, Hasty, Decoy, Waterhen and Vendetta. From one beach all the 19th Brigade Group were taken aboard, but at the neighbouring beach where there were 2,000 sick and wounded men and technical troops, only 1,500 had been embarked by 2.30 a.m. when the last lighter departed.
- The troops embarked here included the remaining eighty nurses—from the 2/5th Australian and the 26th British General Hospitals.
- 5,900 troops were taken off, and some of those who remained were taken in trucks to the Marathon beaches.



The embarkation beaches.

# 25/6 April 1941 - Greece

- Vendetta embarked 350 officers and men, mainly Australians; Waterhen a total of 70. Sixty of Vendetta's troops were wounded, mostly by shrapnel.
- "Their morale," wrote Rhoades, "was excellent, and it was stated by all that, had adequate air protection been available, the Germans would never have got through the passes."
- During its passage to Suda Bay the convoy suffered three heavy but fruitless dive-bombing attacks though several men were wounded by splinters.
- Suda Bay was reached without mishap at 6 p.m. on the 26th.



# 25/6 April 1941 - Greece

- In the afternoon Allen received orders to move that night through Tripolis to Kalamata.
- The column moved off at 8 p.m. For the third consecutive night this column of 600 vehicles containing 6,000 men had a journey of 90 miles by the map—further in fact—this time along winding mountain roads.

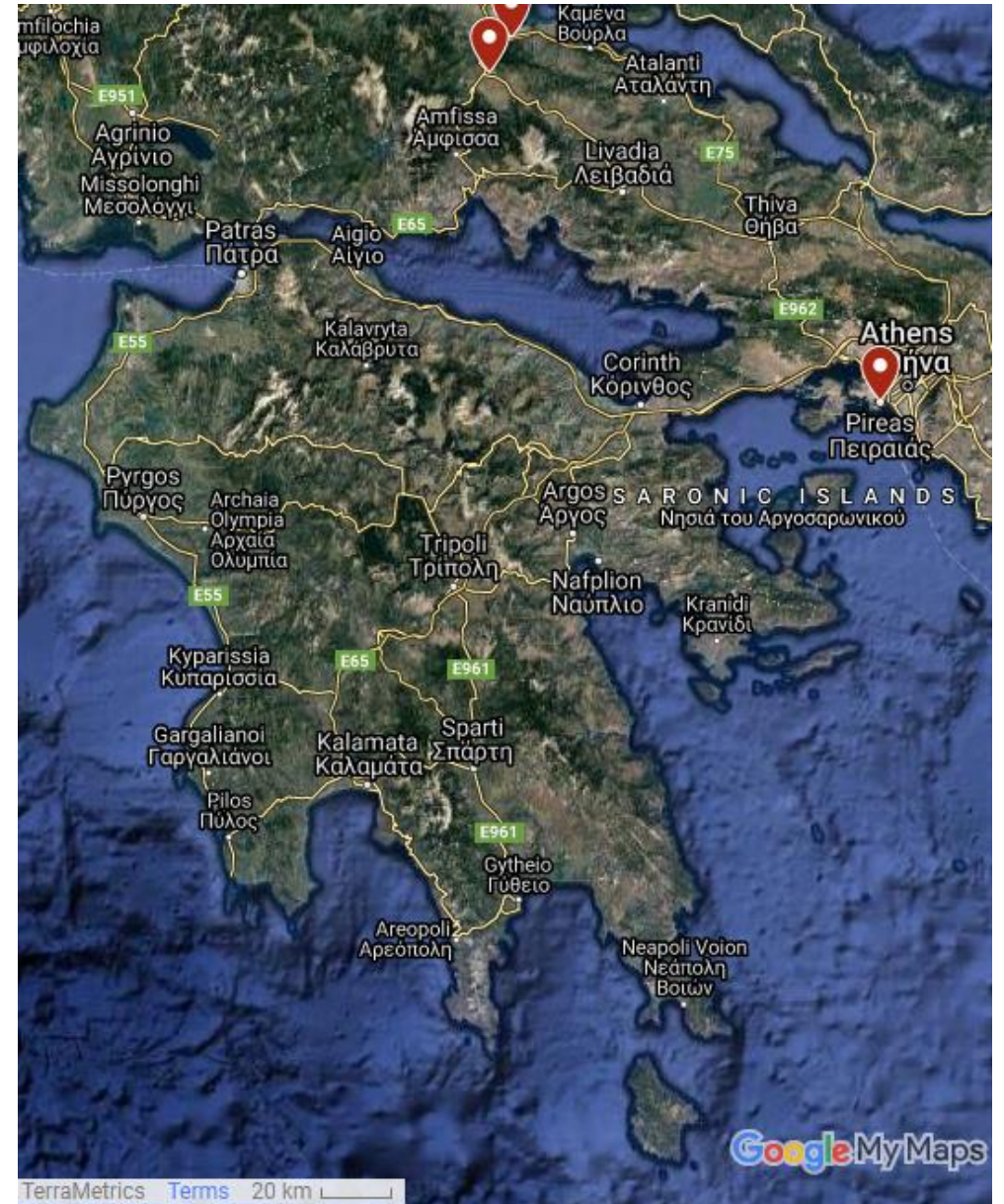


The embarkation beaches.



# 26 April 1941 - Greece

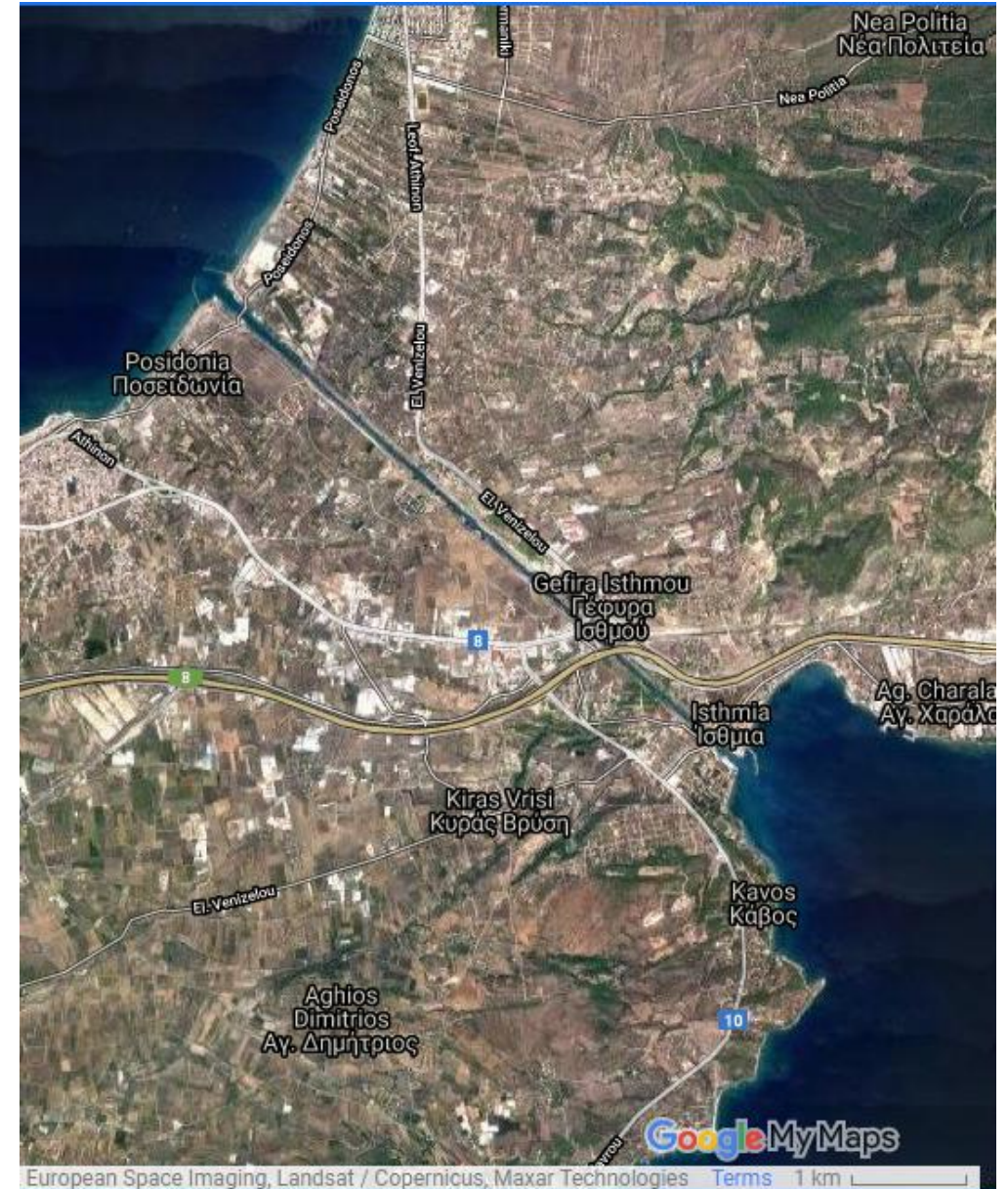
- A flat sandy isthmus only three miles wide at its narrowest point links the Peloponnese with the remainder of Greece; through that isthmus had been cut a canal 70 feet in width and 26 or more in depth capable of floating ships up to 5,000 tons. Across the canal ran a bridge carrying the road and railway which passed through Corinth, on the coast south-west of the canal.
- Fear of paratroops, known to be with Field Marshal List's army, had now led to the assembly in the Corinth area of a small patchwork force of all arms.
- On the north and south banks of the canal were a detachment of the 4th Hussars, a squadron of New Zealand divisional cavalry, the carriers of 22nd and 28th Battalions, Major Gordon's company of the 19th New Zealand Battalion, Captain Dean's company of the 2/6th Battalion, a section of 6th Field Company of the New Zealand Engineers, some British engineers, and a section of Bofors guns of the 122nd Battery.
- The New Zealand engineers had prepared the bridge for demolition and the ferries had been destroyed.





# 26 April 1941 - Greece

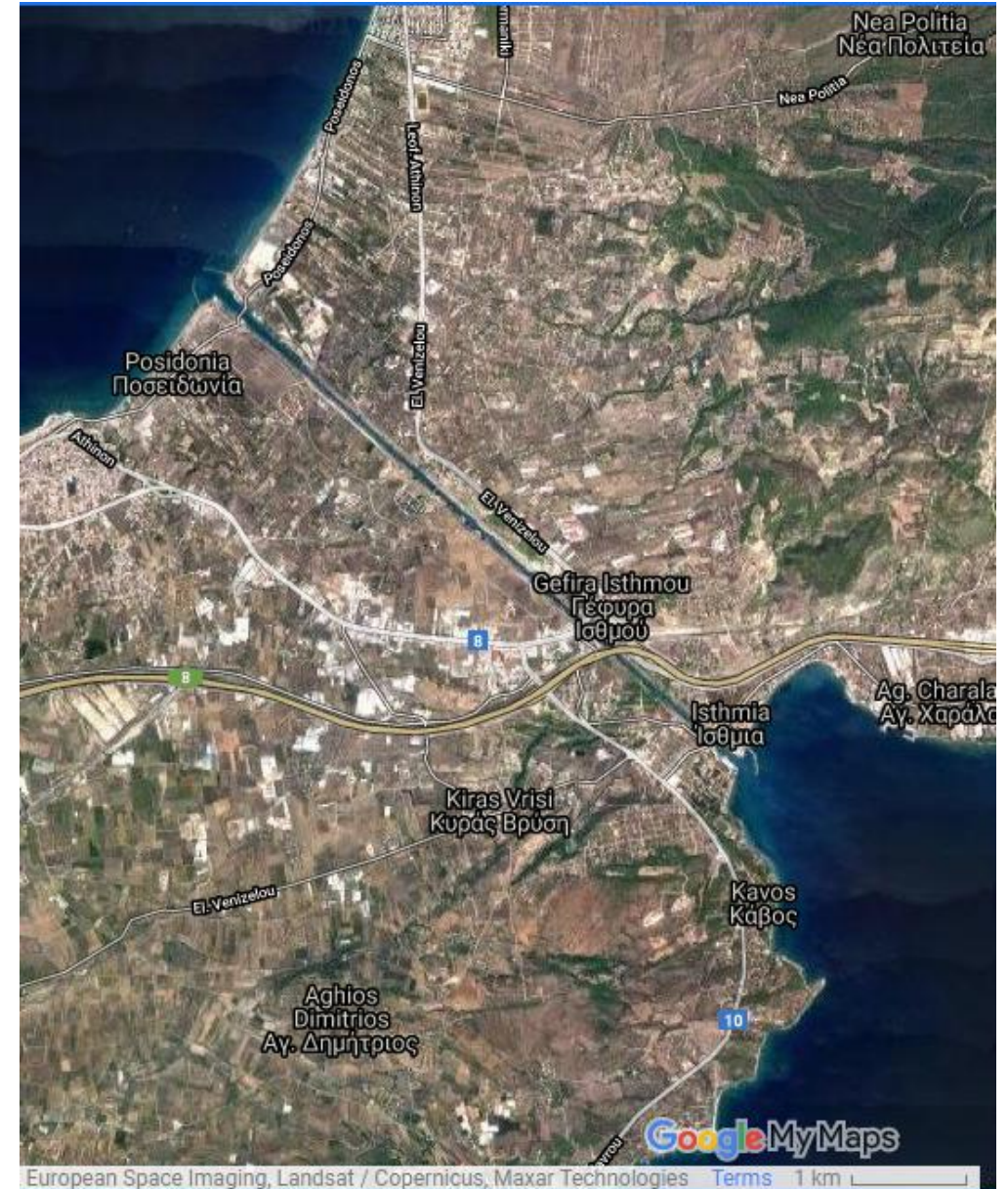
- In the area were three 3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns, eight 3-inch, and sixteen Bofors, the latter dispersed along the route from the canal to Argos 30 miles south.
- The area had been attacked from the air at intervals during the previous four or five days, and on the evening of the 25th aircraft had silenced some anti-aircraft guns.
- Early on 26 April the attack was resumed. About 6.30 a.m. a flight of bombers approached flying low and hit and destroyed a heavy anti-aircraft gun on the slopes south-east of the canal. About 7 a force of some 120 medium and dive bombers and fighters arrived and began a thunderous attack, the dive bombers leisurely circling to find their targets—chiefly guns and groups of vehicles—and then diving on them. Fighters systematically machine-gunned the area. At length the fire of the anti-aircraft guns was subdued.
- About 7.15 there appeared many large aircraft of a type new to the defenders. They flew in groups of three very slowly at about 300 or 400 feet. From the outer aircraft of each group dropped a descending line of men in parachutes, and from the inner machine canisters of stores. In half an hour a force variously estimated by the defenders from 800 to 1,500 men was dropped astride the canal and near Corinth.





# 26 April 1941 - Greece

- In a few minutes the German paratroops had occupied the bridge and were rounding up prisoners. Lieutenant Tyson, who had helped to prepare the bridge for demolition, and Captain Phillips, fired at the charges with rifles. One of their shots is believed to have detonated a charge, and the bridge was completely destroyed.
- The defenders opened fire on the paratroops and the strafing aircraft as soon as the drop began. The German aircraft had heavily machine-gunned the positions held by Dean's company of the 2/6<sup>th</sup> north of the canal. Two bombs dropped in one platoon area showered sand into the air so that it covered the weapons, and the automatics could not be made to fire again.
- The paratroops who landed round Dean's company vastly outnumbered them. The platoon which had been bombed was soon overcome and it was not long before the remaining platoons (Lieutenants Richards and Mann) were hard pressed.
- Two gliders each carrying twelve men landed in Richards' area, but he and his men killed or wounded all their occupants. However, this platoon was later overcome and the survivors captured.
- At 11.45, when no ammunition remained except a few rounds for a pistol, Company Headquarters capitulated. Ten men of the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been killed and thirteen wounded.



# 26 April 1941 - Greece

- No Germans landed in the area of Jones' company of 2/6th south of the canal but before long paratroops supported by machine-gun fire were advancing towards its position.
- Jones decided that there was nothing for it but to withdraw towards Argos while he could. The Australians fell back into the hills south-east of the isthmus.
- About 9 p.m. they were overtaken by two companies of the 26th Battalion which had been sent north to help to extricate Isthmus Force. This battalion lent vehicles to the Australians, who remained with this unit until embarkation.
- Meanwhile an officer of the New Zealand engineers had organised remnants of the Isthmus Force, including the New Zealand cavalry squadron, and they withdrew to Tripolis.



The embarkation beaches.

# 26 April 1941 - Greece

- When it became apparent that the enemy held the canal strongly, Barrowclough was ordered to defend the pass north of Argos that night to cover the embarkation from the Argos beaches;
- thereafter he was to defend the road about Tripolis until the 27th-28th and then withdraw to Monemvasia.
- He placed the 26th Battalion in the pass north of Argos, the 24th Battalion at Tripolis to defend that vital road junction, and the 25th in defence of the western approaches to Miloi.
- Lee's patchwork force at the Argos airfields was ordered to move south that night and prepare to defend the embarkation area at Monemvasia.
- Freyberg radioed orders to the 4th Brigade Group that it should embark from the Athens beaches on the 27th-28th.



The embarkation beaches.



# 26 April 1941 - Greece

- The 4th Brigade at Erithrai lay concealed, and in the early morning was not detected by scouting aircraft.
- At 11 a.m. a closely-spaced German column of about 100 vehicles led by tanks and motor-cars began to climb up the road from Thebes. When the tail of the column was in range, accurate fire by the Australian guns dispersed them.
- The German troops were seen to scatter and then reboard their trucks and drive back to Thebes leaving eight vehicles on the road.
- About midday came the expected attack by German aircraft, now that the rearguard had revealed its position. Soon after 1 o'clock German artillery began firing. An artillery duel continued all afternoon, tanks occasionally probing forward. A tank was directly hit late in the afternoon and infantry moving towards the left flank were dispersed by machine-gun fire at 3,000 yards. During the afternoon enemy vehicles were seen streaming east along the road towards Skhimatarion.
- News of the Corinth parachute landing had arrived at 2 p.m. and the orders to embark at Porto Rafti at 7.
- At 9 o'clock the brigade began to embus and soon was rolling along the road at 30 miles an hour, the engineers blowing a series of craters behind it.



The embarkation beaches.

# 26/7 April 1941 - Greece

- Three large-scale embarkations were to take place on the night of 26th-27th: from the Athens beaches, the Argos beaches, and Kalamata.
- The troops at the Athens beaches included Brigadier Miles' big artillery group at Porto Rafti, and the depleted 1st Armoured Brigade at Rafina.
- At Porto Rafti the single landing craft, which was the only means of loading, had first to go to Kea Island to bring in 450 men whom it had landed there on the 24th-25th. This delay was likely to prevent the program being carried out. So Brigadier Miles ordered the 102nd Anti-Tank Regiment and the 2nd RHA to Rafina.
- The gunners had brought to the beaches all the equipment that could be carried, even heavy No. 11 wireless sets. Miles ordered that all the equipment which the men were carrying and also the 2-pounder guns must be taken on board. However, when the time came this was found to be impossible.
- The Glengyle and Salween were loaded and some 2,720 were embarked in the cruiser Carlisle and destroyers Kingston and Kandahar, but when Glengyle sailed from Rafina at 2 a.m 1,173 were still on the beach.



The embarkation beaches.

# 26/7 April 1941 - Greece

- It had been intended to send the landing ship Glenearn to Navplion on the 26th-27th but she was bombed and disabled that evening, so Pridham-Wippell took his flagship, H.M.S. Orion and the HMAS Perth to Navplion (where another cruiser, four destroyers and two transports were assembled).
- He detached H.M.A.S. Stuart to Tolos. Stuart (Captain Waller) began embarking troops at Tolos beach at 11.15 p.m., the men wading to a landing craft which ferried them to the ship. Soon Stuart reported that she was full. She transferred her troops to Orion, asked for the help of a cruiser, and returned with Perth to Tolos.
- Again and again the landing craft was stranded temporarily on a sand bar about 30 yards from the shore. The naval beach-master had warned Colonel Courage, the area commander, against this bar but had failed to persuade him not to use this beach. At 4 a.m. about 2,000 had been embarked and some 1,300 were still ashore.



The embarkation beaches.

# 26/7 April 1941 - Greece

- At Navplion the Ulster Prince, bombed and burnt out by German aircraft, obstructed the little harbour and made it impossible for destroyers to come alongside the quay.
- A choppy sea rendered it dangerous to embark men in small boats and, in the darkness, a number were washed overboard and drowned.
- Finally, at 4.30 a.m., dangerously late, the ships sailed with about 2,600, having left 1,700 ashore.
- Of those left at Navplion 400 moved down the coast in a tank landing craft, later bombed and sunk; and 700, including the Australian Reinforcement Battalion, were sent to Tolos where they hid for the day.



The embarkation beaches.

# 26/7 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- At 7 a.m. Perth and Stuart joined Orion off Parapola Island, fifty miles south-east of Navplion, and the force proceeded to Suda Bay, where they arrived that afternoon.
- At 7 a.m. the slower troopship convoy was some fifteen miles astern of the cruisers. Isis and Hotspur were both filled with troops, and to enable them to press on ahead to Suda Bay, Pridham-Wippell ordered Wryneck, Waterhen and Vendetta from that base to relieve them on the convoy screen.
- At 6.45 a.m. heavy high level and dive bombing attacks developed on the convoy and at 7 a.m. Slamet received direct hits which stopped her and set her badly on fire. Diamond was detached to stand by and pick up survivors. Shortly afterwards the three Suda Bay destroyers were sighted ahead, and Wryneck was ordered to help Diamond, which was being constantly dive-bombed during her rescue work.
- At 9.25 a.m. Diamond reported that she had picked up most of the survivors and was proceeding to Suda. An hour later Wryneck requested fighter protection.
- It was the last heard from the two ships. When they failed to arrive at Suda, Griffin was sent to search for them.
- At 2.30 a.m. on the 28th April she found a raft from Wryneck, and subsequently picked up some survivors from whom it was learned that both ships had received direct hits in a bombing attack soon after 1 p.m. on the 27th, and had sunk immediately. Total survivors from them and Slamet whose rescued they were carrying—were one naval officer, forty-one ratings, and eight soldiers.



# 26/7 April 1941 - Greece

- At Kalamata from 18,000 to 20,000 troops were now assembled, about one-third being of Allen Group (the 16th and 17th Brigades and corps troops) and most of the remainder a medley of base troops, Yugoslavs and others.
- Allen ordered the commanding officers to take "active measures to prevent troops other than Australian and British troops under the command of Allen Group from filtering on to the ships". He ordered his provosts to shoot any man who "fired a shot, lit a fire or panicked".
- About 10 p.m. the troops saw lights out to sea, coming closer and closer to the shore. Orders were given and the lines of waiting men began to march forward, in threes and in step, carrying weapons and spare boxes of ammunition. As the head of each column neared the shore they could see the dim shapes of destroyers in the bay and an occasional light flashing on the wharf where soon two destroyers were tied up with gangways at bow and stern. The men filed quietly aboard, and, when a destroyer was loaded and cast off, those who remained sat on the wharf in their ranks and waited for the next.
- Naval officers, who were present at Dunkirk, wrote Savige, "expressed their surprise at all troops carrying their weapons and equipment, and spare boxes of S.A.A."
- About 2.45 Allen was informed that no more destroyers would pull in that night but that ships would return the following night. Believing that all except the drivers had embarked, Allen and Savige boarded the last destroyer.
- In fact it turned out that several other groups from Allen's force had been left behind—a detachment of the 2/1st Field Regiment and its commanding officer, who was trying to ensure its embarkation; the Yugoslav anti-aircraft gunners; and some others.
- The total number embarked is uncertain but certainly exceeded 8,000—by far the largest number taken off one beach on a single night.

# 27 April 1941 - Libya

- The morning of the 27th brought a revival of the khamsin, but the wind abated later. The improvement in visibility brought a severe attack by dive bombers on the heavy anti-aircraft guns near the harbour. One aircraft was shot down but four guns were temporarily put out of action. The anti-aircraft artillery suffered almost 50 casualties. Six men were killed; two died later of wounds.
- Brigadier Slater investigated the action. He found that first an attack had been made by numerous high-level bombers (Ju-88's) with fighter escort to draw the fire of the heavy anti-aircraft guns. Then 50 dive bombers attacked the guns, at least 12 to each site. In some cases their approach was not seen, for they came out of the sun.
- At two of the gun sites attacked, "porcupine" formation was adopted—all guns pointing outwards and firing at over 65 degrees elevation—and the guns continued firing throughout the attack. At these two sites the damage was not great; one man was killed, one wounded.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

011215

Tobruk. The crew of an Anti Aircraft gun standing by for action.

# 27 April 1941 - Libya

- At the other two sites the personnel took cover after the first bomb had fallen. At these sites there were 46 casualties, including 5 killed, 4 guns were put out of action for 48 hours and other serious damage was done. It was a hard teaching of the lesson that the greatest safety for the gun crews lay in fighting their guns.
- On the afternoon that this raid took place all fighter aircraft in Tobruk except those required for reconnaissance had left the El Gubbi aerodrome to fly back to Egypt.
- There was only one possible answer to the problem to deceive the enemy by camouflage, concealment, the construction of dummy positions and frequent changes of the defensive layout. Slater immediately took counter-measures for this purpose. A camouflage officer was appointed to the anti-aircraft brigade. Work was started at once on the construction of alternative gun-sites. Dummy sites were erected close to real sites and much ingenuity and effort applied to making them realistic.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

020798

TOBRUK, LIBYA. 1941-09-11. A DUMMY ANTI-AIRCRAFT POSITION BUILT ON THE PILASTRINO ESCARPMENT.

# 27 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- On the 27th Pridham-Wippell was near the end of his resources. Suda Bay was crowded with ships packed with troops. All available transports were filled and it was likely that any future embarkations must be carried out by naval vessels. He decided to send his laden transports — Glengyle, Salween, Khedive Ismail, Dilwarra, City of London, and Costa Rica—not to Crete but to Alexandria, escorted by one force of cruisers and destroyers and protected from the north-westward by another.
- Soon after dawn the air raid alarm sounded in the ships of the Kalamata convoy. The men came up on to the deck with a spontaneous rush.

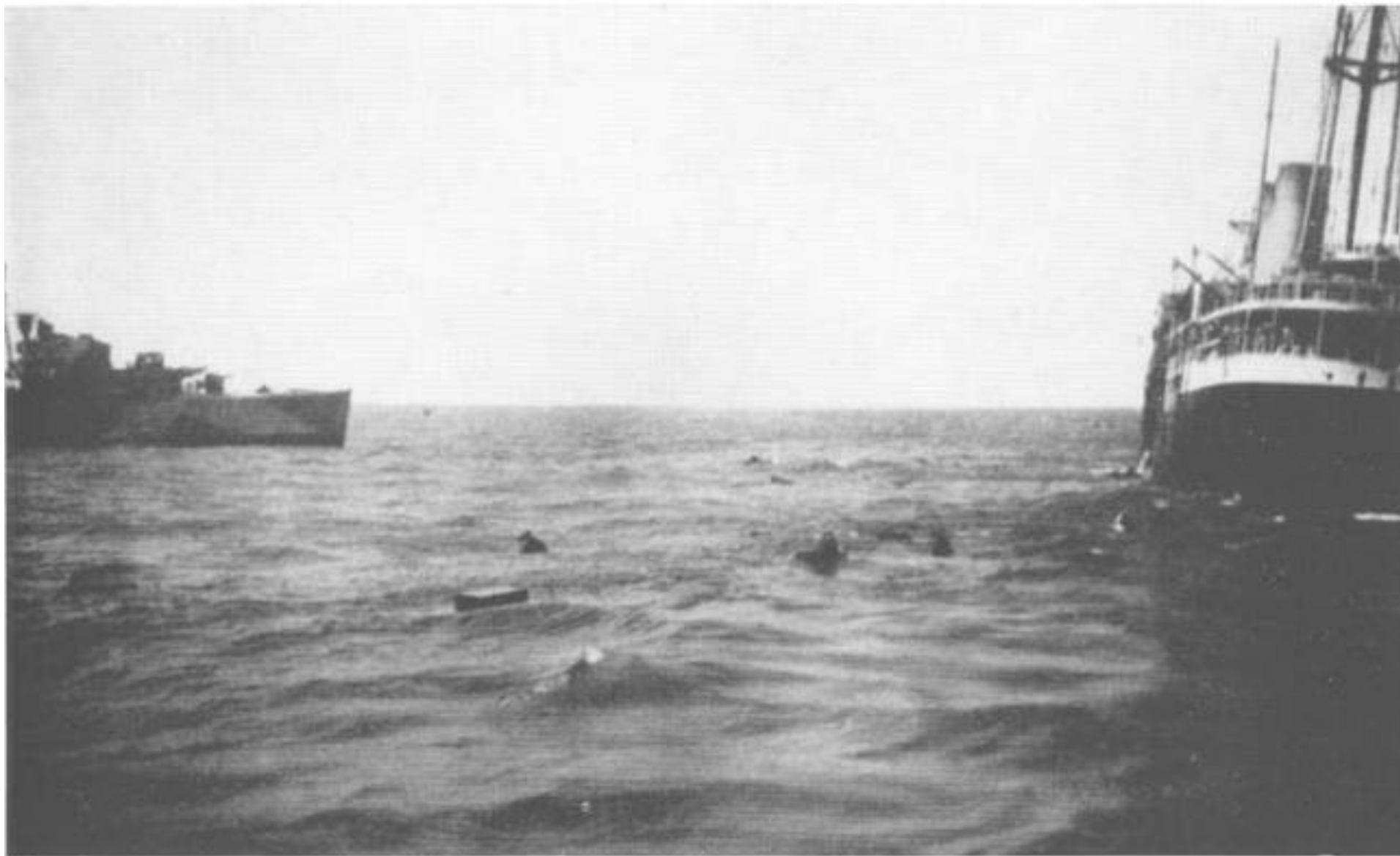




# 27 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- On the City of London, for example, eighty-four Vickers, Brens and Hotchkiss machine-guns and anti-tank rifles were mounted and fired at the attacking aircraft.
- A near miss brought an avalanche of water over the forecastle of Costa Rica, from whose decks every Vickers gun and Bren on board was in action.
- There were further unsuccessful attacks during the morning, though seven enemy aircraft were shot down.
- At 2.40 p.m. an enemy aircraft was seen, too late, gliding out of the sun. Its bomb struck the water 7 or 8 feet from the Costa Rica, whose engines stopped immediately.
- At 3 o'clock water was coming in fast through gaps in the plates on the port side. The troops were ordered to fall in. There was room for some of the 2,500 on deck, but most lined the alleyways or stood along the lower deck in darkness, silently on parade. The destroyer Defender came alongside. At this stage four men of the ship's crew came on deck, threw a few rafts overboard and shouted "Every man for himself", whereupon about twenty soldiers left the ranks and jumped overboard. This delayed the destroyer Hero which was coming along the port side and whose crew had to pull these men from the water.
- The Costa Rica was rising and falling 18 or 20 feet in the water and men had to swing down the side on ropes and jump for the deck of the Defender. When she was filled the destroyer Hereward came alongside. Among the last to jump on to her were those manning machine-guns, who had been ordered to remain in case the aircraft attacked again.
- Finally, when Costa Rica was listing so steeply that a man could step off the lower bridge on to the deck of a destroyer, the Hero replaced the Hereward and the Dutch ship's officers and about twenty soldiers who remained jumped on to her deck. The trans-shipment took forty-five minutes. The troops aboard included the 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion, the 2/7th Battalion, part of the 2/8th, and a company of the 2/1st.





(Lt-Col T. G. Walker, 2/7 Bn)

The stern of the sinking *Costa Rica* viewed from the *City of London*, the nearest ship in the convoy, with *HMS Defender* on the left. 27th April.

# 27 April 1941 - Greece

- There remained in Greece the 4th Brigade Group and part of the armoured brigade near the Athens beaches, about 2,500 men at the Argos beaches, the 6th Brigade Group at Tripolis, several units and detachments at Monemvasia, and more than 8,000 men at Kalamata.
- About 800 of the armoured brigade remained at Rafina. All guns had been destroyed. During the 27th this force had taken up a concealed defensive position round the beach. Early in the day German aircraft bombed the wrecked vehicles on the hills north of Rafina and the village itself, and flew low over the hidden troops but without seeing them.



The embarkation beaches.

# 27 April 1941 - Greece

- While the 4th New Zealand Brigade was moving to a defensive position about 500 yards east of Markopoulon on the Athens-Porto Rafti road, it was detected about 11 a.m. by some twenty-three German aircraft and severely machine-gunned.
- This fire exploded a shell in an ammunition waggon of the 2/3rd Field Regiment, which again produced other explosions and soon shells were bursting everywhere, vehicles burning, and the ripe crops in the fields and the trees in the pine woods blazing fiercely. Nine guns were destroyed, and six artillerymen and a larger number of New Zealand infantrymen were killed by the explosions; about 30 were killed or wounded in the 20th Battalion.
- Into the blazing woods squadrons of German aircraft poured bombs and machine-gun fire at intervals.
- By 1 p.m., however, the 18th and 20th Battalions were in their intended position forward, the 19th in reserve and the 2/3rd Field Regiment in support, with some guns well forward in an anti-tank role.
- About 3 p.m. a column of 50 to 100 German vehicles, most of them light tanks, were seen moving into Markopoulon. The guns did not fire on the village, but whenever German tanks emerged from it they were met by a heavy concentration of fire from guns and mortars, and throughout the afternoon the tanks remained in the sanctuary the village offered. Many of the German vehicles passed across the front towards the little port of Loutsas. The attack, expected hourly, never came, though there was more strafing from the air. At 6 o'clock the brigade began destroying its remaining trucks, and at 8.45 the guns.

# 27/8 April 1941 - Greece

- At 9 o'clock the men of 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the forward positions marched back into a perimeter which the reserve battalion, the 19th, had formed about 1,000 yards from the beach. The troops were embarked from Porto Rafti in the cruiser Ajax (2,500 men), and destroyers Kimberley (700) and Kingston (640).
- At 1.15 a.m. the dim shape of a destroyer appeared off shore Rafina. It was Havock whose captain, Lieut-Commander Watkins, had learnt that men were left at Rafina and had steamed from Porto Rafti to pick them up. By 4 a.m. the 800 were aboard the destroyer and on the way to Crete.
- Destroyers were expected at the Argos beaches but none arrived, and at 3 a.m. the troops who had assembled ready to embark dispersed to spend another day in hiding.
- At dusk on the 27th, as the troops at Kalamata were forming up to march to the quay again, about twenty-five bombers came over and, making their runs at no more than 500 feet, for an hour dropped sticks of bombs across the already battered town. When they had gone the men patiently formed up again and stood waiting for the ships. But no ships appeared that night, and at 1 a.m. the troops dispersed to their lying-up places.



The embarkation beaches.

# 27/8 April 1941 - Greece

- At Miloi and Tripolis the 6th Brigade saw no signs of the enemy on 27th except in the air. Freyberg ordered Barrowclough to hold till dark and then move back to Monemvasia as fast as he could.
- At midday he began thinning out his troops. The 26th Battalion moved south under air attack, which though frequent, caused only three casualties. The remainder of the brigade, with Freyberg's headquarters, moved at night, and by daylight on the 28th had travelled 120 miles and was concealed within the defensive line at Monemvasia.



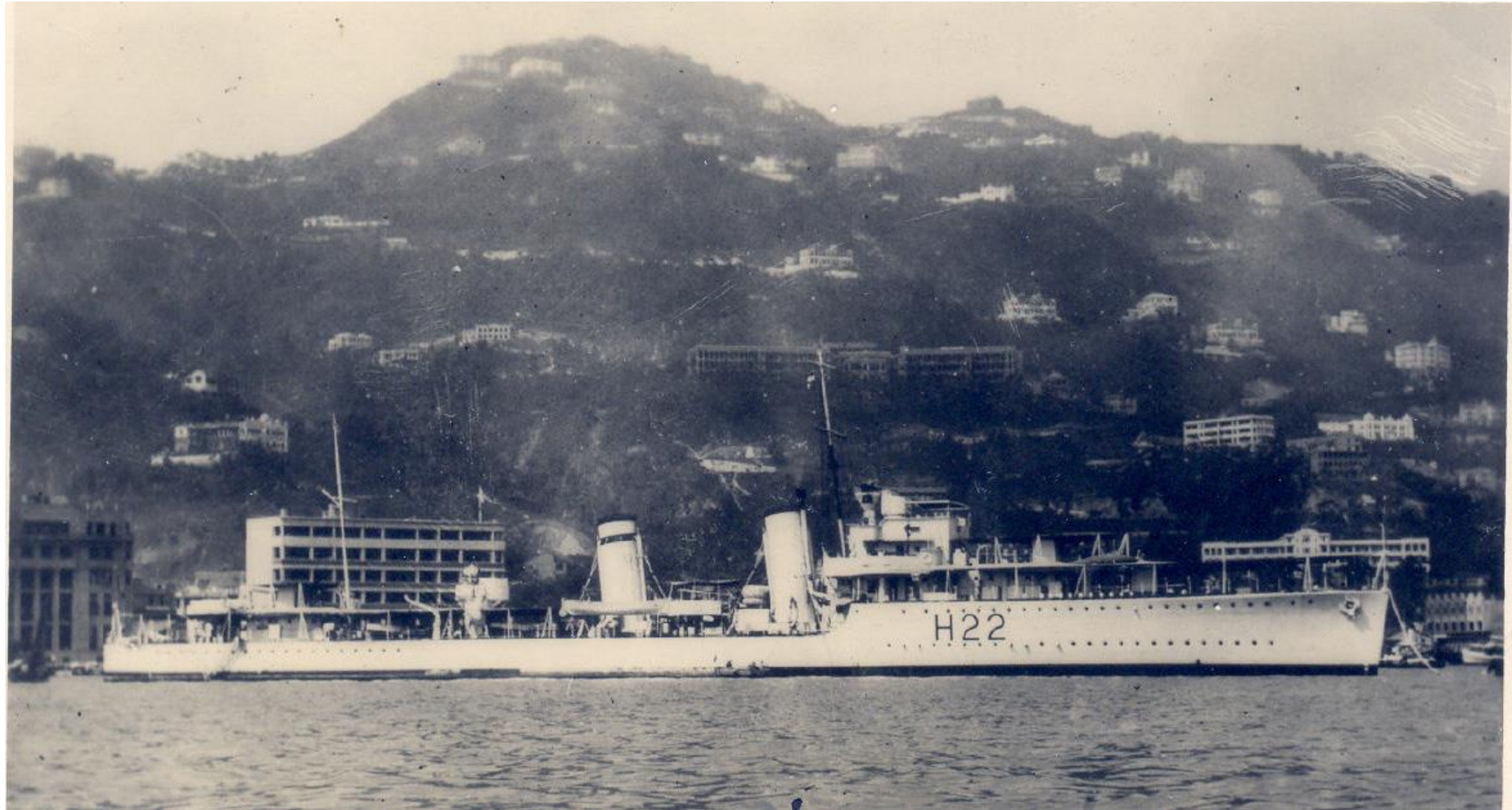
The embarkation beaches.



# 27/8 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- On 24th April, to avoid almost certain destruction on the ground, the remaining RAF aircraft were flown from Greece to Crete. Here they were joined by Blenheim fighters hurriedly transferred from Aden to protect convoys evacuating troops from Greece.
- Flight Lieutenant Whittall\* of No. 203 Squadron R.A.F. was lost during a typical battle on 27th April when three Blenheims challenged vastly superior enemy forces searching for British ships, and the Blenheims were withdrawn after one week.
- \* F-Lt J. C. Whittall, 39356 RAF; 203 Sqn RAF. Regular air force offr; of Worcester Park, Surrey, Eng; b. Neutral Bay, NSW, 10 Jan 1916. Killed in action 27 Apr 1941.

# Wryneck



- Thanks for your attention.
- See you again on the 11<sup>th</sup> May.