

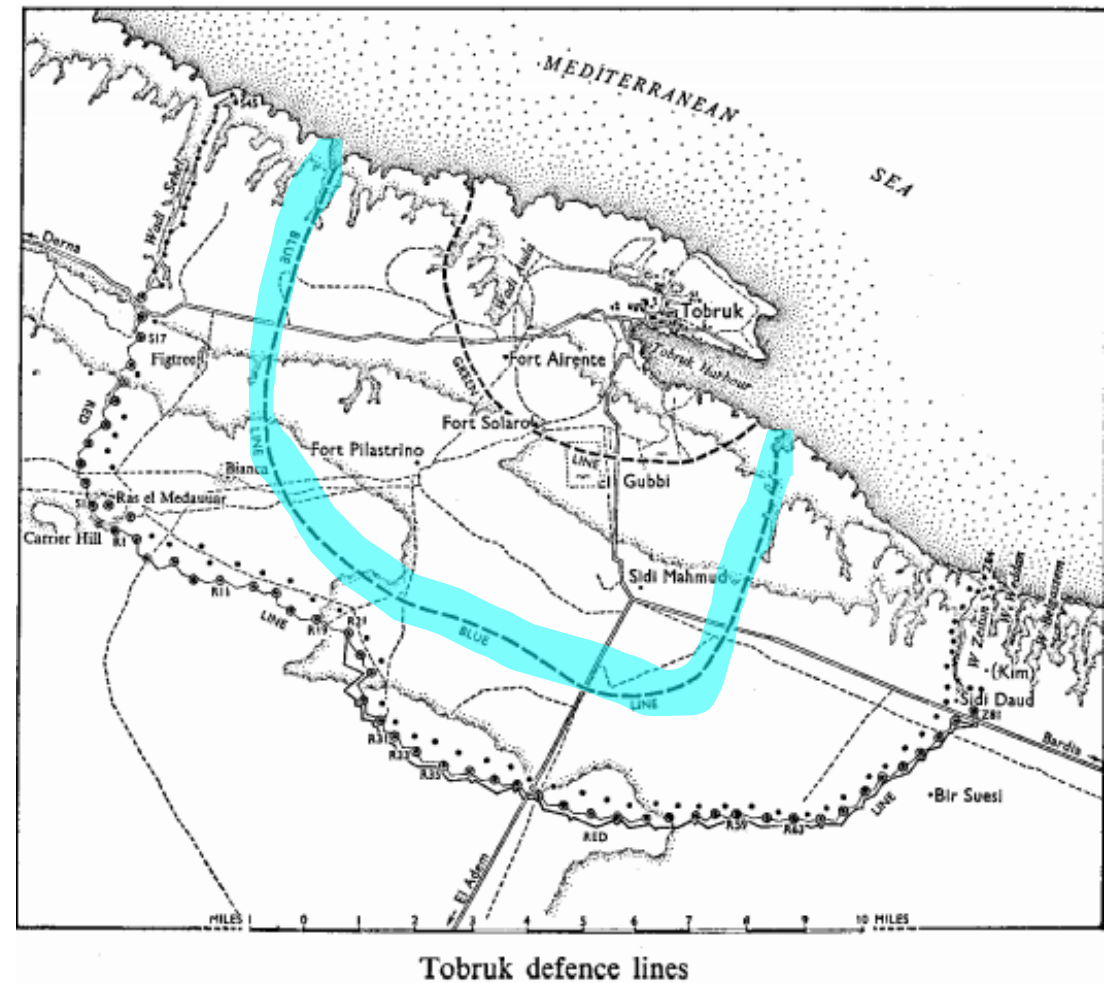
Australia's War: 80 years ago this week

28 April 1941



28 April 1941 - Libya

- At 6 a.m. the harbour area was heavily raided. A bomb almost destroyed "Admiralty House", the naval headquarters. Air raids continued throughout the day. And large numbers of vehicles were observed during the forenoon and early afternoon moving up from south to west, towards the road leading to Acroma from which all previous attacks on the western sector had come.
- In the past week great progress had been made in strengthening the defences in depth and developing the **Blue Line**, particularly in the western sector. The engineers had continued working round the clock laying the tactical minefields.



28 April 1941 - Greece

- At Miloi and Tripolis the 6th Brigade saw no signs of the enemy except in the air.
- Freyberg ordered Barrowclough to hold till dark and then move back to Monemvasia as fast as he could.
- Consequently 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 battle 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.

28 April 1941 - Greece

- At **Monemvasia** Lee already had his force in position; and Colonel Clifton and the New Zealand engineers had placed in the road depth charges from a Greek destroyer which was aground in the harbour.
- The rear party of Group headquarters, including Baillie-Grohman, was established near by, and had collected the local caiques in case of need.
- The inhabitants had been induced to go to villages in the hills so that the town would appear to scouting aircraft to be deserted.



28 April 1941 - Greece

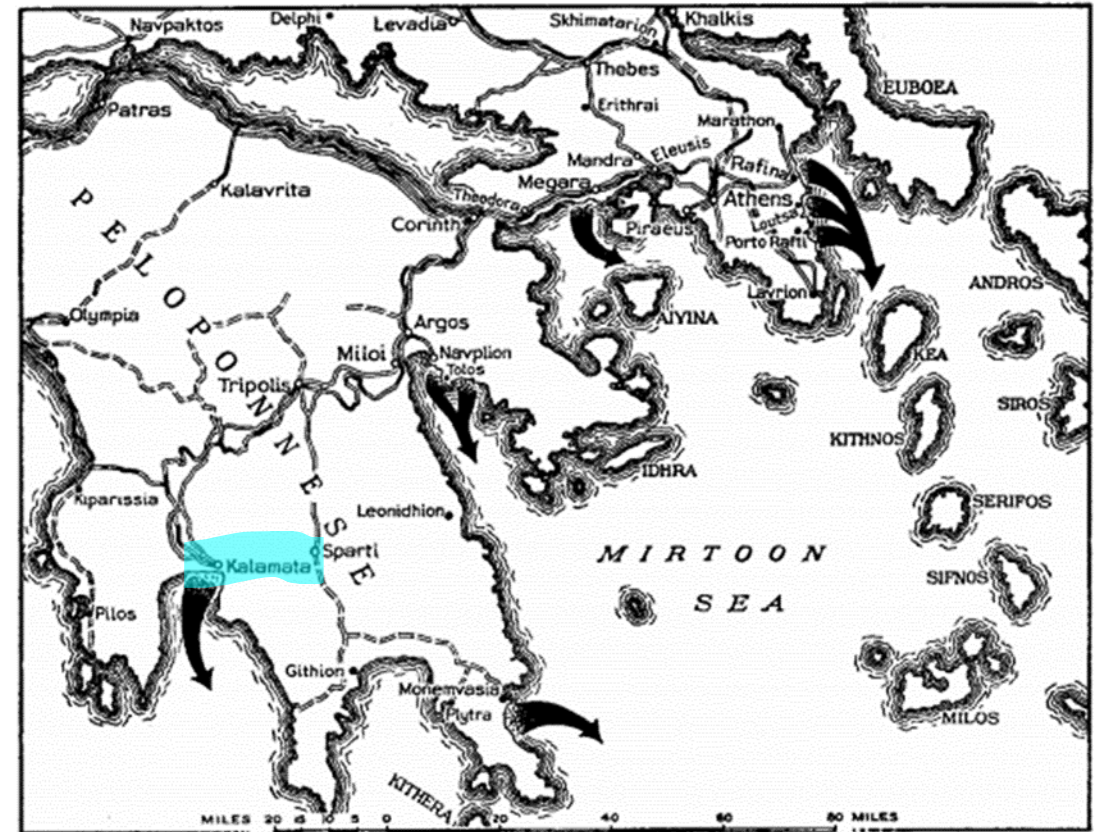
- At the Argos beaches—Navplion and Tolos—there were now more than 2,000 troops, many without rations, and the number was increasing as parties of stragglers arrived.
- Enemy aircraft were overhead during the day machine-gunning and bombing. A rearguard force was organised from the Australian Reinforcement Battalion and some 200 men of the 3rd Royal Tanks, the only fighting detachments in the area.
- Destroyers were expected on the night of the 27th-28th but none arrived, and at 3 a.m. the troops who had assembled ready to embark dispersed to spend another day in hiding.



The embarkation beaches.

28 April 1941 - Greece

- At **Kalamata** about 6,000 out of more than 8,000 men were unarmed and largely leaderless base troops. The only organised fighting troops were the New Zealand Reinforcement Battalion (about 800 men under Major MacDuff), a force of 380 Australians (including about 70 of the 2/1st Field Regiment and the transport detachments of the battalions of the 17th Brigade, all under Lieut-Colonel Harlock, and about 300 men of the squadrons of the 4th Hussars.
- The 4th Hussars were given the task of providing an outer defence for Kalamata; the New Zealand battalion was to be in position at 7.30 p.m. to cover the hoped-for embarkation on the night of the 28th.



The embarkation beaches.

28 April 1941 - Greece

- At Kalamata about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the Hussars patrolling north of Kalamata reported that they had been 25 miles from the port and made no contact with the enemy. Two hours later, however, as the troops were moving down to the beach to be ready to embark, German troops, having overrun the Hussars, drove into the town and to the quay, and captured the naval beach-master.
- Furious firing broke out round the quay. Harlock and other officers hurried parties of troops to the scene. MacDuff's New Zealand battalion fixed bayonets and charged towards the quay.
- The fighting that followed was extremely confused. Only 70 of the 400 Australians under the command of Captain Gray could be used in this attack because of shortage of weapons. Gray divided these into two platoons, one of which joined the New Zealanders, while Gray led the other in an attack along the sea front.
- A concerted attack began about 8.15 p.m. By 9.30 the quay had been recaptured, two field guns which the Germans had established there had been taken, and about 100 of the enemy had been made prisoners.

28 April 1941 - Crete

- On the 25th, in the first large-scale shipment from Greece, some 5,000 troops were put ashore at Suda Bay; and, in the succeeding days, transports and warships disembarked 20,000 more. There were no tents to shelter the new arrivals. They were guided to bivouac areas among the olive trees, where, lacking even blankets and greatcoats, they had to sleep on the ground with no covering but their clothes. Some had no mess gear.
- In the first few days there was little for many to do except rest under the olive trees, forage for food and equipment, eat—and perhaps get into trouble. The men, used to drinking beer, found the heavy Greek wines treacherous. Even fighting units which had landed organised and more or less complete in numbers lacked tools with which to dig field works.
- "Officers and men on arrival from Greece were sent, as far as possible, to any of their unit who had arrived previously and had been organised under an officer The only cooking utensils were petrol tins; a very large number of men fed out of tin cans as there were no mess tins, knives, forks or spoons available in ordnance in large quantities."

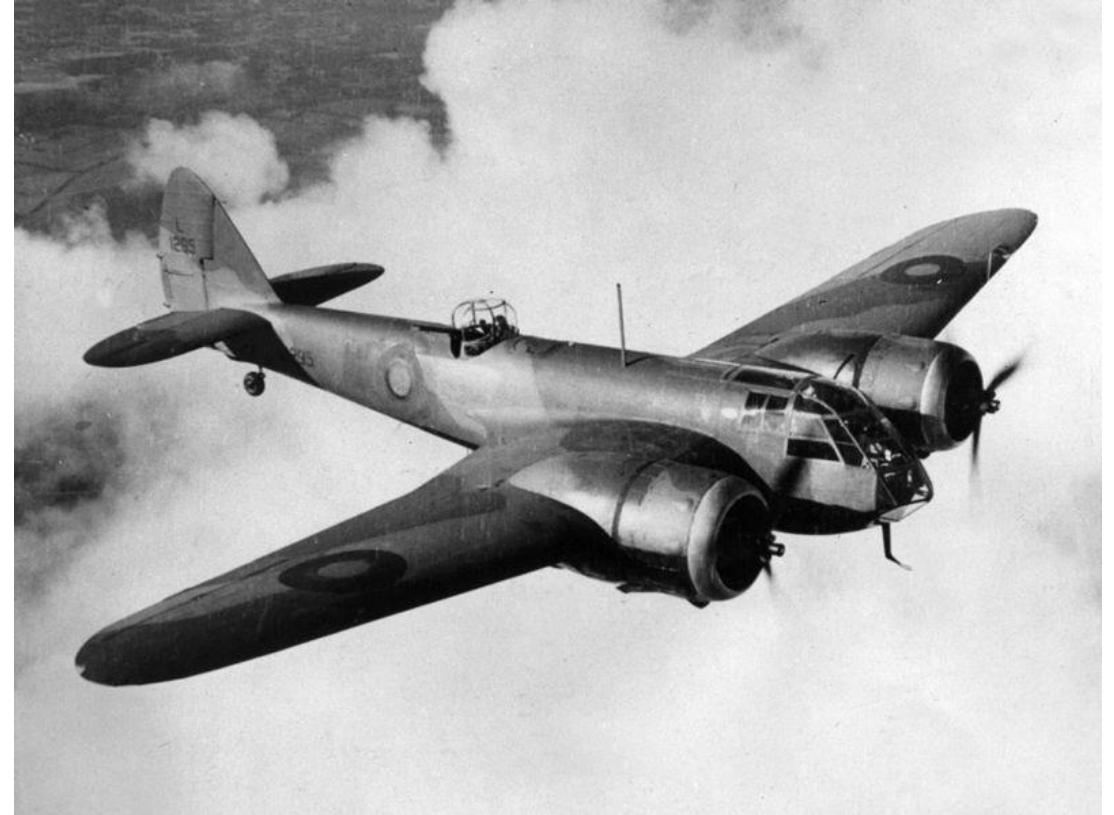


(Australian War Memorial)

Australian troops resting on the shores of Suda Bay.

28 April 1941 - Crete

- The air force on Crete included four depleted squadrons from Greece—No. 30 with from six to eight serviceable Blenheims, Nos. 33 and 80 with six Hurricanes between them, No. 112 with six serviceable Gladiators—and one squadron from Egypt (No. 203) with nine Blenheims.
- At Maleme was also No. 805 Squadron of the Fleet Air Arm.



A Bristol Blenheim Mk I

28 April 1941 - Crete

- Wilson reported that the enemy would not improbably attempt a combined seaborne and airborne attack in the near future. His estimate of the necessary garrison somewhat exceeded those of Weston and the joint planners: three brigade groups each of four battalions and one motor battalion distributed between the Suda Bay area and Heraklion.
- He concluded: "I consider that unless all three Services are prepared to face the strain of maintaining adequate forces up to strength, the holding of the island is a dangerous commitment, and a decision on the matter must be taken at once."
- Here he indicated a basic problem: how was a defending force to be maintained? There was a limited store of supplies and limited equipment for a garrison of one brigade totalling some 5,000 men; this store was in process of being increased to 90 days' supplies for 30,000 men. From Greece, however, had come perhaps 25,000 men, who, besides being fed, needed to be largely rearmed and reclothed, and who possessed no vehicles or heavy weapons and little ammunition. Ships carrying supplies from Egypt had to make a hazardous voyage to ports on the north coast and use ill-equipped harbours where unloading was slow.
- The problem of supply was complicated by the presence on the island of a population exceeding 400,000, partly dependent on imported grain, and of 14,000 Italian prisoners of war captured by the Greeks.

28 April 1941 - Crete

- On 28th April M. Tsouderos (photo), the Greek Prime Minister, whose Government was now established at Canea on Crete, presided at a meeting which Generals
- Wilson and Weston, Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac, Admiral Turle, and Group Captain Beamish attended.
- The Greek representatives explained that the Greek forces under General Skoulas consisted of 2,500 gendarmes, 7,500 soldiers, and 1,000 reservists, organised into eleven battalions none of which was well equipped. They asked that a British general be appointed to command the Allied forces on the island, and that the Greek troops be armed with British weapons.



28 April 1941 - London

- In London that day the Joint Intelligence Committee had estimated that the Germans had aircraft enough round the eastern Mediterranean to enable them to land from 3,000 to 4,000 paratroops or airborne troops on Crete in a first sortie, and might make from two to three sorties in a day from Greece and three or four from Rhodes. This estimate was immediately passed on to Cairo; and, the same day, Churchill sent Wavell the following message:
- It seems clear from our information that a heavy airborne attack by German troops and bombers will soon be made on Crete. Let me know what forces you have in the island and what your plans are. It ought to be a fine opportunity for killing the parachute troops. The island must be stubbornly defended.



Burning German Junkers Ju 52s at Ypenburg, Netherlands in 1940.

28 April 1941 - London

- Menzies writes in his diary:
- War Cabinet. Winston says “We will lose only 5,000 in Greece”. We will in fact lose at least 15,000. W. is a great man, but he is more addicted to wishful thinking every day.
- Acute exchanges on news. I say that propaganda bad—best propaganda news, especially in Australia and U.S.A. But British Services are against news. In the Greek campaign “our retirement is continuing”! But German High Command puts out half a column!



28/9 April 1941 - Mediterranean

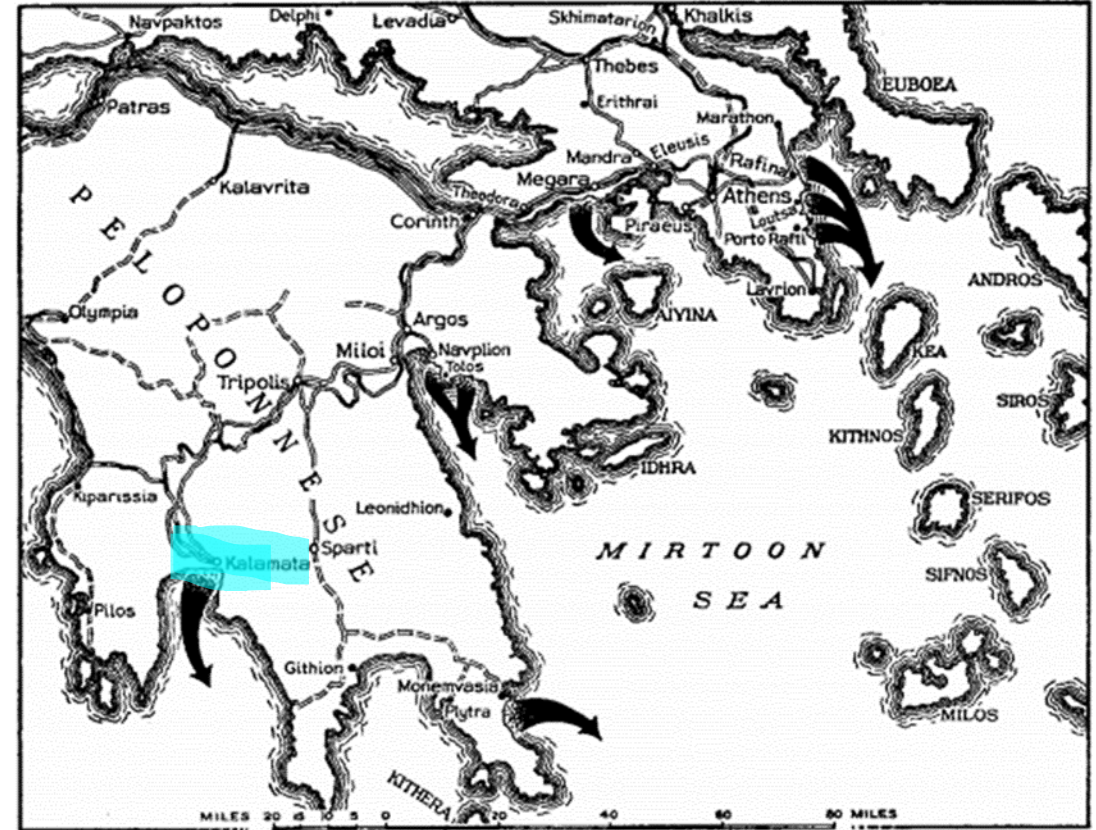
- The destroyers Isis and Griffin arrived at Monemvasia at 10.30 p.m. on the 28th to commence embarkation.
- At 1am on the 29th Ajax, Hotspur and Havock arrived.
- On the way north they sighted a flare ahead and Havock, racing in for a possible submarine, was right over the spot before a little dark shape was discerned in the water, and a yell in good Australian revealed an aircraft's rubber dinghy with a couple of forms huddled inside.
- This was Perth's Walrus, who had met a Junkers 88 and been shot down that evening.
- Perth's aircraft had been landed at Suda Bay on 1 January for service at Base, and had since been employed as courier and on Base duties.
- Embarkation proceeded smoothly, and at 3 a.m. on the 29th, after seeing the beaches cleared, General Freyberg (now in command of all British troops in Greece) and Baillie-Grohman boarded Ajax and the force sailed.



Supermarine Walrus I, serial number K5783, from the first production batch. Taken immediately prior to World War II. This aircraft served with the New Zealand cruisers HMS Achilles and HMS Leander.

28/9 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- Perth, Phoebe, Decoy and Hasty under the command of Bowyer-Smyth in Perth covered Convoy "GA.14" throughout the night of the 27th-28th. Nubian, Hero, Hereward and Defender sailed from Suda Bay and joined Bowyer-Smyth about sixty miles south-west of Gavdhos Island at 8 a.m. on the 28th. The two cruisers and six destroyers set course for **Kalamata** so that the final approach would be from the south - west, to arrive at 10 p.m.
- Pridham-Wippell had heard that in addition to the troops there were 1,500 Yugoslav refugees at Kalamata, and he sailed Kandahar, Kingston and Kimberley from Suda to Kalamata direct to assist in the embarkation.



The embarkation beaches.

28/9 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- Bowyer-Smyth then had two cruisers and nine destroyers under his command. At 7.30 p.m. on the 28th, about twenty miles south of Kalamata, Bowyer-Smyth detached Hero to proceed ahead and establish touch with the army ashore.
- Fires were seen on shore as Hero approached the town, and at 8.45 p.m., when about three miles from the harbour, it was clear from "tracer bullets in profusion" that fighting was in progress, and a flashing signal was received from the breakwater: "Bosch in town."
- Biggs anchored Hero close to the beach east of the town, radioed Bowyer-Smyth: "Harbour occupied by Germans, British troops to south-east of town," and landed his 1st Lieutenant, LtCmdr Elsworth, to find the O.C. Troops.
- "This was a tricky time. The troops on shore were 'trigger happy', and there were no organised units on the beach."



(Department of Information)
Captain Sir Philip Bowyer-Smyth and Officers on Bridge of Perth.

28/9 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- When Bowyer-Smyth received Biggs' first signal at 9.10 p.m., Force "B" was about ten miles from Kalamata, approaching the port at 16 knots. Tracer fire and "big explosions" were seen on shore. Bowyer-Smyth wrote, four days later: "As soon as I saw these explosions I realised that during embarkation Force "B " would be in an extremely hazardous tactical position in the event of attack from seaward. Ships would be silhouetted against explosions and fires on shore, would be embayed and unable to scatter, and there was no covering force in the offing.
- Taranto was only twelve hours steaming away and with the information the enemy obviously had such an attack was far from improbable. These factors were considered in a rapid appreciation, coupled with other considerations: that beach embarkation of the estimated numbers without landing craft would be impracticable in the time at disposal; that secrecy had gone; and that "the forces under my command constituted a substantial part of the light forces of the Mediterranean Fleet whose loss would be in the nature of a calamity, particularly in view of recent cruiser losses". Alternatives were weighed: to withdraw the whole force; to commit the whole force to embarkation; to leave the destroyers and withdraw the cruisers. Bowyer-Smyth concluded that "either all must stay or all go. Reluctantly I decided that the number that could be got away did not warrant the substantial risk to an important force."
- At 9.29 p.m., when about six miles from the anchorage, he reversed course, raised steam for full speed, and retired Force "B" at 28 knots; ordering Hero to rejoin, "an order which I hoped he would, as he did, interpret by bringing away any men he could".

28/9 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- At 9.30 p.m. Elsworth reported that the beach was suitable for embarkation, and Biggs made an amplifying signal to Bowyer-Smyth: "Troops collecting on beach east of town. All firing ceased in town. Consider evacuation possible from beach. Brigadier is reporting."
- Owing to a W/T defect in Hero, this signal was not passed until 10.11 p.m. By that time Bowyer-Smyth had turned Force "B", and was some twenty miles south of Kalamata, retiring at 28 knots.
- Bowyer-Smyth's conclusion to abandon the Kalamata operation on the 28th was, as Cunningham subsequently remarked, "an unfortunate decision". It contributed to the loss of some 6,000 troops and 1,500 Yugoslav refugees, who were forced to surrender.



The embarkation beaches.

28/29 April 1941 - Greece

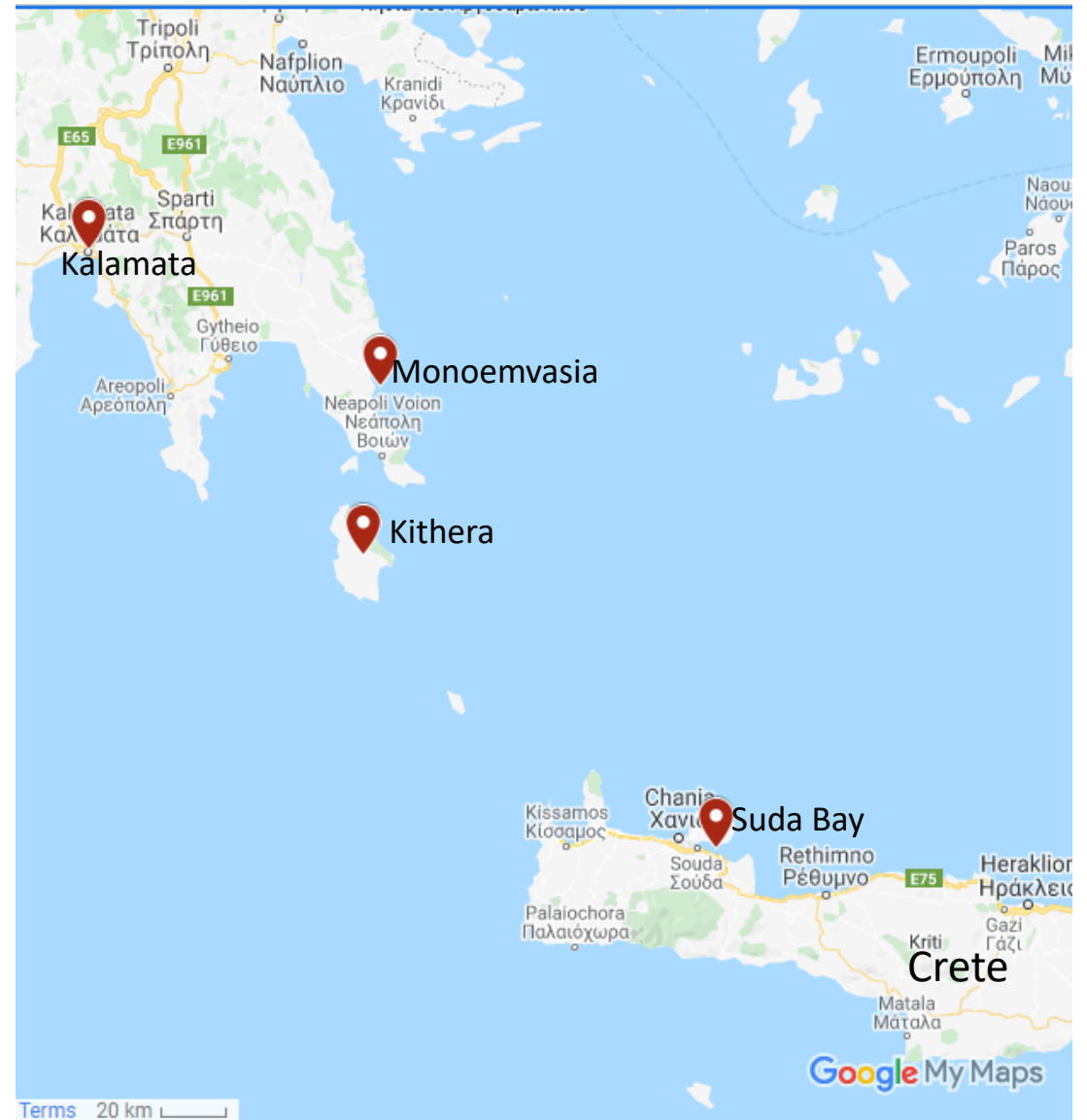
- Hero, joined later by the destroyers Kandahar, Kimberley and Kingston, remained until about 3 a.m., when they sailed, having taken on board some of the wounded and about 300 others.
- As soon as the destroyers had gone Parrington assembled all troops on the beach and told them that the navy could do no more and that he proposed to surrender at daybreak. Those who did not wish to surrender should be out of the area by 5 a.m..
- Parrington then sent an officer to the German headquarters to say that no resistance would be offered after 5.30 a.m.



HMS Hero. 1,350 tons 36 knots 4 4.7 inch guns, 8 21 inch torpedo tubes.

28/29 April 1941 - Med

- The plan was to send three sloops to Kithera Island where some 800 men had been transported in caiques and a landing craft.
- That night the men on Kithera were ferried to the sloops in the landing craft, and then taken to Suda Bay, the sloop Hyacinth towing the landing craft.



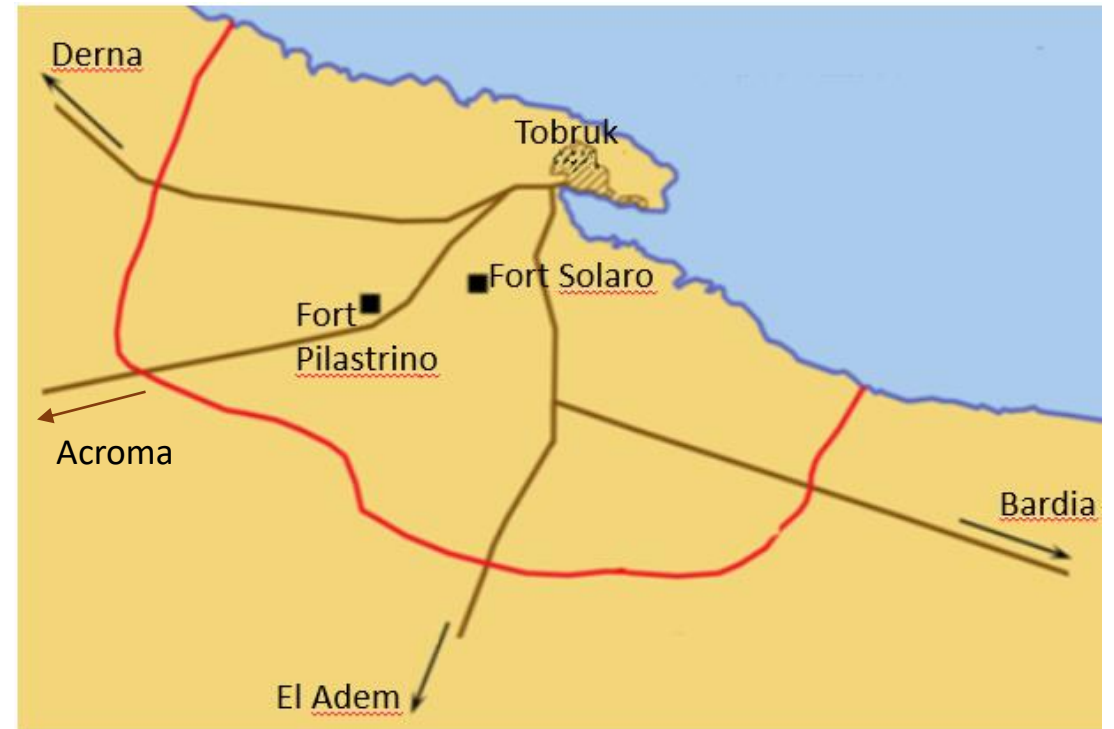
29 April 1941 - Egypt

- Wavell replied that in addition to the original garrison of three battalions and the anti-aircraft and coastal batteries, Crete now contained some 30,000 men evacuated from Greece. "It is just possible," he added, "that plan for attack on Crete may be cover for attack on Syria or Cyprus, and that real plan will only be disclosed even to [their] own troops at last moment."
- Churchill proposed that General Freyberg (portrait), for whose courage he had great admiration, should be placed in command in Crete, and General Wavell agreed.



29 April 1941 - Libya

- The morning tactical air reconnaissance on the 29th revealed a continuation of the westward movement of transport across the front of the 20th and 26th Brigades.
- The tempo of enemy air activity was stepped up still further as the day progressed. Field gun positions, forward infantry posts and infantry in reserve areas were bombed and strafed. In one attack three men were killed and eight wounded in the 2/10th Battalion. The 20th Brigade's sector was shelled all morning.
- Soon after midday a dive-bombing and machine-gunning attack was made on the 2/24th Battalion Captain Budge, the company commander, was conferring with other officers; one was killed, and four wounded, including Budge himself. Captain Canty took over command.



29 April 1941 - Libya

- In the late evening about 30 aircraft (one reports put the number as high as 63) using the last of the daylight dive-bombed the rear areas of the 20th Brigade; more than 30 men were wounded.
- The day ended with an artillery bombardment of the reserve positions of the 26th Brigade. But the night was quiet.
- In the port three lighters arrived, unloaded six infantry tanks and took back with them some of the German tanks captured in the Easter battle for examination by the equipment experts in England.



A Matilda 2 Infantry Tank. 25 tons, crew of four, 2 pounder gun, max speed 16mph on road, 9 mph off road.

29 April 1941 - Greece

- There remained in Greece one organised Australian unit—a detachment of the 2/5th General Hospital commanded by Major Brooke Moore and including six other officers and 150 other ranks.
- It was charged with the care of 112 patients, all too ill to be moved, and other casualties who might arrive.
- On the morning of the 27th the Germans had come and placed a guard over the hospital area, which was at Kephissia, near Athens, but the Australians were allowed to continue their work unhindered.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Postcard from Robert Albert Gray, 2/5 General Hospital, to his niece Daphne from Stalag XXA, 13 March 1942.

29 April 1941 - Mediterranean

- Late in the afternoon of 27th the remaining four Australian destroyers, Stuart, Vampire, Vendetta and Waterhen, with Coventry, Calcutta and Flamingo, had sailed as escort to Convoy "GA.14" direct from the beaches to Alexandria, which was reached in the early morning of the 29th April after an uneventful passage.



HMS Flamingo, a Black Swan-class sloop, 1,350 tons, 19 knots, 6 4inch guns.

29 April 1941 - Med

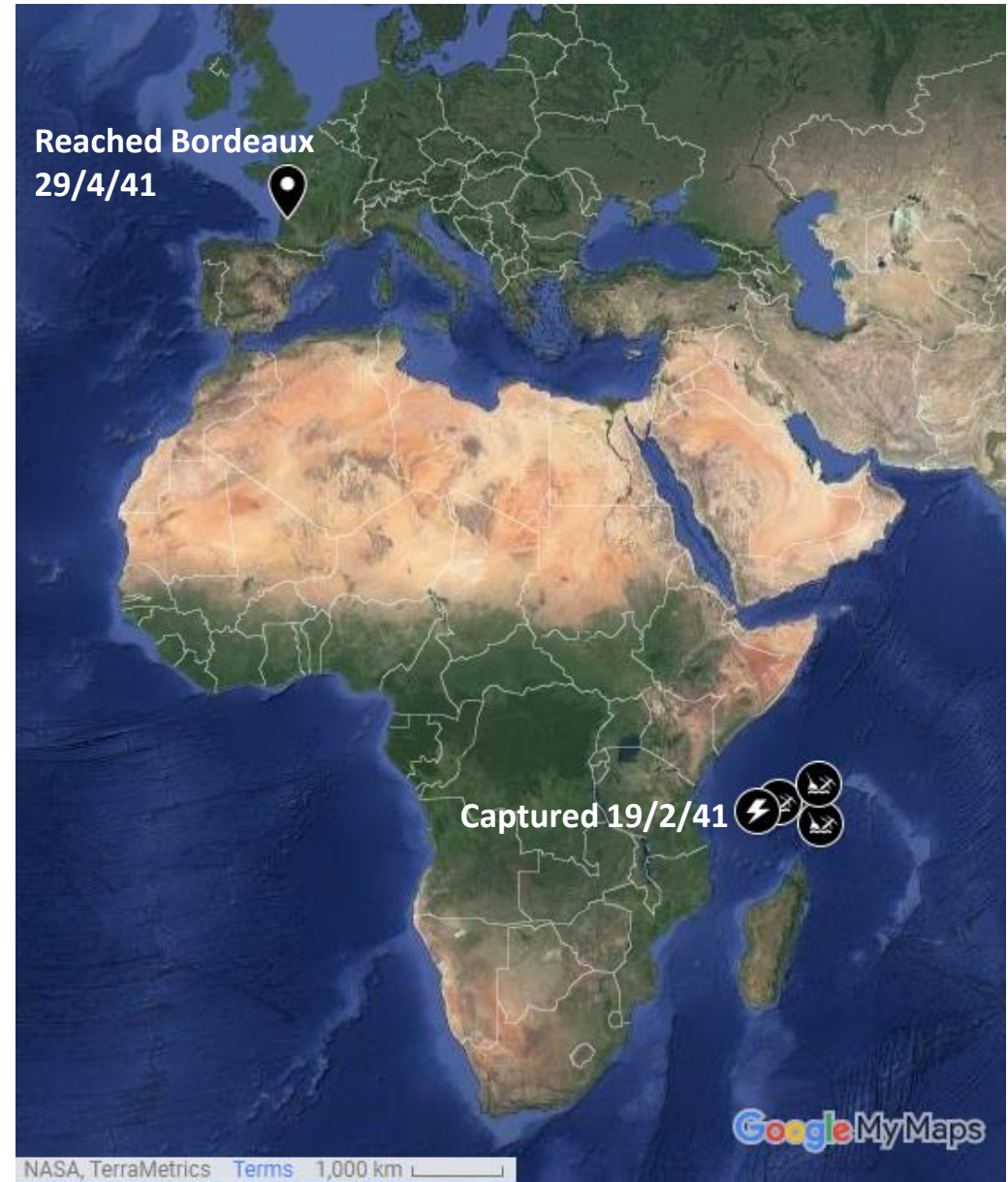
- The ships from the Monemvasia and Kithera embarkations began to reach Suda at 7.30 a.m. on the 29th.
- Troops were redistributed into transports, and at 11 a.m. Pridham-Wippell sailed convoy "GA.15" for Alexandria via Kaso Strait.
- The convoy, of seven ships, together with its escort and covering force, carried a total of 6,232 troops and 4,699 others including Italian prisoners-of-war; British merchant seamen; naval, Fleet Air Arm, and Royal Air Force officers and men; civilians; walking wounded; and nursing sisters.
- Force "B" from Kalamata joined Pridham-Wippell at 2 p.m. on the 29th.



On a ship evacuating troops from Greece to Crete. (Australian War Memorial)

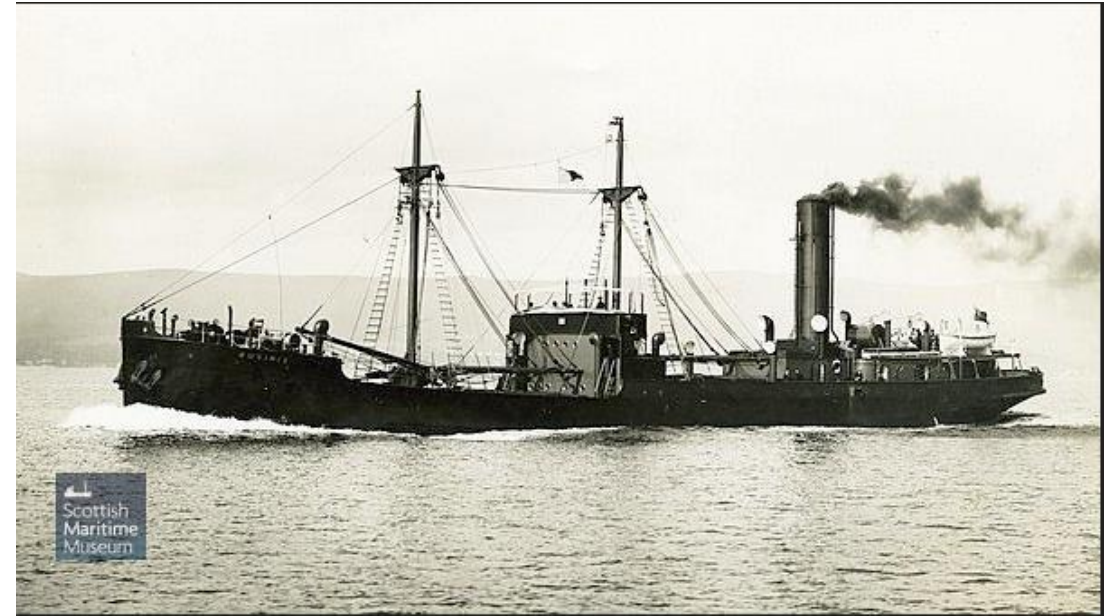
29 April 1941 - France

- The 6,994 ton oil tanker British Advocate, captured by the Admiral Scheer on 19 February 1941 at 07.10N. - 45.30E., west of the Seychelles while on passage from Abadan to U.K., via Cape Town and taken as a prize, arrived at Bordeaux on 29 April 1941.
- She was sunk in an air attack at Nantes on 25/09/1943 but subsequently refloated and repaired.



29 April 1941 - Atlantic

- No 10 Squadron RAAF's Sunderlands with Hudson aircraft from St Eval, flew daily Crossover patrols off Brest from one hour after dawn until two hours after dusk.
- Some twenty such patrols were flown by the Sunderlands during April.
- On 29th April one of the squadron's aircraft (T9075) returning from this patrol, unable to find Pembroke Dock in bad visibility, attempted an emergency night landing in the Irish Sea after his petrol supply had all but failed. The Pilot F/O Joyce, W&EM (AG) 3332 Cpl Amos, W&EM 205727 Cpl Hewitt, Fitter 2E(AG) 3683 LAC Raine, Fitter 2A(AG) 207712 Bell and Armourer 15774 ACI Francis were killed.
- Five survivors of the crash were rescued next day by the steamer Busiris (photo).



10.04.1941: Attacked by a German aircraft off the Runnelstone, Mounts Bay, whilst on passage from Maryport to Plymouth. A 550lb bomb landed on deck but failed to explode. It was removed by a disposal squad at Falmouth.

03.05.1941: Saved from severe damage during the explosion of the SS Malakand of Liverpool by being warped to the far end of Huskisson Dock. Chief Officer Mackenzie of the Busiris was awarded the OBE.

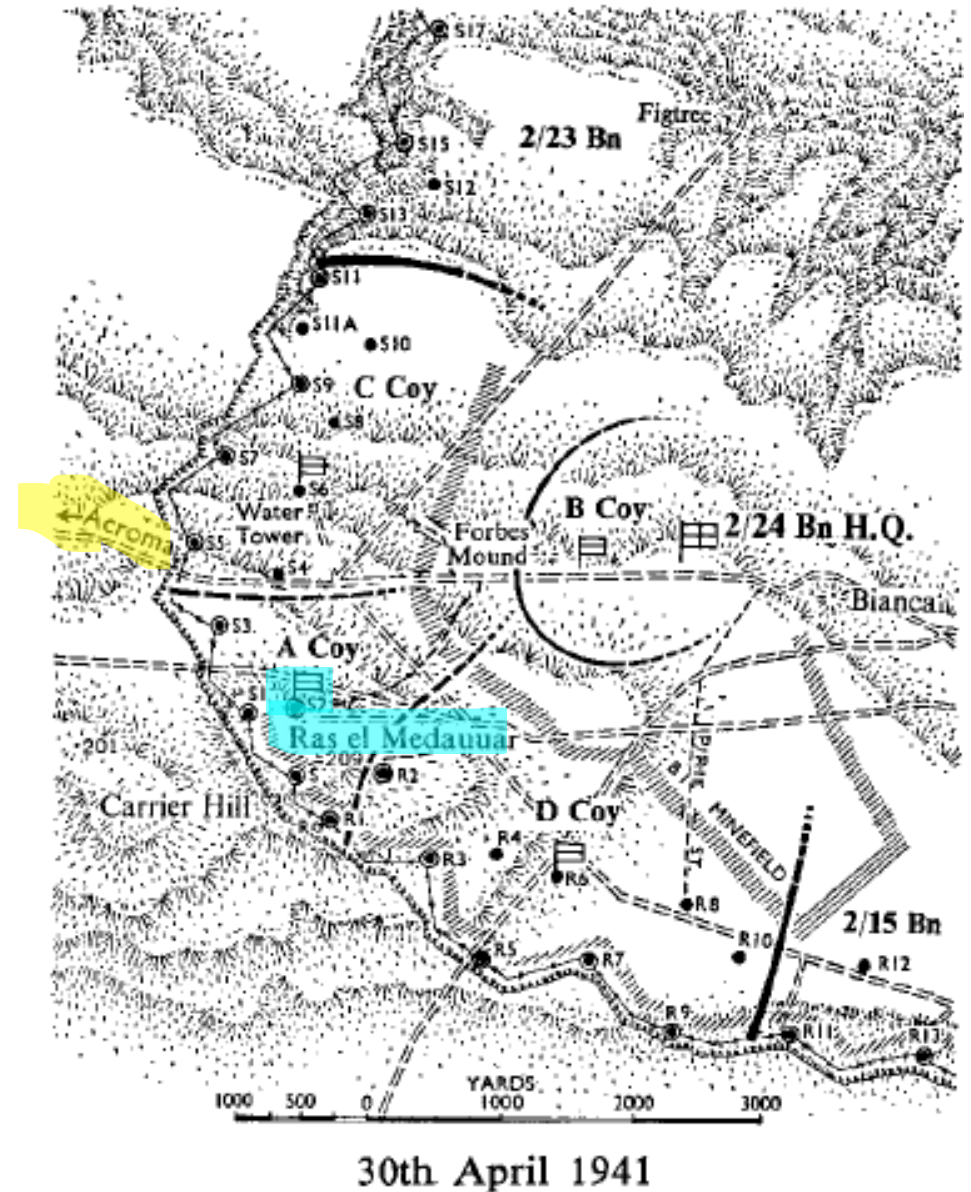
29/30 April 1941 - Med

- General Wilson told Pridham-Wippell that most of the troops at Kalamata would be forced to surrender the following morning and suggested that a few destroyers might be sent on the night of 29th-30th to embark any small parties that might still be free.
- Isis (Senior Officer), Hero and Kimberley left Suda Bay at 5 p.m. on the 29th on this mission. They embarked a total of thirty three officers and men in small isolated parties, and learned that the main body had surrendered at 5.30 a.m. on the 29th.



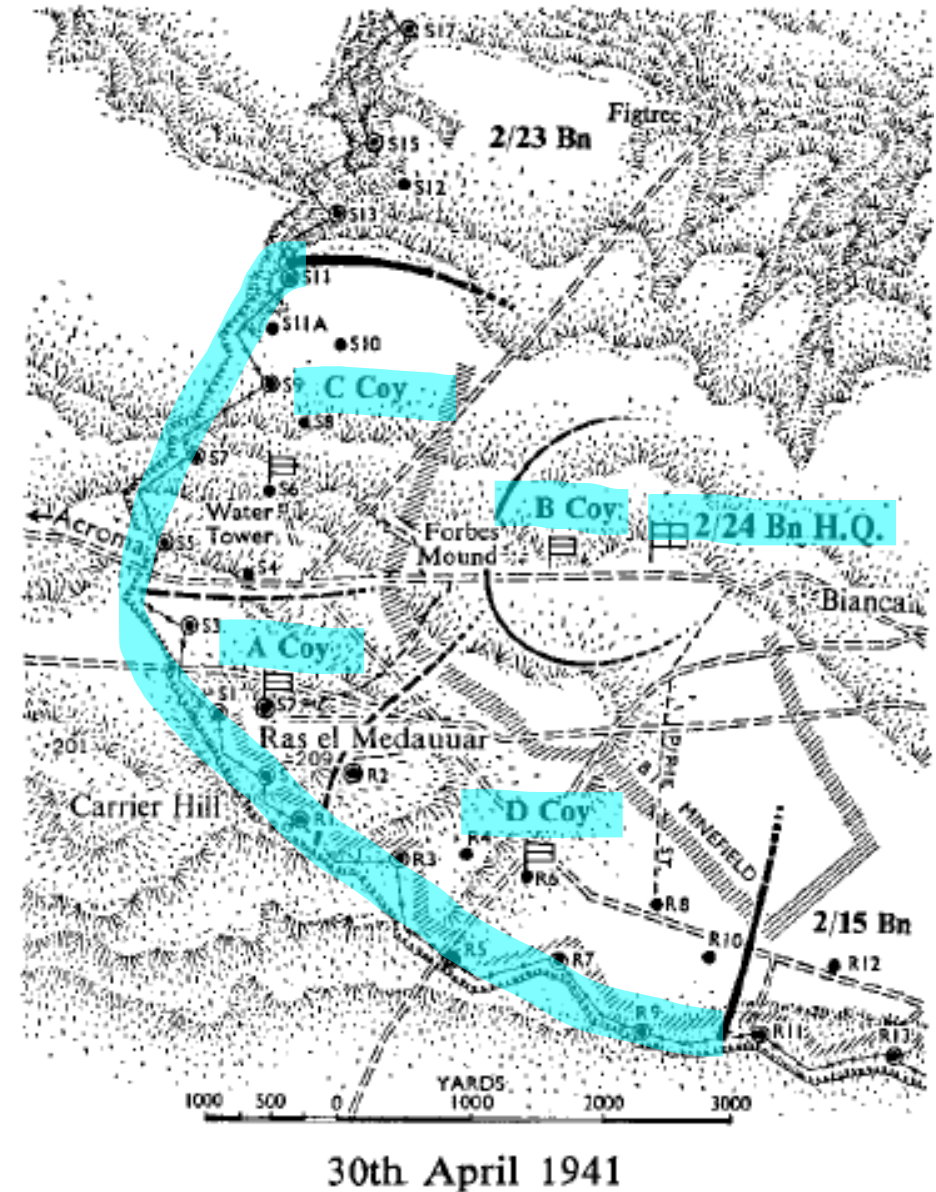
30 April 1941 - Libya

- At first light on 30th April, Major Fell, standing near his headquarters on the forward slopes of Ras el Medauuar, had his attention drawn to clouds of dust in the west in the direction of Acroma, stirred up, it could be seen, by moving vehicles. More than 100 were seen.
- Soon afterwards, farther north, about 20 armoured vehicles were observed moving in along the top of the escarpment, until shells from the defending artillery began to fall among them, when they withdrew.
- The aircraft that made the morning tactical reconnaissance reported an increase in motor transport around the fortress and at Acroma.
- About 9 a.m. enemy infantry could be seen in the distance from the slopes of Medauuar. They dismounted from trucks coming from the direction of Acroma and advanced in line in low ground south of the Acroma Road to within 4,000 yards of the perimeter; there they sat down.



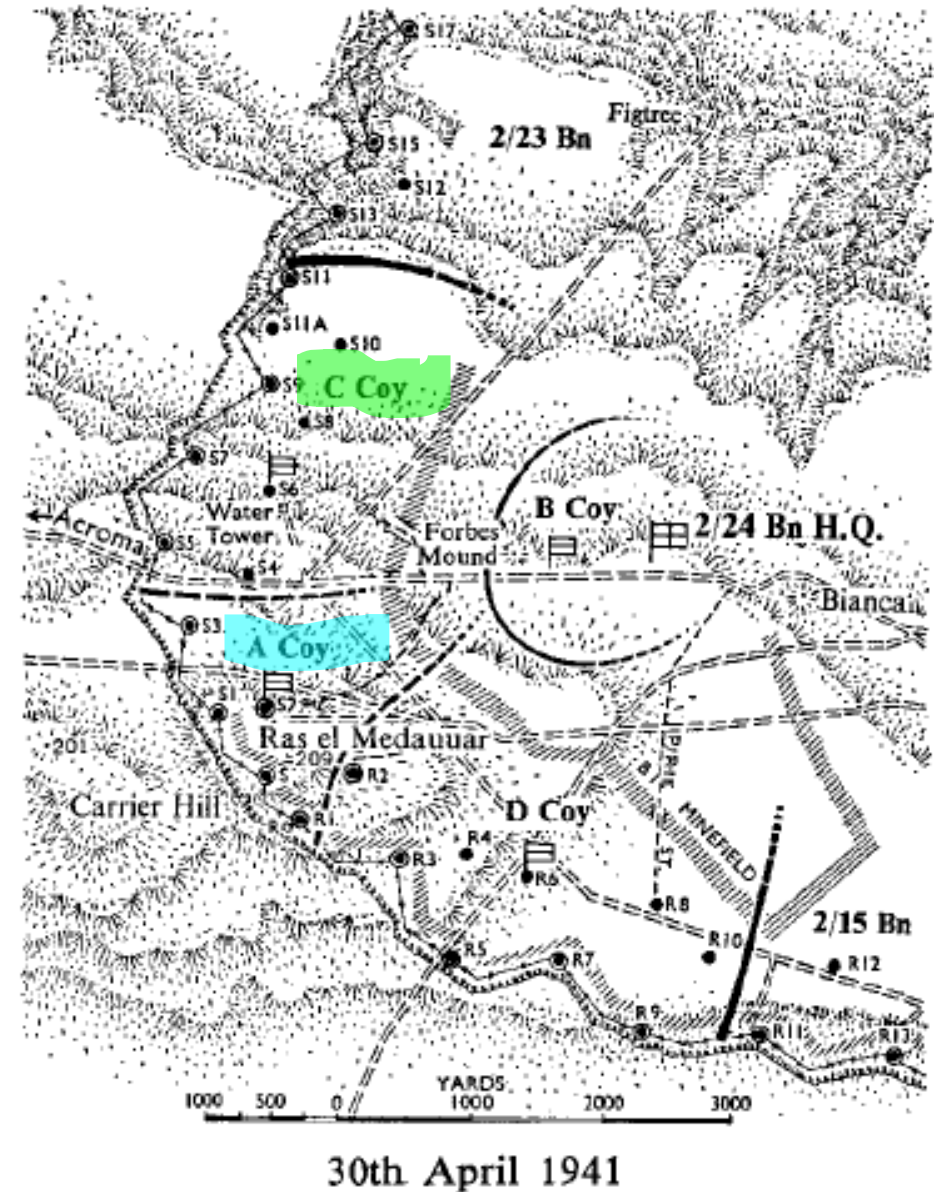
30 April 1941 - Libya

- Curtains of dust closed and parted, giving momentary, hazy views of enemy territory where continuous movement of men and tanks could be indistinctly perceived all day.
- It was noticed that the infantry were slowly coming closer, close enough for the defenders to see that they were Italians.
- Behind them, beyond the ridges, a great volume of dust rose up, more it seemed than the slight wind alone would have raised.
- The 2/24th was ready to meet an attack as previous assaults had been met.
- Yet the morning and afternoon passed quietly on the battalion's front with the exception of some light shelling on Ras el Medauuar by 105-mm guns and of a repetition of the almost regular dive-bombing attacks on the forward troops, chiefly in the western sector.



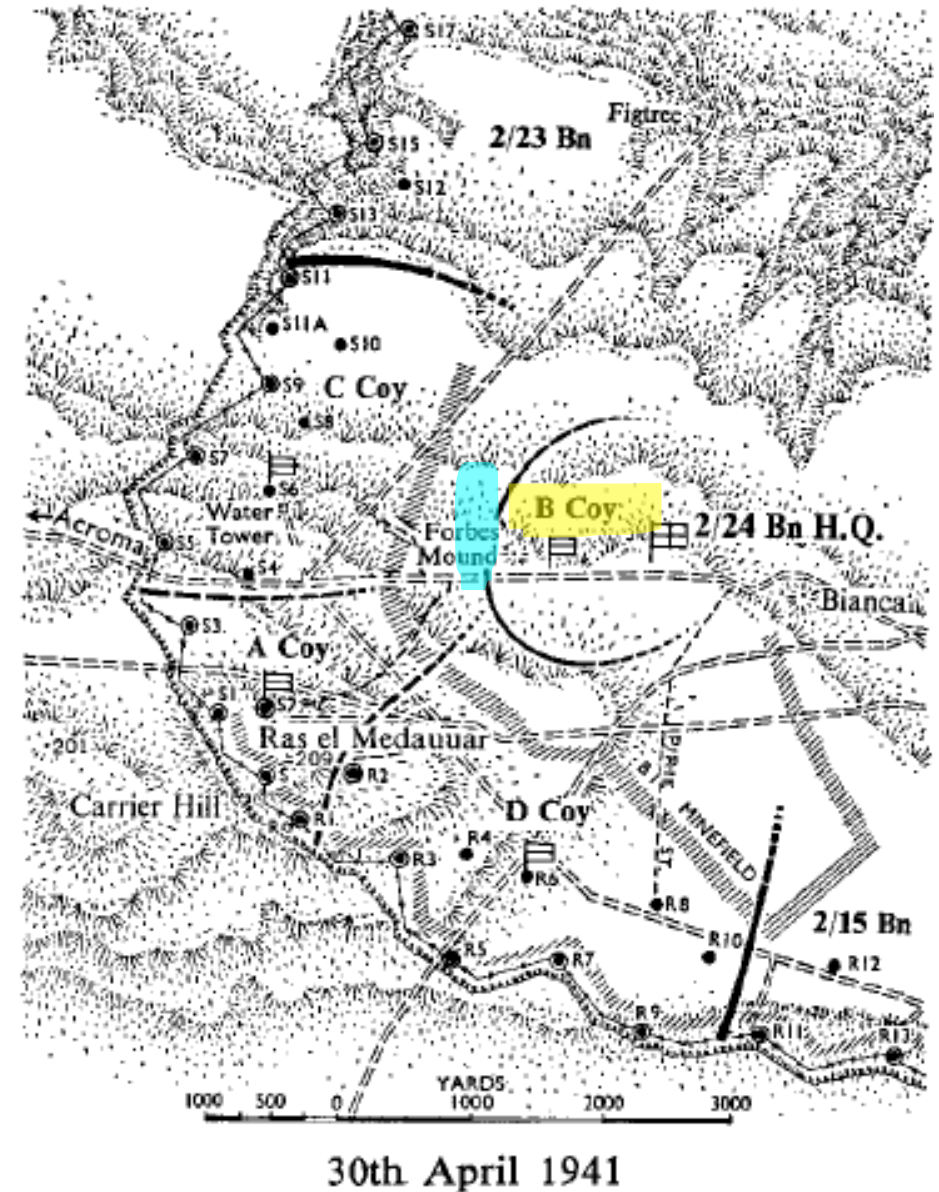
30 April 1941 - Libya

- At 7.45 p.m. as the towers of dust raised by the bombing began to clear, more infantry were seen in the dying light to be gathering about 3,000 yards in front of **Fell's company**. The telephone line to Fell had gone dead, but there was still communication to the companies on either flank.
- Spowers ordered the whole 2/24 battalion to stand to arms.
- At 8 p.m. a heavy artillery barrage was brought down on 4,500 yards of the perimeter on either side of Ras el Medauuar, enveloping the front in a pall of dust as the light continued to fade. At first it fell on the wire.
- At 8.15 red and green flares were seen outside the wire, the barrage lifted and concentrations were brought down with great accuracy upon the perimeter posts themselves.
- About 8.30 p.m. the enemy fired a white flare, there was a pause in the artillery fire and the perimeter wire was blown with bangalore torpedoes between **Canty's** and Fell's companies, in the area where the Acroma road crossed the perimeter.



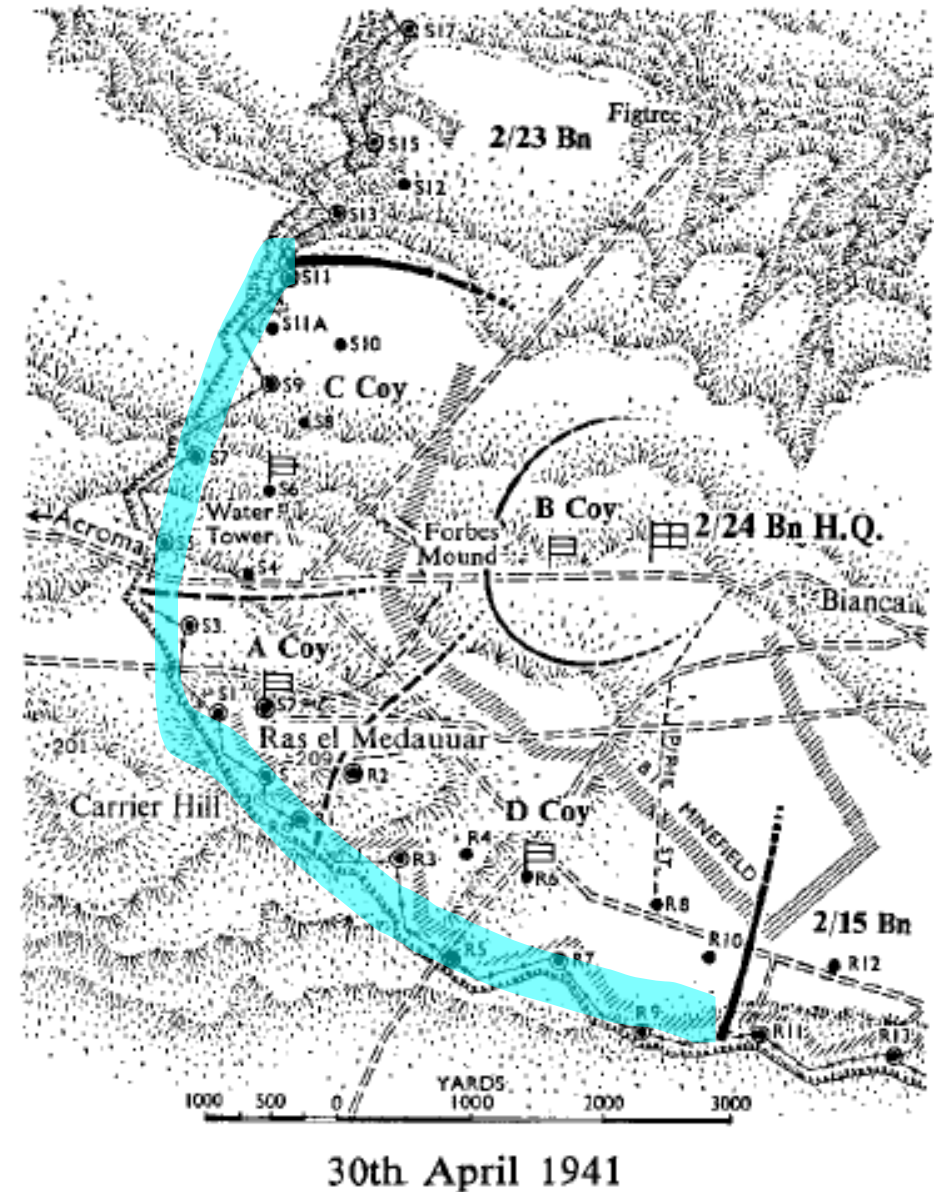
30 April 1941 - Libya

- Spowers of the 2/24th, who had already lost contact with his centre and right wing companies, discovered soon after 9.30 p.m. that his lines to brigade headquarters and to the brigade reserve battalion (the 2/48th) were both dead.
- The wireless link to brigade was opened and the slow process of passing enciphered messages began.
- At 10.14 p.m. Spowers received a report from the commander of his reserve company, Captain Gebhardt, whose forward platoons were astride the east-west road about a mile and a half from where the penetration of the perimeter had been made. His right platoon, Gebhardt said, had been fired on from the north-west at a range of 500 yards; the report indicated that the fire was coming from near the inner minefield about half a mile north of the road.
- Spowers ordered Gebhardt to send out a patrol to ascertain what troops were firing on them and directed the carrier platoon to provide two Bren guns each to battalion headquarters and Gebhardt's company for local protection.



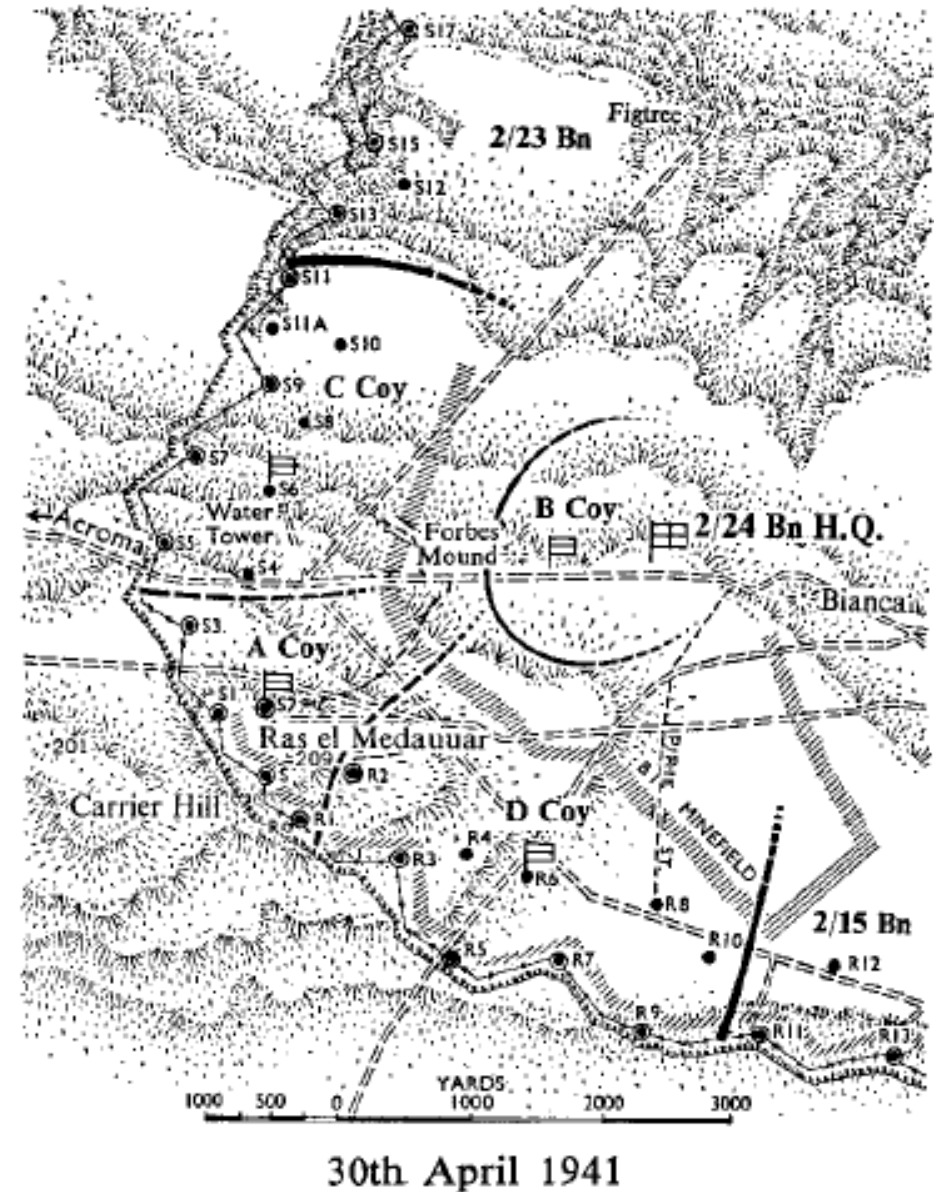
30 April 1941 - Libya

- At 8 p.m. a heavy bombardment out towards the western perimeter was heard over the whole fortress area; it seemed to be falling on the 26th Brigade.
- The hostile rumble of this gunfire might not have been heard in the headquarters operations room; it was a subterranean chamber excavated in solid rock at the end of a tunnel burrowed deep into the face of the second escarpment.
- At 9.30 p.m., the 26th Brigade reported that the artillery fire had now died out; a considerable number of green and white flares had been seen along the perimeter; there was no further information available because Major Fell's and Captain Canty's companies, on whose front the flares had been seen, were out of communication.
- Then at 11.20 p.m. came a message from 26 Brigade.
- "Penetration 2/24 Battalion area possible but situation not certain."



30 April 1941 - Libya

- When this information reached divisional headquarters, General Morshead had retired.
- Colonel Lloyd warned the other brigades and sought a detailed report from Tovell.
- He then told Brigadier Wooten (commanding the division's reserve brigade) that the enemy appeared to be holding a bridgehead in front of Ras el Medauuar between Posts S3 and R3 from which to launch an attack in the morning.
- Wooten ordered his battalions to stand to arms.
- Just before midnight Spowers at last received word from Gebhardt that the reconnaissance patrol had located the "Italian" party. Spowers ordered Gebhardt to "collect them if possible" by means of a fighting patrol at least a platoon strong.



30 April 1941 - Crete

- On the 29th April the convoy carrying Freyberg and the 6th New Zealand Brigade had reached Suda Bay. Freyberg went ashore thinking to obtain a passage by air to Egypt, where he understood his division would be assembled and reorganised, and to visit his 5th Brigade which he knew was staging in Crete. It was arranged that he should set off for Egypt early next morning, but, when morning came, he was instructed to remain and attend a conference at Canea a few hours later. Freyberg described the meeting:
- “We met in a small village between Maleme and Canea and set to work at 11.30 General Wavell had arrived by air and he looked drawn and tired and more weary than any of us. Just prior to sitting down General Wavell and General Wilson had a heart-to-heart talk in one corner and then the C-in-C called me over. He took me by the arm and said "I want to tell you how well I think the New Zealand Division has done in Greece. I do not believe any other Division would have carried out those withdrawals as well." His next words came as a complete surprise. He said he wanted me to take command of the forces in Crete and went on to say that he considered Crete would be attacked in the next few days. I told him that I wanted to get back to Egypt to concentrate the division and train and re-equip it and I added that my Government would never agree to the division being split permanently. He then said that he considered it my duty to remain and take on the job. I could do nothing but accept.”
- In their "heart-to-heart talk" Wavell had told Wilson that he wished him "to go to Jerusalem and relieve Baghdad".

30 April 1941 - Crete

- It was decided that the likely scale of attack was by 5,000 to 6,000 airborne troops and possibly seaborne troops also, launched against Maleme and Heraklion airfields; no additional air support could be provided.
- Freyberg took Wavell aside and told him that there were not enough men on Crete to hold it, and that they were inadequately armed; and he asked that the decision to defend the island be reconsidered if aircraft were not to be available.
- Wavell said that the scale of the probable attack had possibly been exaggerated, that he was confident that the troops would be equal to their task.
- He told Freyberg that in any event Crete could not be evacuated because there were not enough ships to take the troops away.



30 April 1941 - Berlin

- The losses of the German Twelfth Army in Greece, announced by Hitler soon after the campaign ended, were 1,160 killed, 3,755 wounded and 345 missing.



Hitler and the Japanese foreign minister, Yōsuke Matsuoka, at a meeting in Berlin in March 1941.

30 April 1941 - Greece

- The total strengths of the British, Australian and New Zealand contingents in Greece were:

• British Army	21,880
• Australian	17,125
• New Zealand	16,720
• Palestinians and Cypriots	4,670
• R.A.F.	2,217
• Total	62,612

- losses suffered by the contingents were:

	Killed	Wounded	Prisoners
• British	146	87	6,480
• Australian	320	494	2,030
• New Zealand	291	599	1,614
• P and C	36	25	3,806
• R.A.F.	110	45	28
• Total	903	1,250	13,958

30 April 1941 - London

- Menzies writes in his diary:
- Clearing up. Whenever we leave, we leave in a hurry. Queer trait in human nature! Great argument in War Cabinet. I protest against W.C. deciding what advice to offer USA regarding moving Pacific fleet (*or a real section of it*) to the Atlantic, without reference to Australia, though I was in London!
- I was too late after flying to Swansea via Cardiff, to receive the freedom of Swansea. Last night Cardiff visited by land mines and I see the smoking results! Picturesque but in some ways horrible day.



30 April 1941 - London

- The issue of consultation arose in relation to —the transfer of the United States Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic. The Australian interest arose from the fact that the main deterrent to any further Japanese aggression was considered to be the presence of a strong American fleet in the Pacific. Owing to the weakness of Singapore and of British naval forces, the American Navy was thought to be the biggest single factor in the stability of the Pacific and the expectation of stability in the Pacific was the condition on which Australian contributions to the war against Germany were possible.
- No rumour or whisper reached Menzies of the contemplated change. He learnt of the proposal for the first time when the Dominions Office supplied him in a routine way with the duplicates of cablegrams it had sent out to Australia on the previous day.
- Menzies told the British War Cabinet pretty plainly that this was not good enough and, in doing so, found that some of the members of the Cabinet themselves did not know of the proposal.



30 April 1941 - London

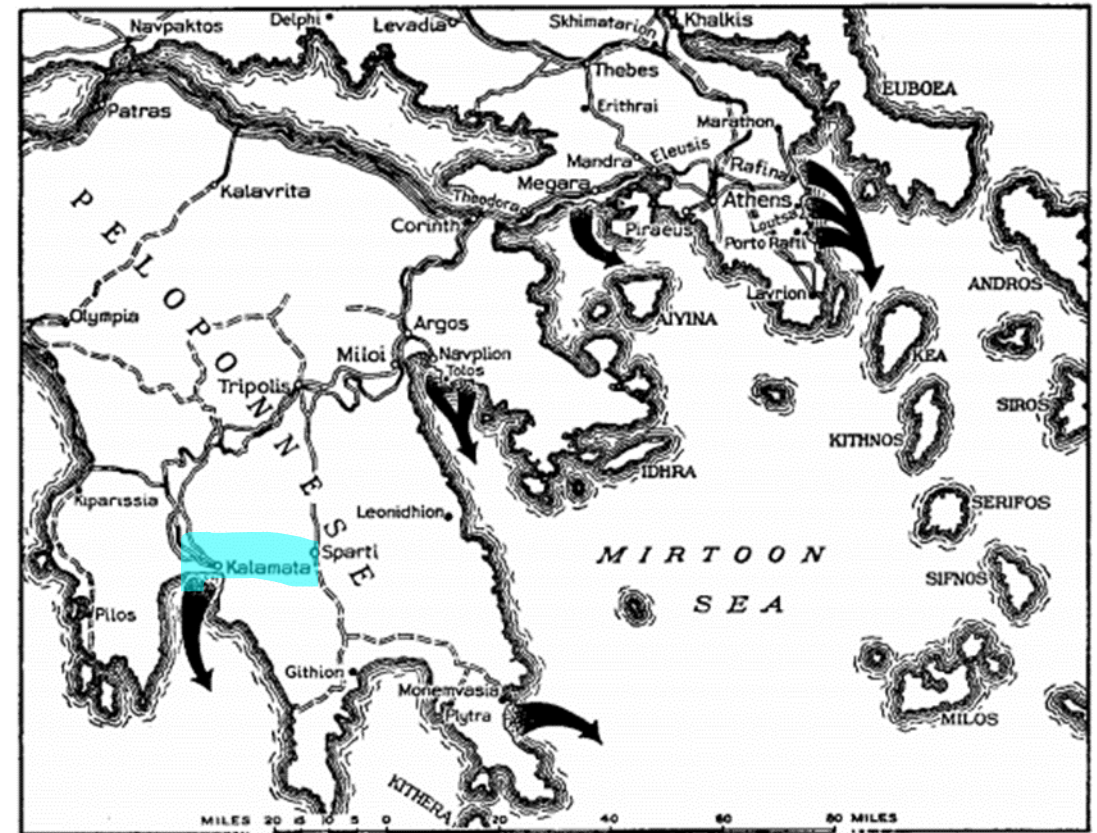
- In April 1941 de Gaulle proposed to Churchill that the Free French forces should take military action against Syria, and, towards the end of the month, Dill asked Wavell what forces he had to assist the French inside Syria should they decide to resist the entry of Germans and break free from Vichy.
- There was considerable doubt, however, whether the French forces inside Syria would, in fact, resist.



Charles de Gaulle (far right) with Andrew McNaughton, Władysław Sikorski, and Winston Churchill

30 April/1 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- The operation (to Kalamata) was repeated by the same three ships (Isis, Hero and Kimberley) on the night of the 30th April, when a few stragglers were picked up near the town, but an organised body was found ashore about seven miles to the south-eastward
- A total of about 200 officers and men were picked up on this night. Ships returned direct to Port Said—Alexandria being temporarily closed by aircraft mines.
- On the same night Hotspur and Havock went from Suda Bay to Milos Island and there embarked 700 British and Palestinian troops. The two ships proceeded via Kaso Strait to Port Said.



The embarkation beaches.

1 May 1941 - Libya

- About 5 a.m. an engagement in front of "C" Company of the 2/13th Battalion on the El Adem Road sector was reported. The enemy force, which was German, was first observed by a deep patrol of section strength led by Corporal Hewitt; they were moving noisily down the El Adem Road towards the perimeter; Hewitt estimated that they were about 50 strong. Hewitt realised that they would run into "C" Company's standing patrol outside the wire, so stationed his patrol to cut off their retreat.
- His prediction was fully realised. Caught in the standing patrol's hot fire the enemy beat a hasty retreat, only to be engaged by Hewitt's men.
- The enemy dropped their stores, including wire-cutting tools and explosives, and fled. Six prisoners were taken, all of them wounded.
- The enemy artillery opened a bombardment at 5.45 a.m.; it seemed to be directed mainly against the perimeter defences on the left of the battalion's area.



It was then just on first light but then a thick mist drifted across the front to prolong the defenders' ignorance of the situation.

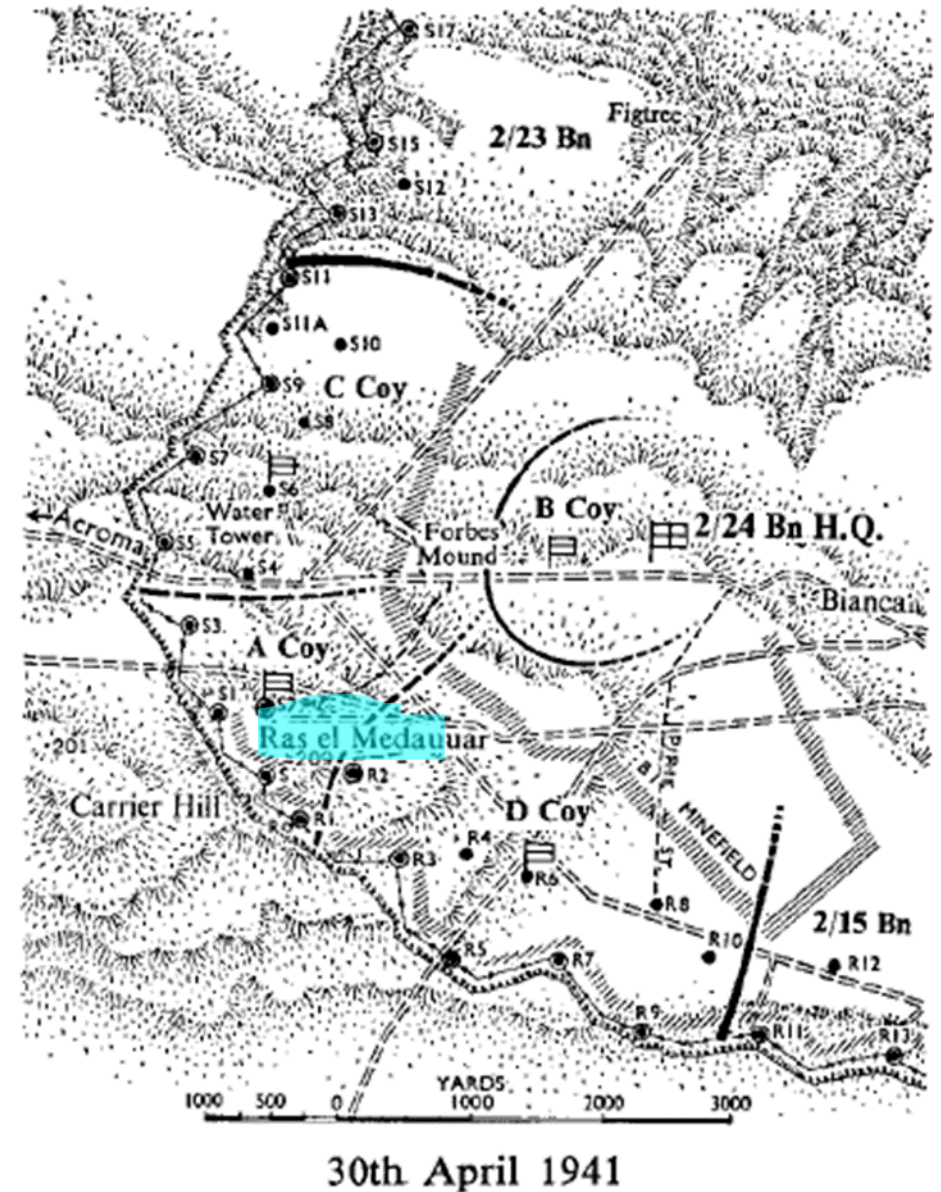
1 May 1941 - Libya

- Shelton with a section of carriers at 6.30 a.m., in heavy mist, moved out and found that weapon-pits had been dug on the left of Gebhardt's company but were unoccupied.
- Shelton told Spowers that he had been fired on from the north side of the Acroma Road by a large body of troops that he thought might be Malloch's company.
- He offered to try to contact Fell's company. Spowers agreed.
- Shelton reported at 6.42 a.m. that the hut was occupied by the enemy (by "Italians", according to the battalion action log). At 7.10 a.m. he reported again that he could see only for a distance of 200 yards, and had been fired on by a large body of troops, but would try to contact Fell's company.



1 May 1941 - Libya

- Spowers reported to Tovell's headquarters that the situation seemed to have clarified; Canty's company appeared to be all right, also the "centre" and left flank. The shelling had ceased but occasional bursts of sub-machine-gun fire could still be heard.
- He was awaiting the return of Shelton's carrier from Fell 's company.
- Just afterwards the sun broke through and the mist cleared; Shelton's carrier could be seen burning on the Acroma Road.
- As the fog dispersed, heavy firing broke out along the perimeter in the Medauuar sector; dive bombers swept down with blaring sirens and other aircraft strafed the front.
- Some 10 minutes later the patrol sent out by Gebhardt returned and reported that they had been unable to reach Fell's company.
- They said that there were six enemy tanks on the east side of Ras el Medauuar.



1 May 1941 - Libya

- Some 15 minutes after the mist lifted about a battalion of enemy infantry were perceived by artillery observers advancing eastwards from the area near the hut north of Ras el Medauuar, which was approximately on the boundary of Canty's and Fell's companies.
- Gunfire from the 51st Field Regiment effectively broke up the advance.
- At 7 a.m. five tanks had approached the 2/13th Battalion's wire where Corporal Hewitt's patrol had intercepted the enemy engineer party.
- They came as if to attack and searched for a gap. The 1st R.H.A. engaged and the tanks soon withdrew.

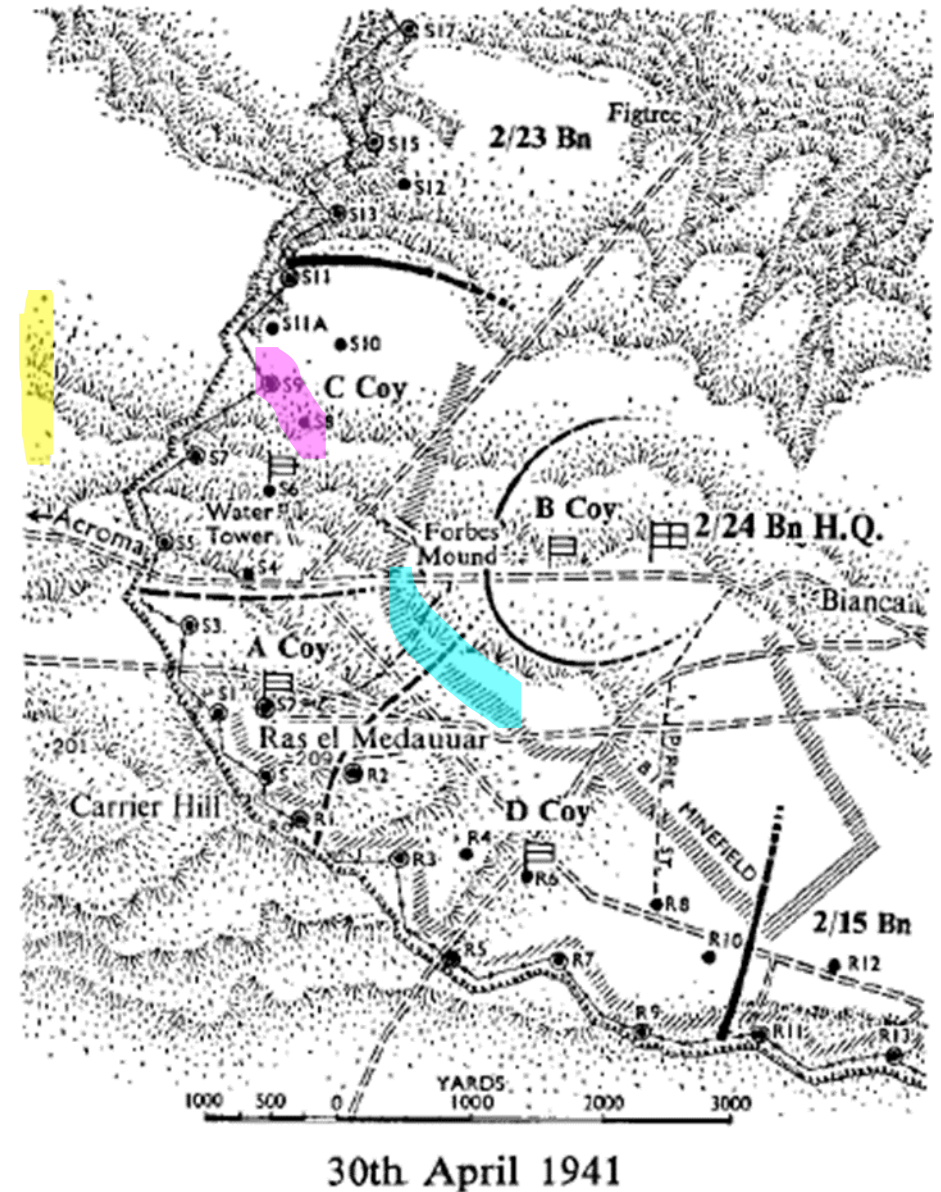


1 May 1941 - Libya

- Five minutes later 30 enemy tanks were seen on the slope of Ras el Medauuar, some towing anti-tank guns. At 8 a.m. they began to come over the sky-line south of that high point, moving eastwards. Behind them more followed. In all, about 40 took part in this thrust—there were about 80 inside the wire.
- The British gunners were at first reluctant to engage them, fearing that their fire might harm Australian infantry in the same area. But the tanks came on, and soon encountered the fire of every artillery piece the defenders could bring to bear. Captain Norman's 24th Anti-Tank Company engaged them in flank. Corporal Aston's gun knocked out one German Mark III and two other tanks, but was then beset by 11 or 12. Two of the crew (Lance-Corporal Luck and Private Bridges) were seriously wounded but the others kept the gun firing until it was smashed by a direct hit. Norman's company lost three guns in the action.
- From behind Forbes' Mound a gun of the 26th Anti-Tank Company commanded by Corporal Edmonds also engaged the German tanks, scoring several hits and stopping two; even after pieces had been torn off his gun's recoil spring cover and breech-block by fire from the tanks, Edmonds kept firing his gun, until he fell mortally wounded.

1 May 1941 - Libya

- The German tank column, shedding one or two tanks damaged by gunfire, moved forward irresistibly until it ran straight onto the B1 minefield in front of Gebhardt's company.
- Within a few minutes 17 tanks had struck mines and come to a halt.
- About a battalion of German infantry followed the tanks but, as they reached the perimeter defences, came under intense fire from the 51st Field Regiment firing at extreme range; the infantry advance was broken up.
- About 15 minutes later more infantry were driven up in lorries about 2,000 yards out from the perimeter opposite Canty's company. There they left their vehicles and advanced between Posts S8 and S9. They too were subjected to gunfire by the 51st Field Regiment.

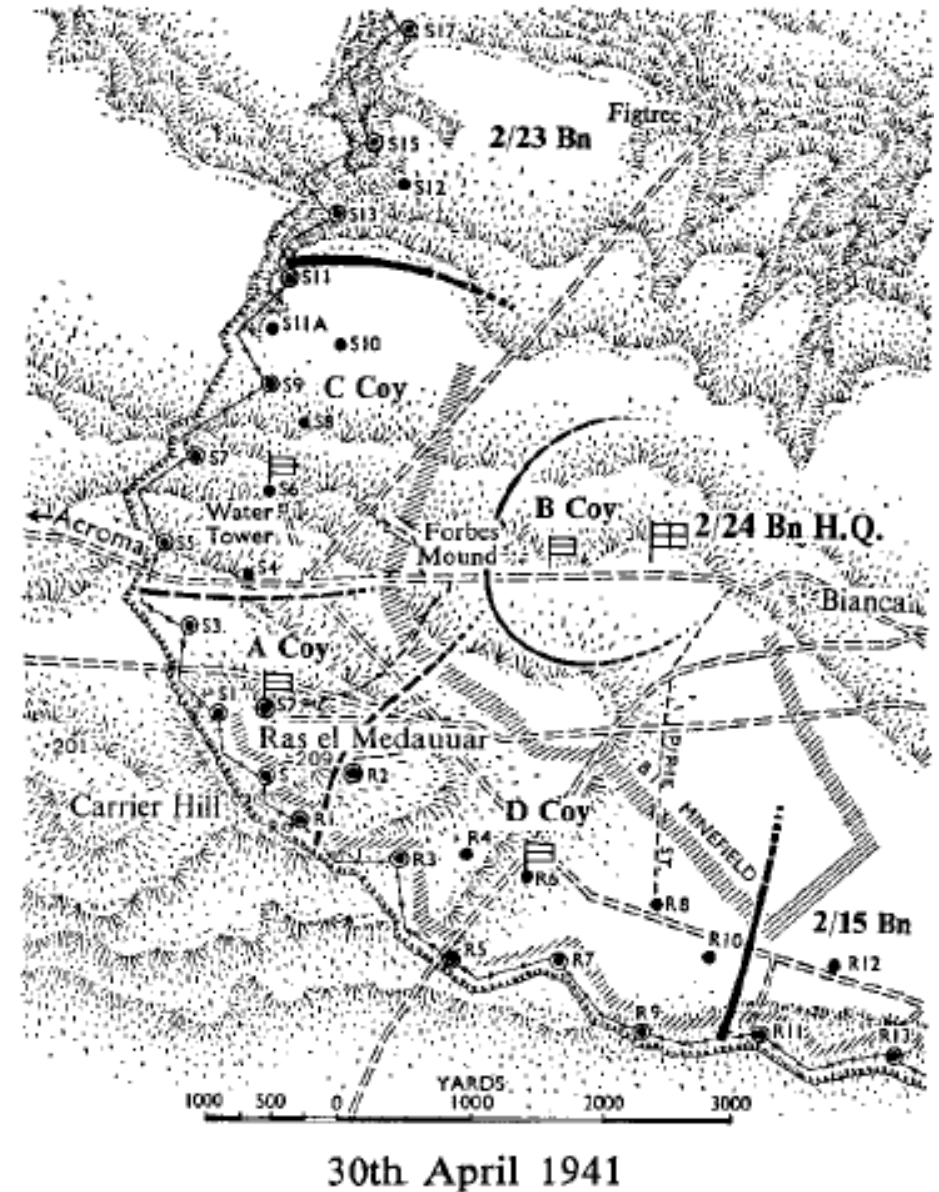


1 May 1941 - Libya

- The 1st and 107th R .H.A. were engaging the tanks.
- Behind the first column of 40, which had become bogged down in the B1 minefield, a second containing 30 more was now moving among the perimeter posts east of Ras el Medauar. One or two flame-throwers were towed by tanks, but they proved very vulnerable to fire.
- Each post was attacked in turn. As the head of the column reached a post, two or three tanks remained to stand over it while the rest moved on. Smoke was laid down continuously to cover the column's operations but seems to have impeded observation more from the east than from the north.
- The column was engaged by the four anti-tank guns of "B" Troop (Lieutenant Hatch and Sergeant Carley) of "J" Battery of the 3rd R.H.A. Bombardier Lane's gun was overrun by seven tanks but four of these were later knocked out by another gun and their crews, as they emerged, were shot up by Gunner Deane with his Bren. Bombardier Rudd succeeded in scoring hits against six tanks in all and in keeping his gun in action though attacked on all sides.
- Three British cruiser tanks of "B " Squadron advanced towards the German tanks in the area R6-R8, fired a few rounds and then withdrew behind a ridge. The enemy put down smoke. The German tanks soon afterwards withdrew.

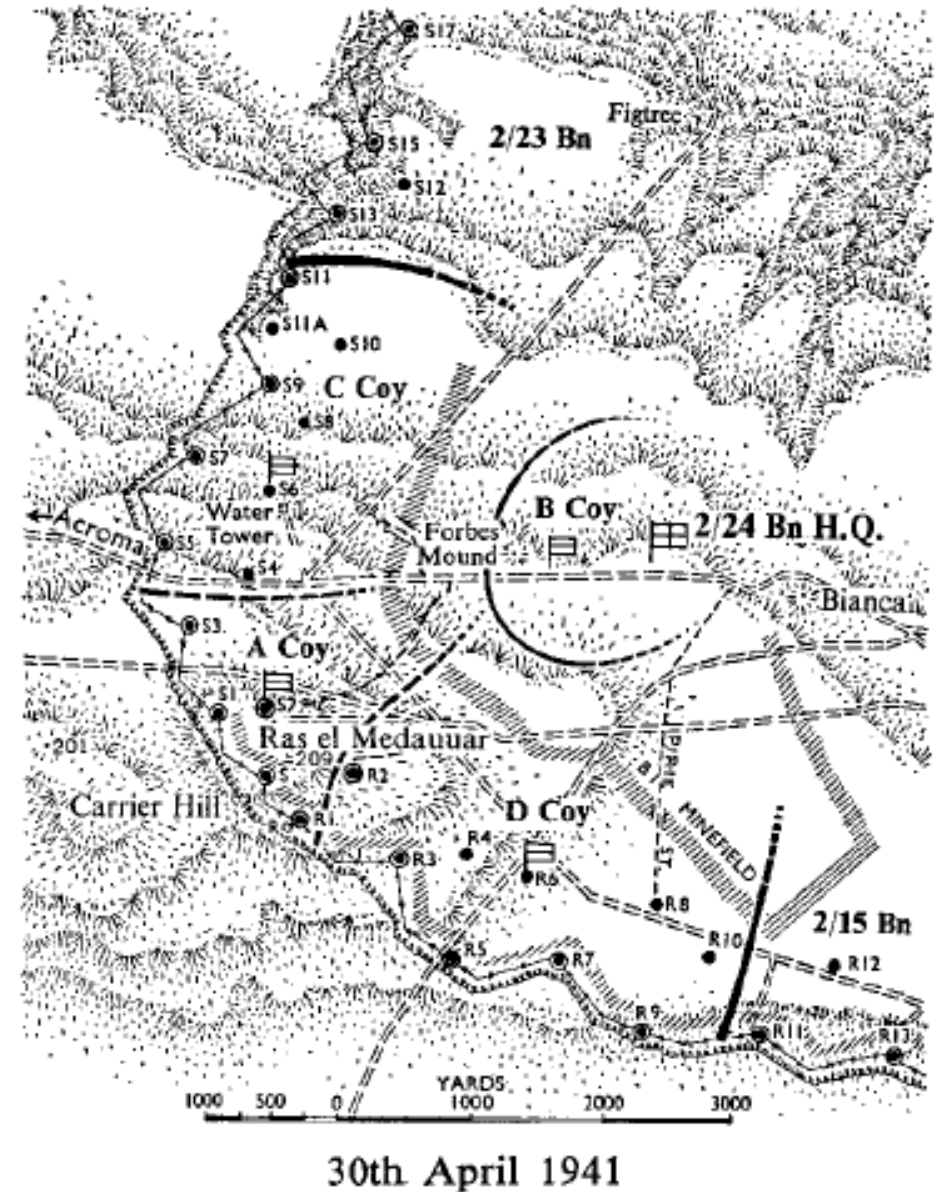
1 May 1941 - Libya

- The leading tank column had withdrawn from the B1 minefield. Part of it had turned south as though to link up with the column moving along the perimeter; their route took them past a gun of the 26th Anti-Tank Company commanded by Corporal Biggs, who staunchly engaged them.
- They did not proceed, however, but turned back by the way they had come to rally near Ras el Medauuar. Meanwhile, near the El Adem Road, the enemy was laying a smoke screen in the region where Corporal Hewitt's patrol had ambushed the German demolition party.



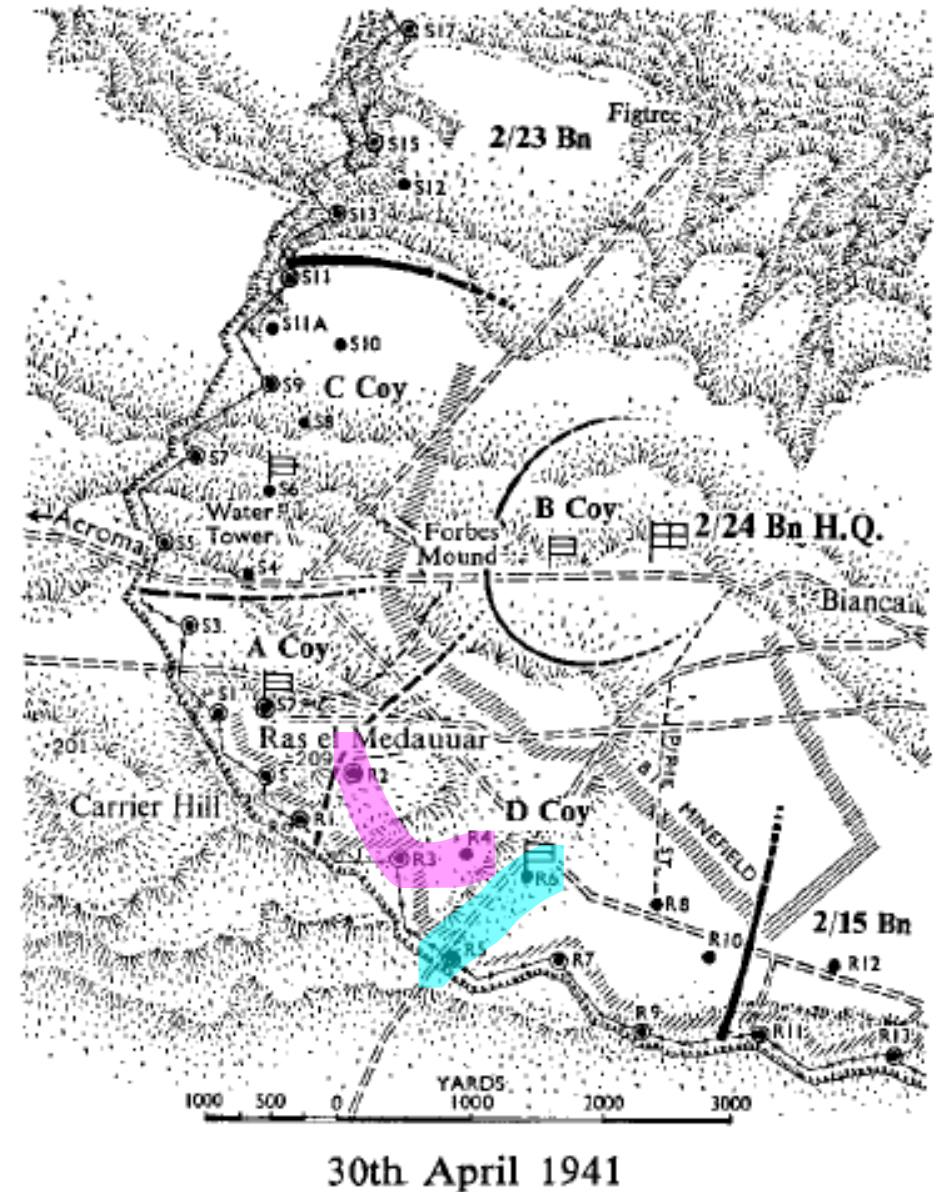
1 May 1941 - Libya

- Nobody knew what had happened to Spowers' infantry on the perimeter who had been out of touch throughout the night and through whose defences the German tanks had broken in such alarming numbers.
- As the German armour moved on, officers of the British artillery continually moved about the battlefield directing fire upon both tanks and infantry concentrations, Captain Clapham of the 51st Field Regiment in his 8-cwt truck, Captain May and Major Goschen of the 1st R.H.A. and Captain Slinn of the 107th are recalled, while others continued to observe and to direct the guns from near the edge of the turmoil area, like Captain Hay who remained all day at Post R14 and who directed the fire of the "B/O" Battery against the first tank assault.
- The Axis air force dominated the skies above the battlefield and was continually active that day—in one attack on "B" Troop of the 1st R.H.A. seven men were killed and two wounded.



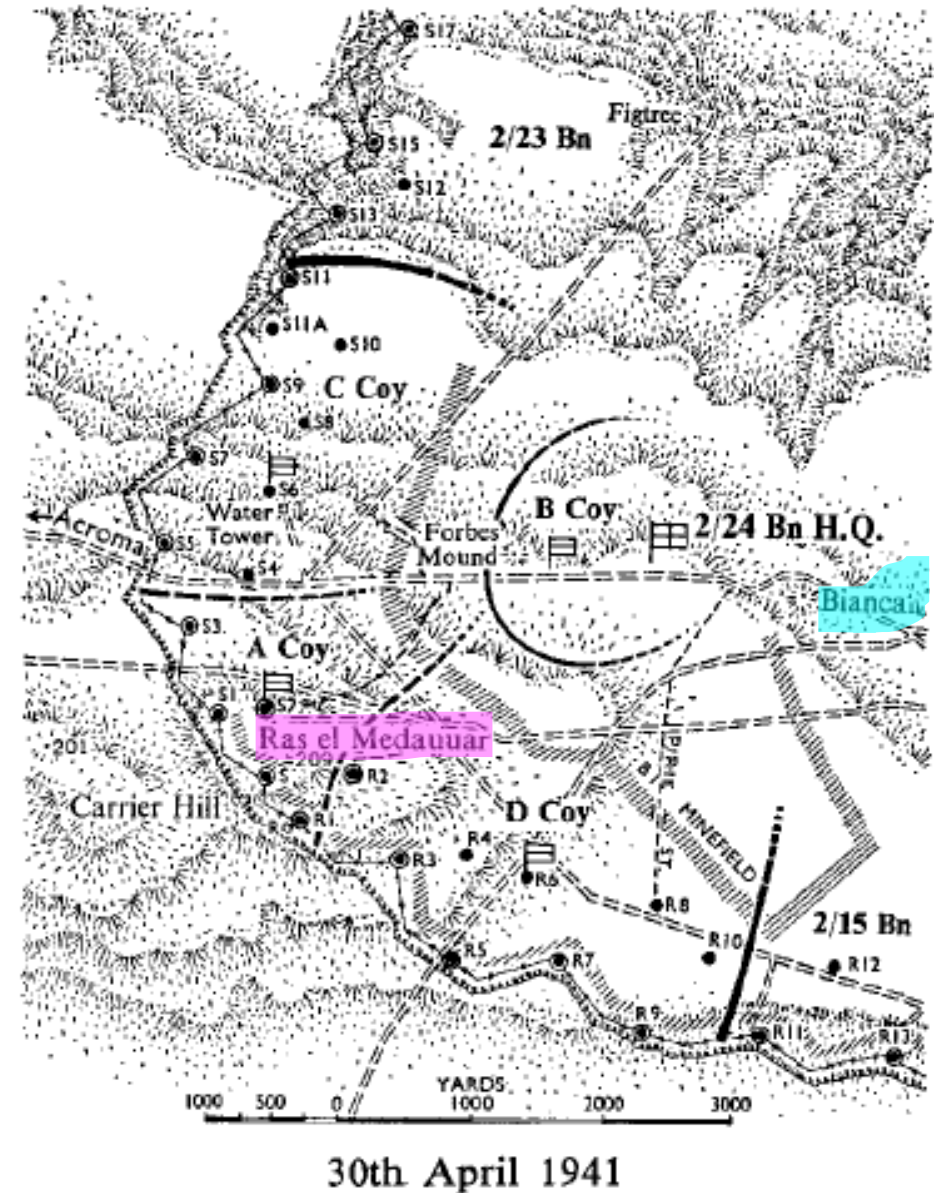
1 May 1941 - Libya

- The German tanks that had retired from the B 1 minefield to reassemble behind Ras el Medauuar, re-formed and thrust south-eastwards, followed by troop transporters, to continue the process of rolling up the perimeter posts.
- Two or three tanks peeled off at each post to shoot in the weaponpits. Then grenades were thrown right into the posts.
- Numbers of troop-carrying vehicles were sighted, but the enemy infantry in the main failed to follow up their tanks.
- The head of the column of tanks pushed on through Lieutenant Mair's platoon area (Posts R2, 3 and 4), past Posts R5 and 6 to the east of Post R7, and there formed a semi-circle facing eastwards.
- Other tanks began breaking down the perimeter wire by dragging cable stretched between two tanks across it.
- Some infantry advanced on Post R5 under cover of a small ditch. Corporal Gazzard stood up above his weapon-pit to engage them and was swiftly killed.
- Posts R5 (Sergeant Poidevin), R6 (Captain Bird) and R7 (Corporal Jones) held out.



1 May 1941 - Libya

- About 300 enemy infantry who had followed the first tank thrust into the perimeter were being mercilessly harassed both by the artillery and by the machine-guns of a detachment of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers stationed at Point 171. Many dispersed and sought cover in the area to the west of Bianca, a white mound that lay astride the northernmost of the two tracks leading into Pilastrino.
- Other infantry of the attacking force were digging in near the breach in the perimeter north of Ras el Medauuar, and farther north above the escarpment.
- About 11.30 a.m. the now stationary spearhead of the enemy tank force, comprising about 25 tanks, was attacked by the ten cruiser tanks of 1st R.T.R.. Several hits were scored on the intruding tanks at a range of from 700 to 800 yards and one medium and two light German tanks were seen to catch fire. The enemy then put down smoke, which halted the engagement; but one of the British tanks had been destroyed and two of the cruisers were hit as they turned to withdraw.
- The guns of the 1st and 107th R.H.A. then concentrated on the German armour, which withdrew behind Ras el Medauuar.



1 May 1941 - Libya

- It was a confused fight, of which no coherent picture could be obtained at the time. Tanks and gunfire had cut all telephone lines in the penetration area. Smoke from shells and bombs and burning vehicles, smoke screens deliberately laid and dust churned up by tanks and trucks were daubed across a blurred landscape shimmering under a mirage through which the black forms of moving tanks could only vaguely be apprehended. As the day advanced a hot wind got up and lifted more dust.
- Soon after midday the attackers exerted pressure on both flanks to extend the width of their breach.
- On the northern flank a small group of tanks outside the perimeter thrust past Post S7 until, near S13 and S15, they were bombarded by the 51st Field Regiment just before 1 p.m. and forced to withdraw. Infantry in trucks followed the tanks, dismounted and attacked the posts from S7 northwards, but with little success against staunch defence. Lieutenant Christie, with headquarters in Post S8 and a forward section in S9, though surrounded, hung on.
- So did Lieutenant Rosel whose platoon, on the extreme right of the battalion front, held Posts S10, S11 and S11A. Rosel had taken charge of the company after Captain Canty's surrender had been enforced earlier in the morning.
- When Rosel found his ammunition stocks dwindling he sent to the neighbouring 2/23rd Battalion for replenishment. About 2.30 p.m. a party led by Corporal Jackson was sent out and delivered several thousand rounds of small-arms ammunition to Rosel in S10.

1 May 1941 - Libya

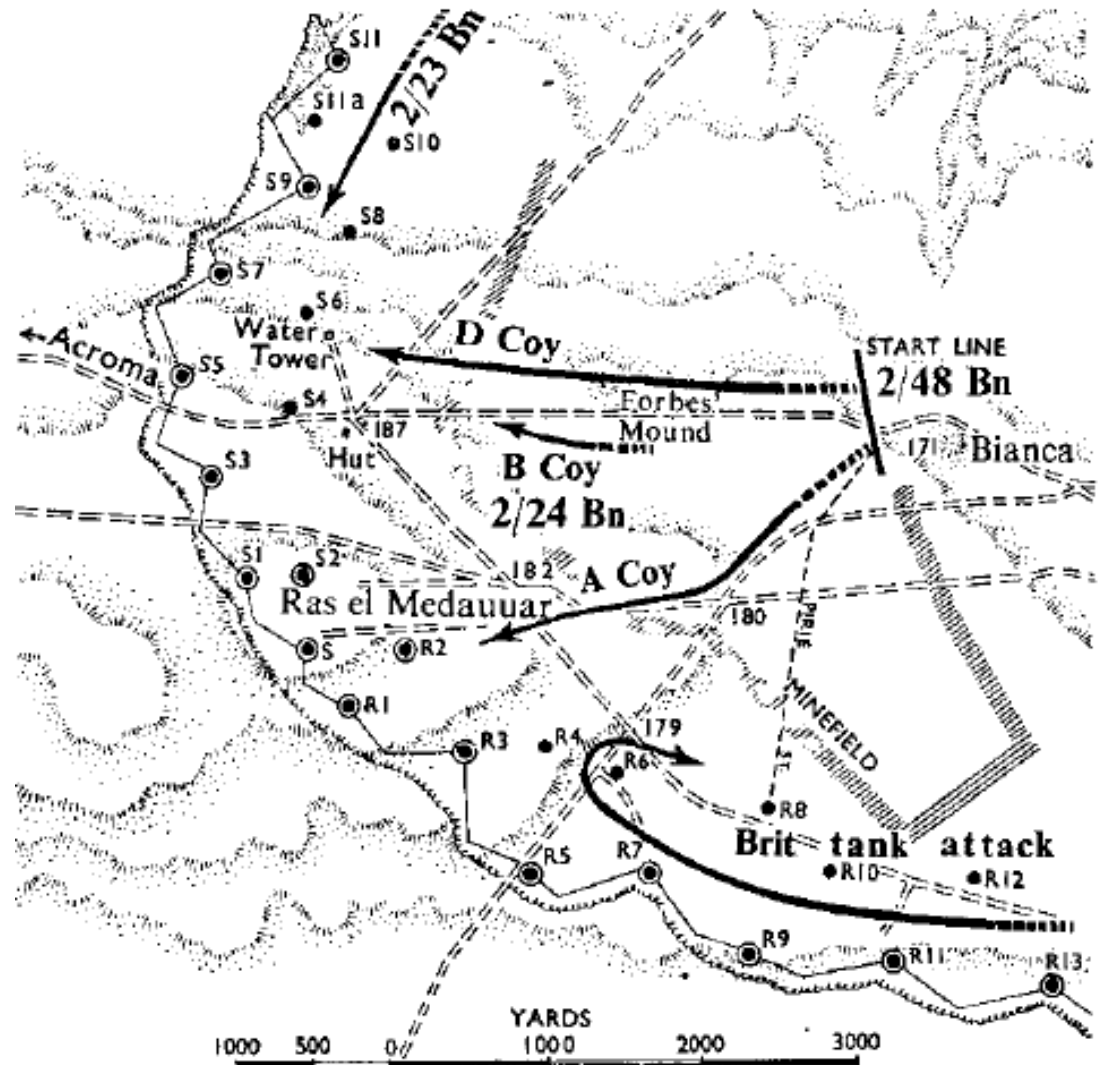
- Rosel* wrote a message reporting the situation and gave it to Corporal Jackson to take back.
- “To D Company 2/23rd Battalion
- From 14 Platoon 2/24th Battalion
- Received ammunition. No idea how 15 Platoon and Company Headquarters are faring. 13 Platoon lost forward section Post S7. Enemy have occupied this post in strength. Also have light gun on ridge above this post making holding of this platoon area untenable. Enemy also have mortar in position on ridge. Propose withdraw men from 8 and 9 and place them in 10 and 11A with my men. I have no communications with anyone outside. There appear to be some two hundred enemy across the wadi from S11. Came up in transport and are digging themselves in. Post S8 have 5 German prisoners, one being badly wounded. Wire in front of my position worthless. In 10 I have 1 Breda, plenty of ammunition, 1 Bren, 4,000 rounds. In 11A 2 Brens with total of 2,000 rounds. Post 11—this includes your section—1 Bren with 3,000, 1 Breda 3,000, 1 Iti mortar with 300 bombs, only 50 ballistite rounds, 1 Anti-Tank Rifle, 220 rounds. Another 2 days rations still on hand. Could you possibly contact ISKO [2/24 Battalion headquarters] and hand on this information. Hope you can understand this. Viva la battalion. The position tonight is going to be very serious and if some reinforcements could be produced we would stand a fair chance. ISKO might know how our Company HQ and 15 Platoon stand. Here's hoping. Thanks for your assistance.
- J. Rosel 1540 hrs 1 May
- Keeping one of your Brens.”
- *Capt J. S . Rosel, MC, VX48603; 2/24 Bn. Bank clerk; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Natimuk, Vic , 26 Jan 1917.

1 May 1941 - Libya

In the early afternoon Morshead had decided to mount an infantry counter-attack with tank support to recover the breach in the Medauuar sector. It was to be made in mid-afternoon and the task was assigned to the 2/48th Battalion.

At 2.30 p.m. Lieut-Colonel Verrier's 2/10th Battalion was warned that it would be required to relieve Windeyer's battalion to release the latter.

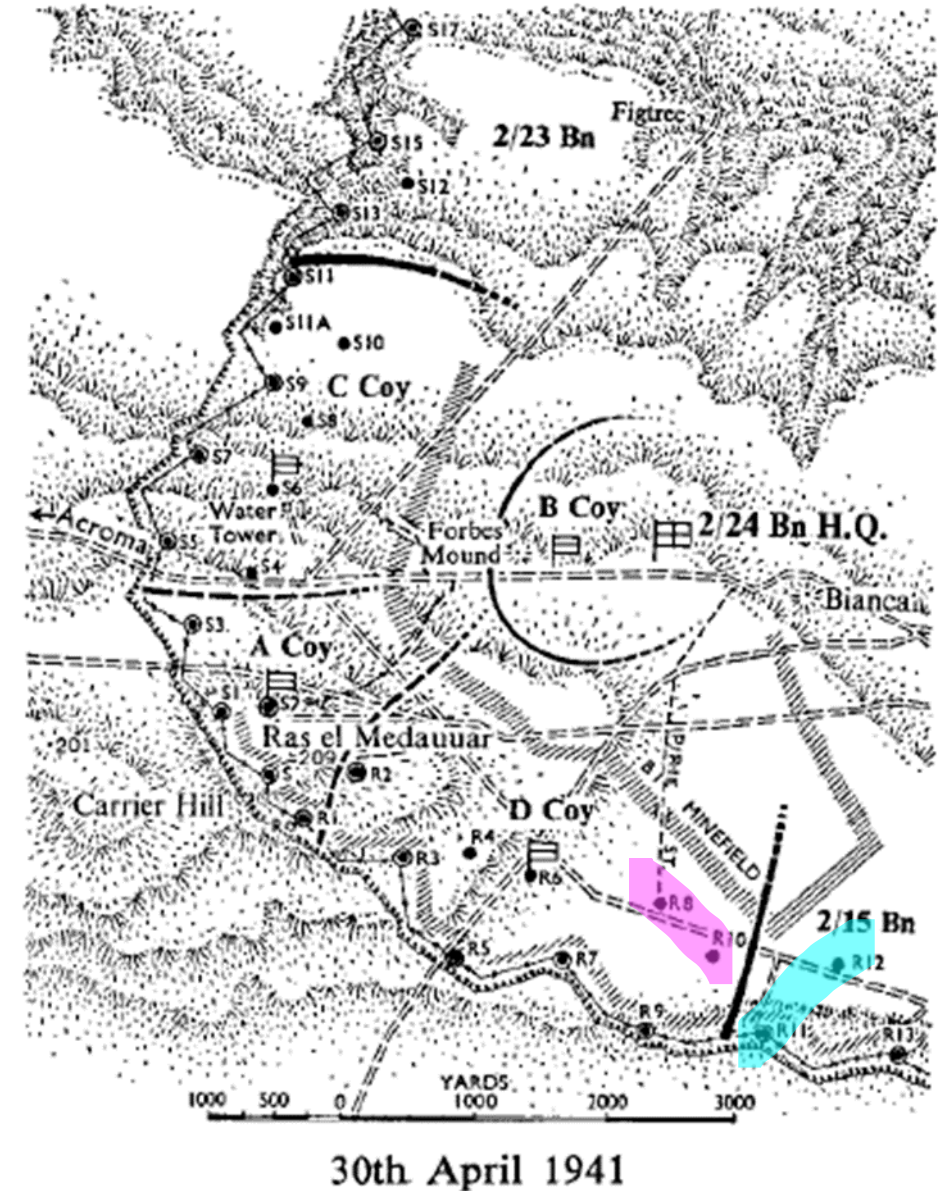
When Windeyer reached Spowers' headquarters, however, he learned that some 20 minutes earlier Spowers had received a message cancelling the counter-attack because of the engagement of the armour against the German tanks.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

- About 3.15 p.m., a number of enemy tanks made another eastward attack along the perimeter and were soon reported to be massing between R8 and R10. The British tank force was ordered to engage them. A composite force of 7 cruisers and 5 infantry tanks was organised, while the remaining cruisers were sent to the top of the Pilastrino pass to guard the approaches to fortress headquarters.
- The plan was simple. The striking force, now reduced to five Matildas and the three cruisers, was to advance along the perimeter between the front and inner row of perimeter posts straight towards the enemy. Posts R11 and 12 were reached about 4 p.m. and it was found that the Australians were still in occupation: they had not been closely engaged.

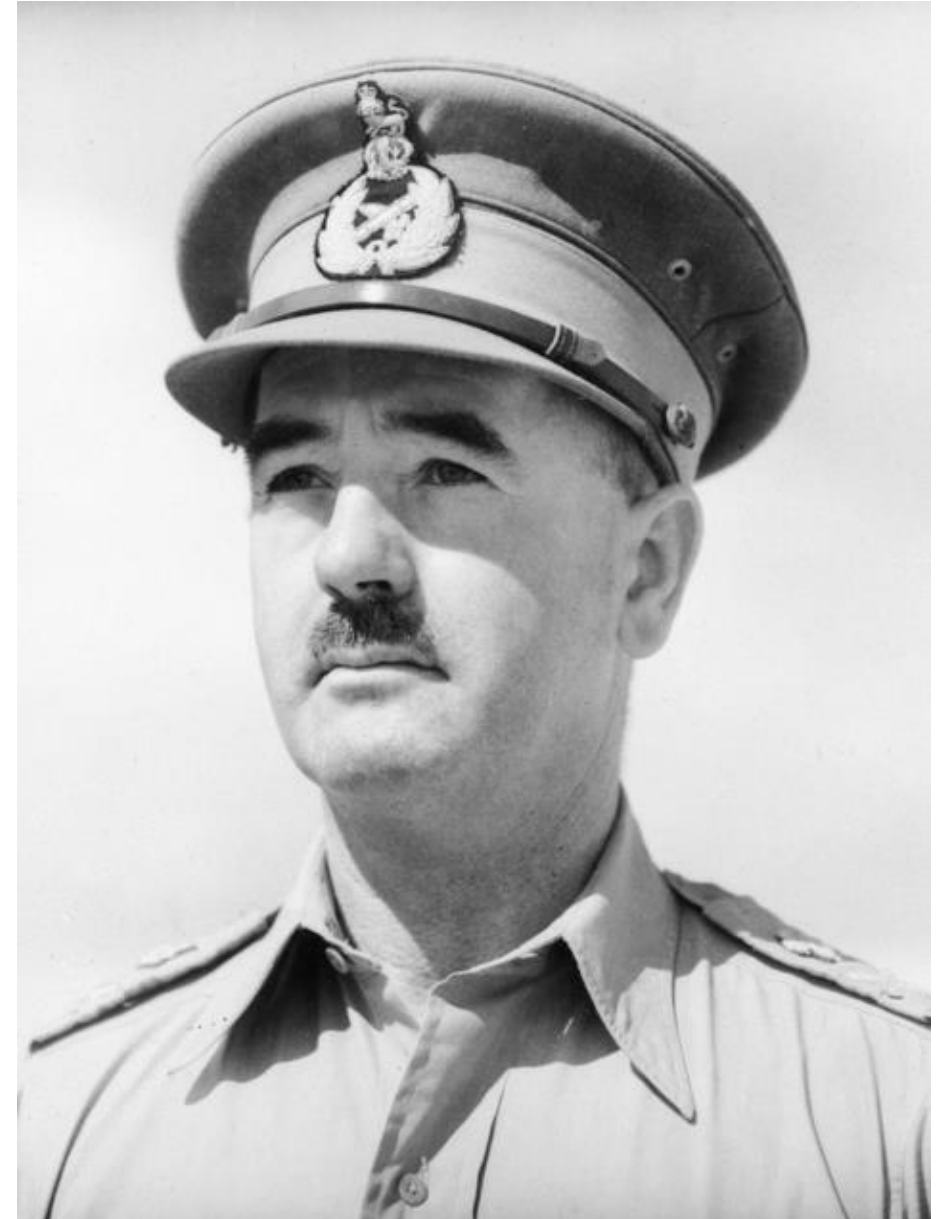


1 May 1941 - Libya

- The Matildas then led the advance to Posts R8 and 9, about 1,000 yards distant, from which region the German tanks had withdrawn towards Medauuar a short time before. Here again the Australian garrisons were still hanging on, though many were badly wounded.
- Leaving two of his infantry tanks at R8, the tank commander then advanced to R6 with six tanks, three Matildas and three cruisers, the Matildas leading. Again it was found that the Australian garrison was holding out. Four German light tanks could then be seen inside the perimeter wire at Post R5 while one German medium tank was visible at R4.
- A British cruiser tank advanced towards the German medium at R4. Fourteen German medium tanks came up from the rear and opened fire at 1,000 yards range. The Matildas moved round to the west of R6 and advanced to meet them. The British commander's cruiser was hit at R6 and the two cruisers still mobile returned to R8 where orders were given to the two Matildas left there to join the three already engaged. But the forward tanks now returned, one having been damaged and all its crew except the driver killed. Another force of German tanks engaged from the flank.
- The five British infantry tanks then fought a rearguard action, greatly outnumbered but effectively supported by the British gunners. Only one cruiser and two Matildas got back to R14. Two Matilda tanks and two cruisers had been lost; one Matilda had been damaged, but was later recovered.

1 May 1941 - Libya

- At 4 p.m. Morshead (photo) had set off for Tovell's headquarters to issue orders for a counter-attack in the centre of the area of penetration. At 4.20 p.m. he stated his requirements to Brigadier Tovell: the 2/48th Battalion was to counter-attack to restore the perimeter defence line but was first to be relieved in its defensive positions on the Blue Line by the 2/10th Battalion.
- The attack was to be mounted before night fell. When Windeyer arrived back at the 2/48th Battalion headquarters after visiting Spowers, he was informed that his battalion was to mount a counter-attack at dusk that evening and that written orders were on their way. The orders were received soon afterwards, at 4.45 p.m. Windeyer was dismayed.



1 May 1941 - Libya

- Windeyer (photo) requested Tovell by phone to postpone the operation until the next morning. Tovell told him that Morshead would speak to him.
- Windeyer described the conversation.
- "The G.O.C. said "Listen Windeyer, it is important that this be done and done today." I said it was impossible. He asked why. I said the troops were spread over miles and could never be assembled and got to the start-line in time. He said he would send vehicles to move them. So I said, that being so, we would do our best. I asked for tank support."
- Morshead informed Windeyer that the tanks were to engage enemy on the southern flank at 5 p.m. but would thereafter be available to protect the battalion's left flank. Morshead also told Windeyer to put down one company in position south of the Acroma Road, facing south.

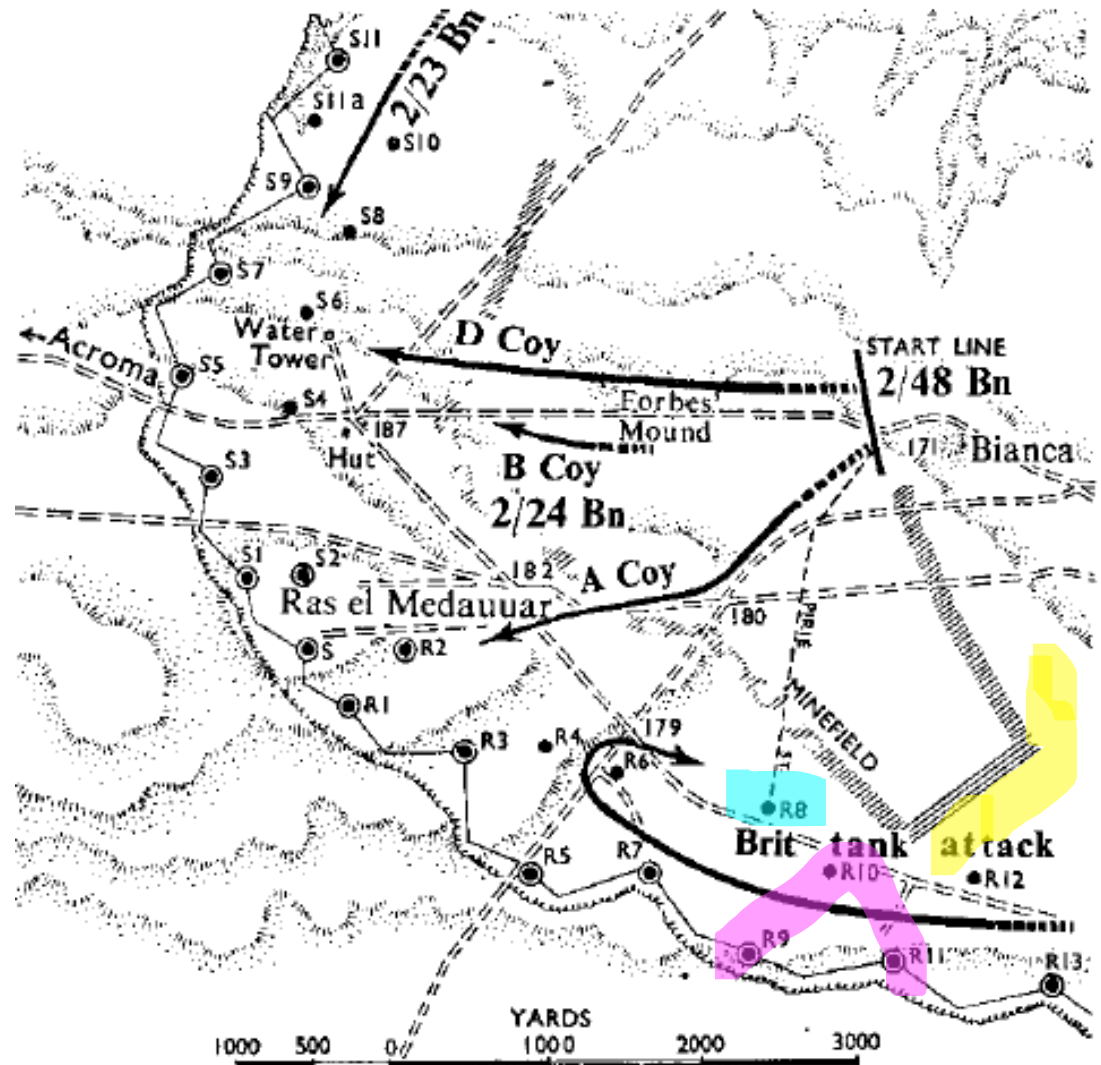


AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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1 May 1941 - Libya

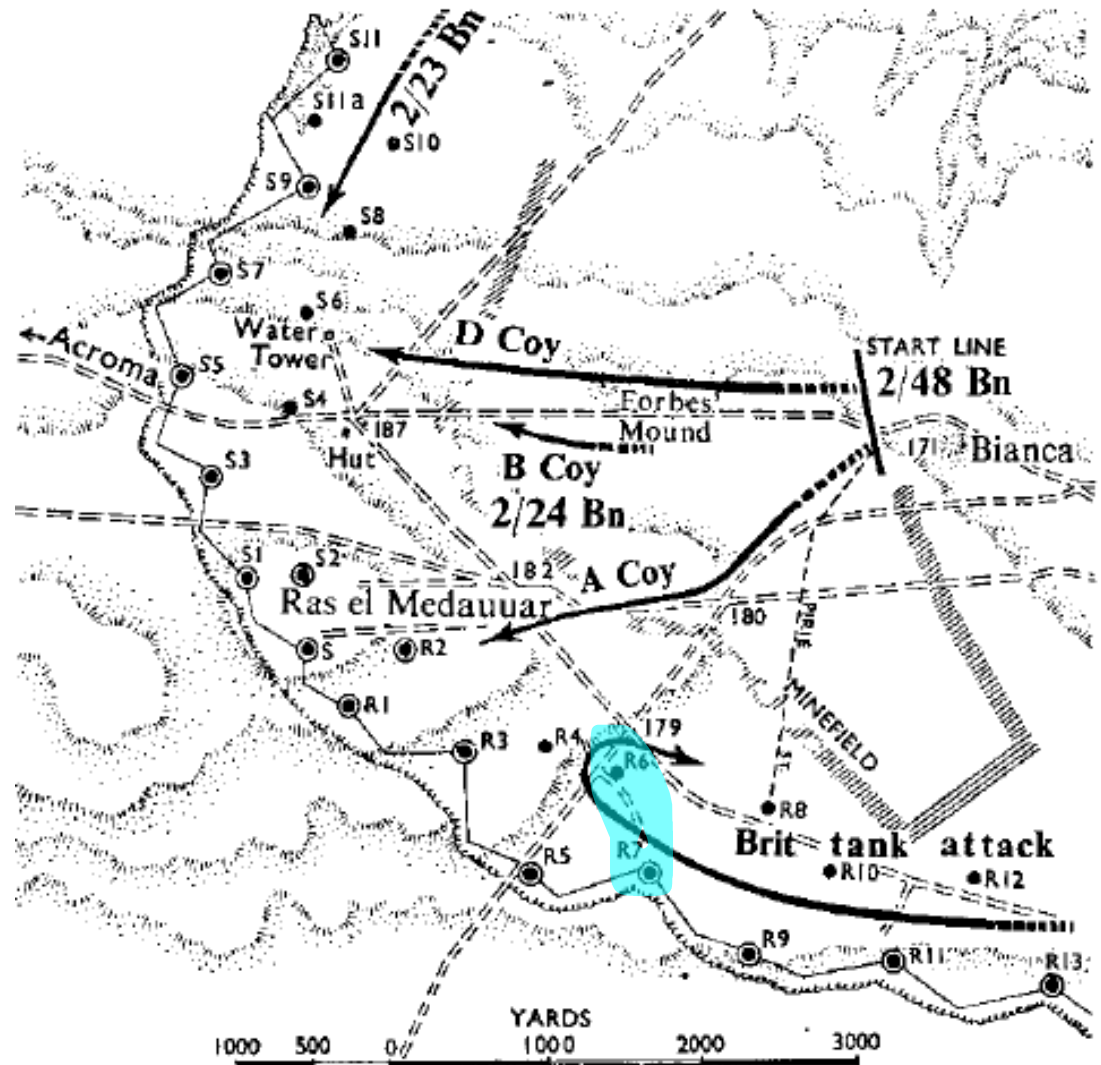
- Captain Provan's company of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion, which had been attached to the 2/15th Battalion, had been sent forward to Posts R8, 9 and 10, which had been reported abandoned earlier in the afternoon. He reached the area about 6 p.m.
- As Provan was coming forward Sergeant Thurman withdrew the garrison of Post R8 (of whom 8 out of 12 had been wounded) to R10, and the garrison of R9 came back to R11. When Provan arrived, Post R9 was reoccupied and Posts R9, 10 and 11 were reinforced but R8 was left unmanned.
- The wounded of the 2/24th were evacuated.
- Provan's company then began to prepare a switch line east of the minefield, which was to become the new front line.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

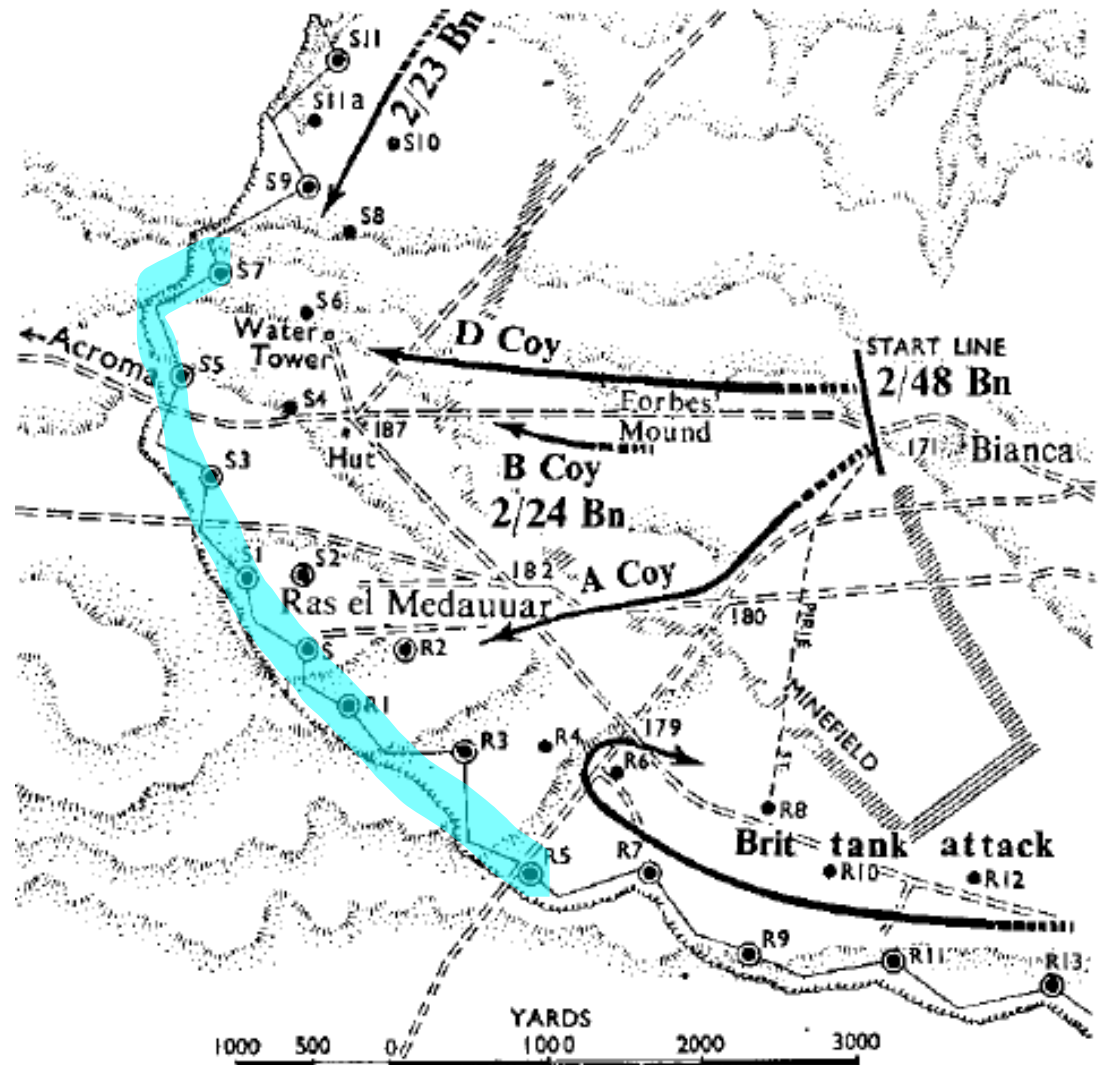
- After the British tanks withdrew, the German tanks turned to support their infantry closing in, as night fell, on Posts **R6 and 7**. Both posts had been under heavy fire throughout the afternoon. R7 managed to hold out but R6, where the automatic weapons had been smashed and the garrison of 14 men under Captain Bird had suffered more than 50 per cent casualties, succumbed at 7.30 p.m.
- R7 was then completely cut off from water, food and ammunition. Corporal Jones, the commander, described the experiences of the garrison:
- “That night the slightest move would bring a flare over our position and the area would be lit like day. We passed a night of merry hell as the pounding went on.”



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

- Windeyer's orders were to retake that part of the perimeter which the enemy had seized, from S7 to the road running through R5, a span of about 4,500 yards. The reserve company of Spowers' battalion was attached for the operation. These objectives involved the capture of 12 heavily fortified posts on a most extended front.
- Windeyer would have only four infantry companies, including the reserve company of the 2/24th Battalion. There was barely time to assemble the troops for the attack. The need was for a simple plan. Windeyer's plan was that his companies should attack in the areas they had held before being relieved by the 2/24th. The Acroma Road was to be the axis of the attack.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

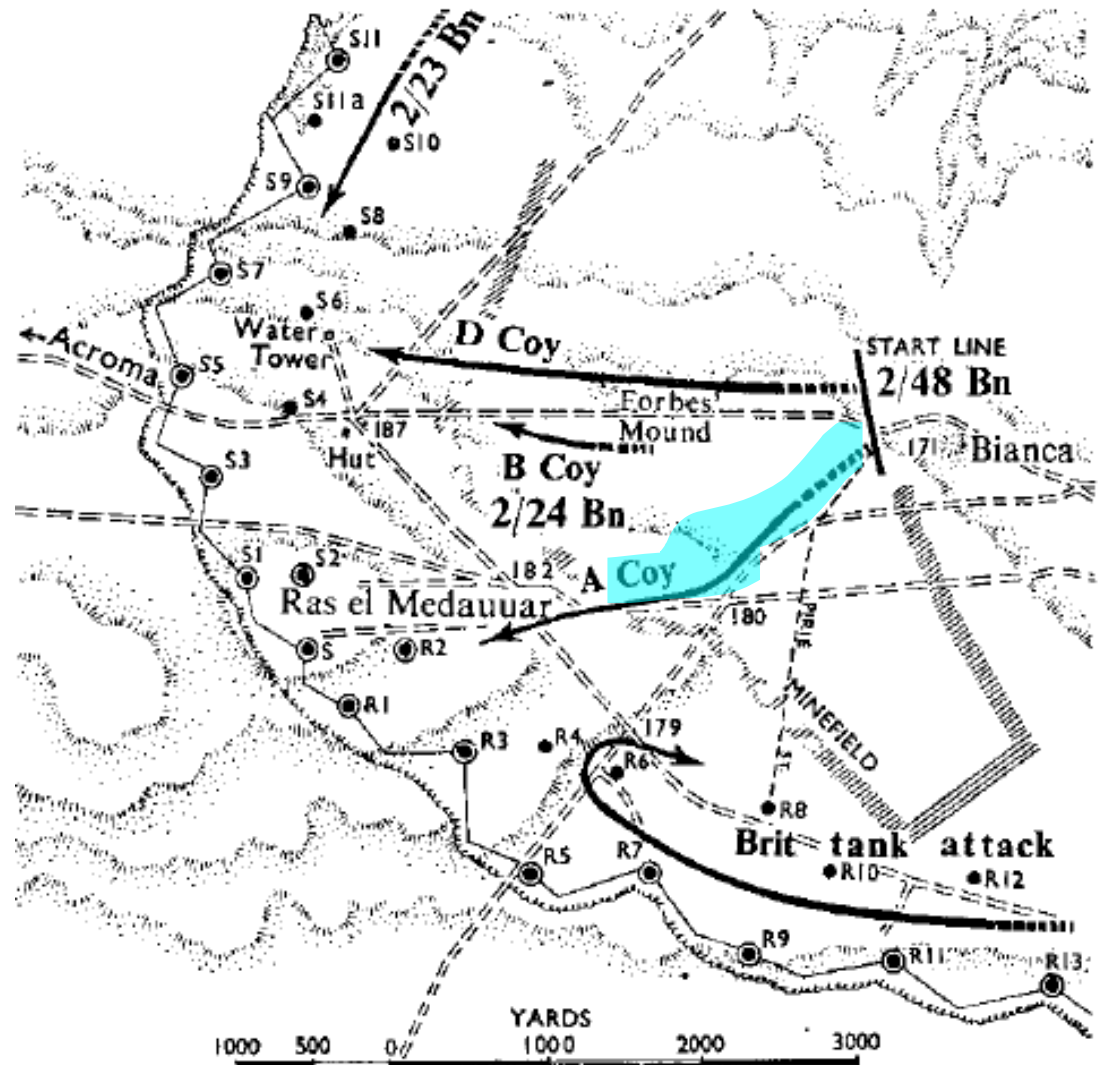
- The artillery plan allowed for concentrations in front of the perimeter during the 20 minutes preceding the attack; shelling of the perimeter posts while the assault troops would be approaching them from the start-line; and finally shelling in areas the Axis forces might use as forming-up places for counter-attack.
- The start-time was fixed for 7.15 p.m.
- The hastily summoned transport did not arrive on time. Vehicles of the 2/10th Battalion had to be commandeered. When at last the battalion was embussed and under way, low-flying enemy aircraft attacked the convoy, vehicles dispersed, one truck was destroyed, troops debussed; more time was lost.
- The battalion arrived, in a dust-storm, late at its start-line, hastily dismounted, and moved off to attack into the glare of a fiery setting sun. The men ran into heavy shell fire almost at once, but pressed on, leaving casualties behind.
- The artillery program had begun at the appointed time, but the infantry were at least 20 minutes behind schedule and thus lost the benefit of close artillery support.

1 May 1941 - Libya

- On the right Captain Woods' company moved out along a valley north of the Acroma Road, which was defiladed from most of the enemy posts. Captain Tucker's company followed 600 yards in rear. Woods intended to capture the right posts first and then exploit southwards towards Medauuar.
- As his company came within range of the second line of perimeter posts, they were pinned to the ground by heavy machine-gun fire from the area of the Water Tower. It was becoming dark.
- Windeyer had noticed that Woods' company was tending to veer to the right, so he ordered Tucker to attack the enemy in the Water Tower area and close the gap.
- While Tucker's company was coming up, Woods was striving to get forward. He sent his rear platoon, under Lieutenant Robbins, to find a way round under cover of a ridge following the Acroma Road, but Robbins came under fire from S10.
- Lieutenant Isaksson's carrier platoon, going forward with the object of locating enemy machine-guns by drawing their fire, was checked by anti-tank guns and by fire from damaged tanks immobilised in the minefield.

1 May 1941 - Libya

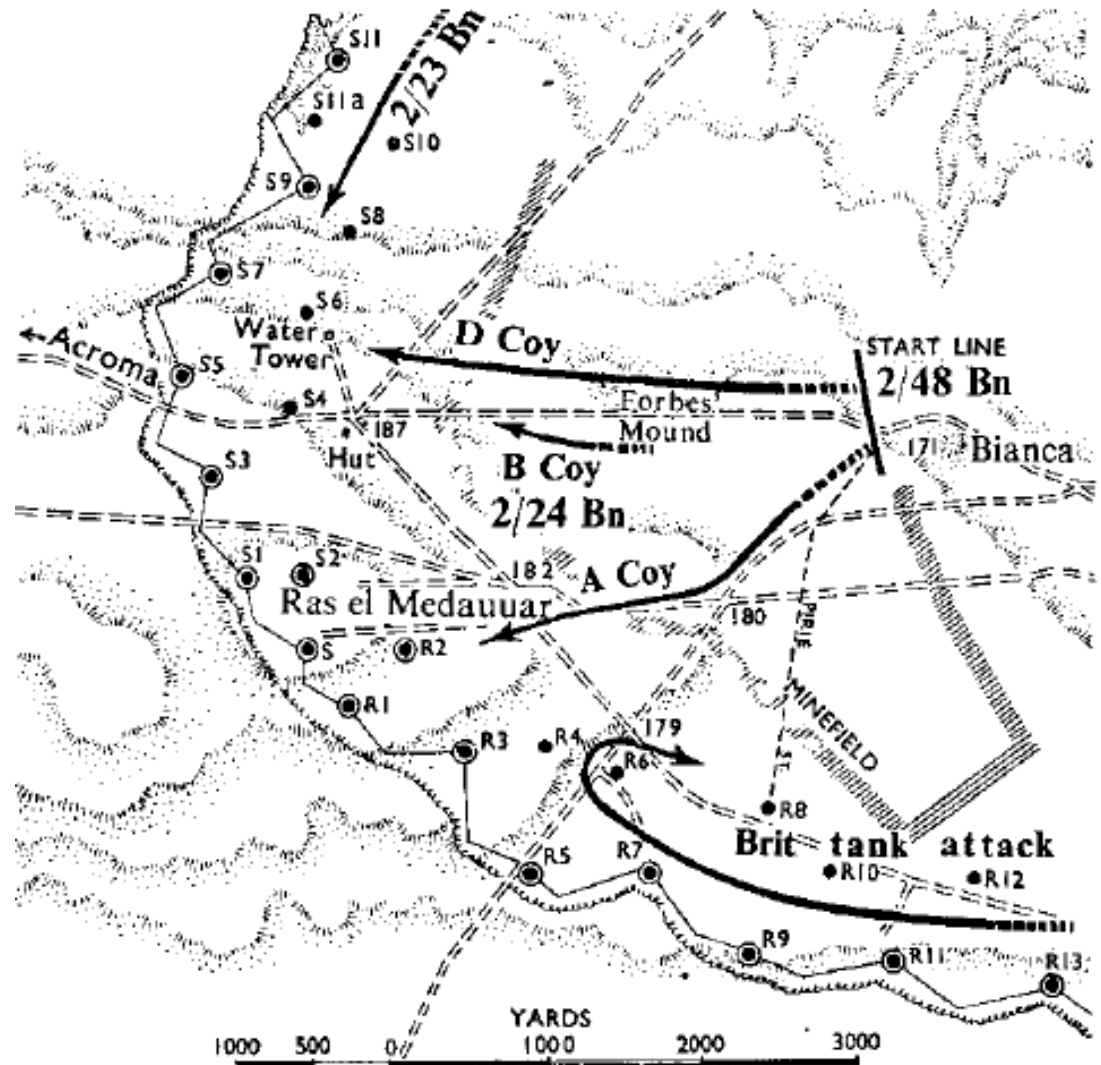
- On the left, Major Loughrey's company had set off under heavy shell fire.
- When they had got to within 200 yards of Point 209 six tanks opened fire from in front. The infantry went to ground. Sergeant Farrell's platoon, which was bringing up the rear, engaged with Boyes anti-tank rifle but with no effect.
- Loughrey sent a runner back to Windeyer with a message that they were held up by enemy tanks. There was no cover from the fire of the German tanks, no effective weapon to combat them, no British armour.
- The forward platoons came back while Farrell's men continued to engage; then the whole company withdrew.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

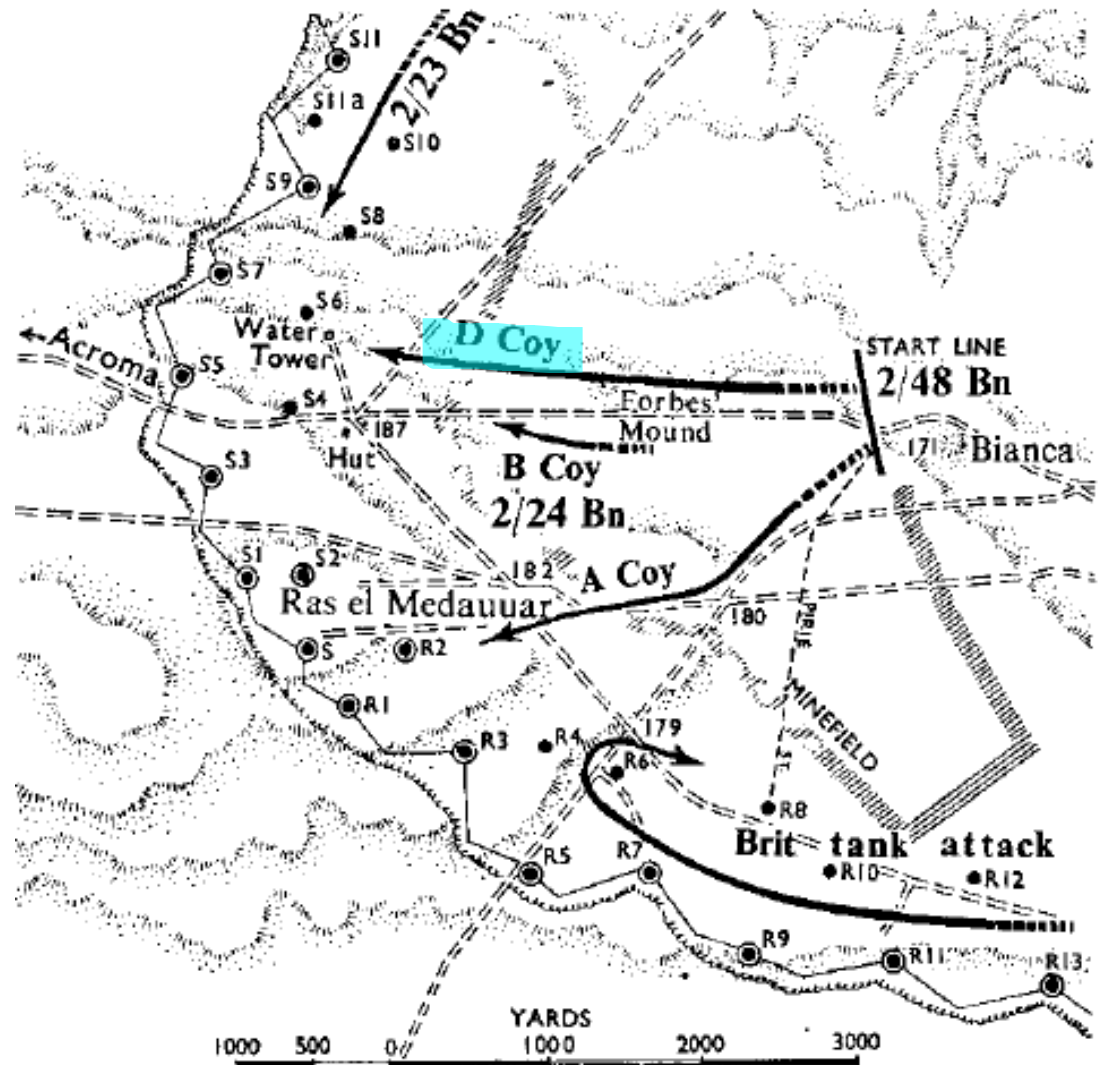
- Windeyer reported to Tovell that the battalion was not making progress. Tovell reported to Morshead and recommended that the attack be discontinued for the time being but resumed at first light.
- Morshead urged that the attack should be continued. Any postponement, he said, would greatly assist the enemy.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

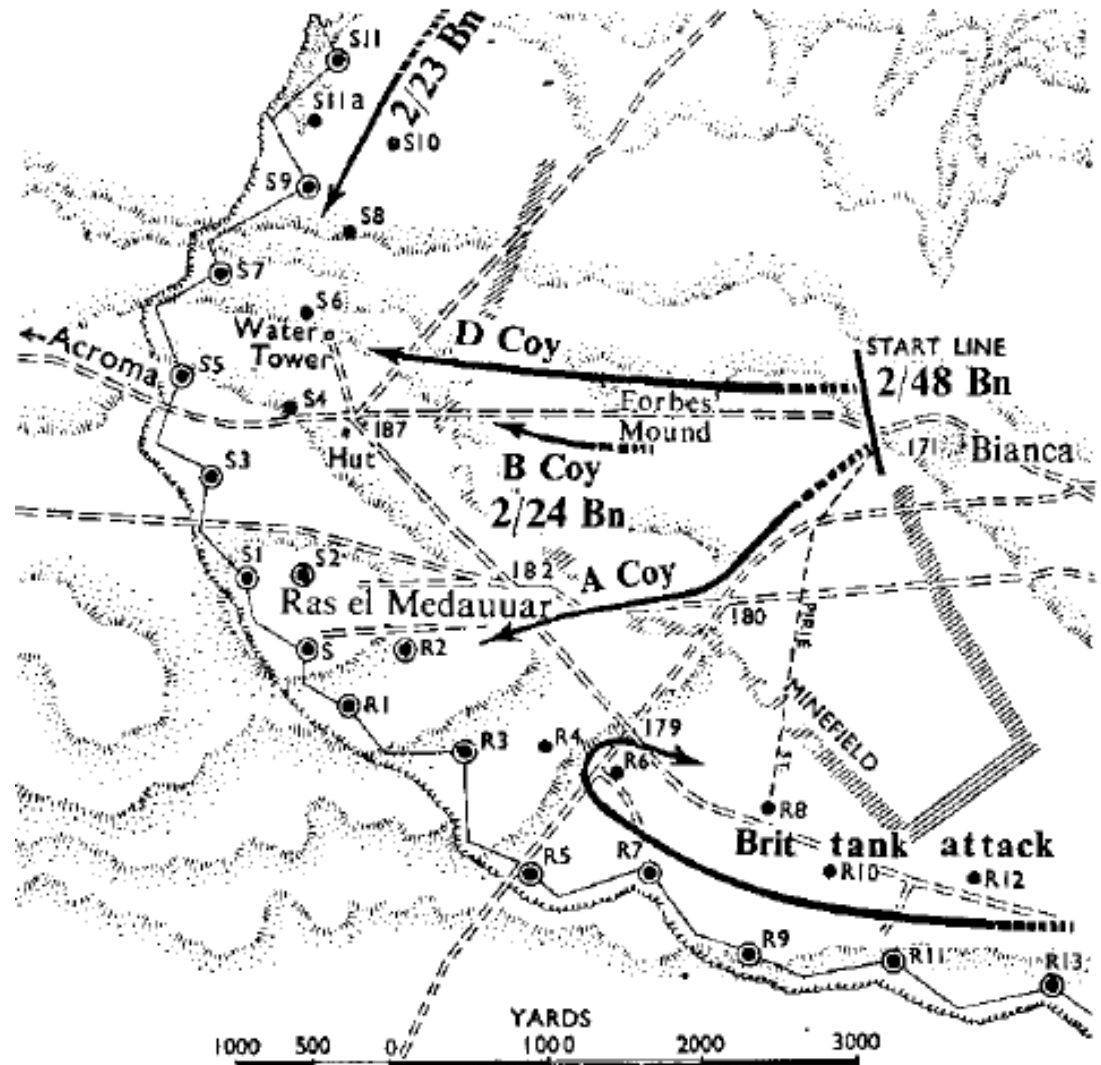
- Tucker's company was now coming in behind Woods' company, and "B" Company of the 2/24th, relieved by Captain Forbes' company of the 2/48th, was advancing along the Acroma Road.
- **Woods** was making a valiant effort to move his men forward by short bounds, keeping ahead himself and calling each platoon forward in turn.
- Lieutenant Larkins' turn came first, but his platoon ran into fire as it moved forward. Larkins was wounded, two men of his headquarters were killed, other men were hit, and the platoon became inert.
- Next it was the turn of 17 Platoon under Sergeant Tonkin, who had assumed command that morning; but Tonkin was killed as the platoon attempted to get forward, and one of the sections was badly cut up and disorganised.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

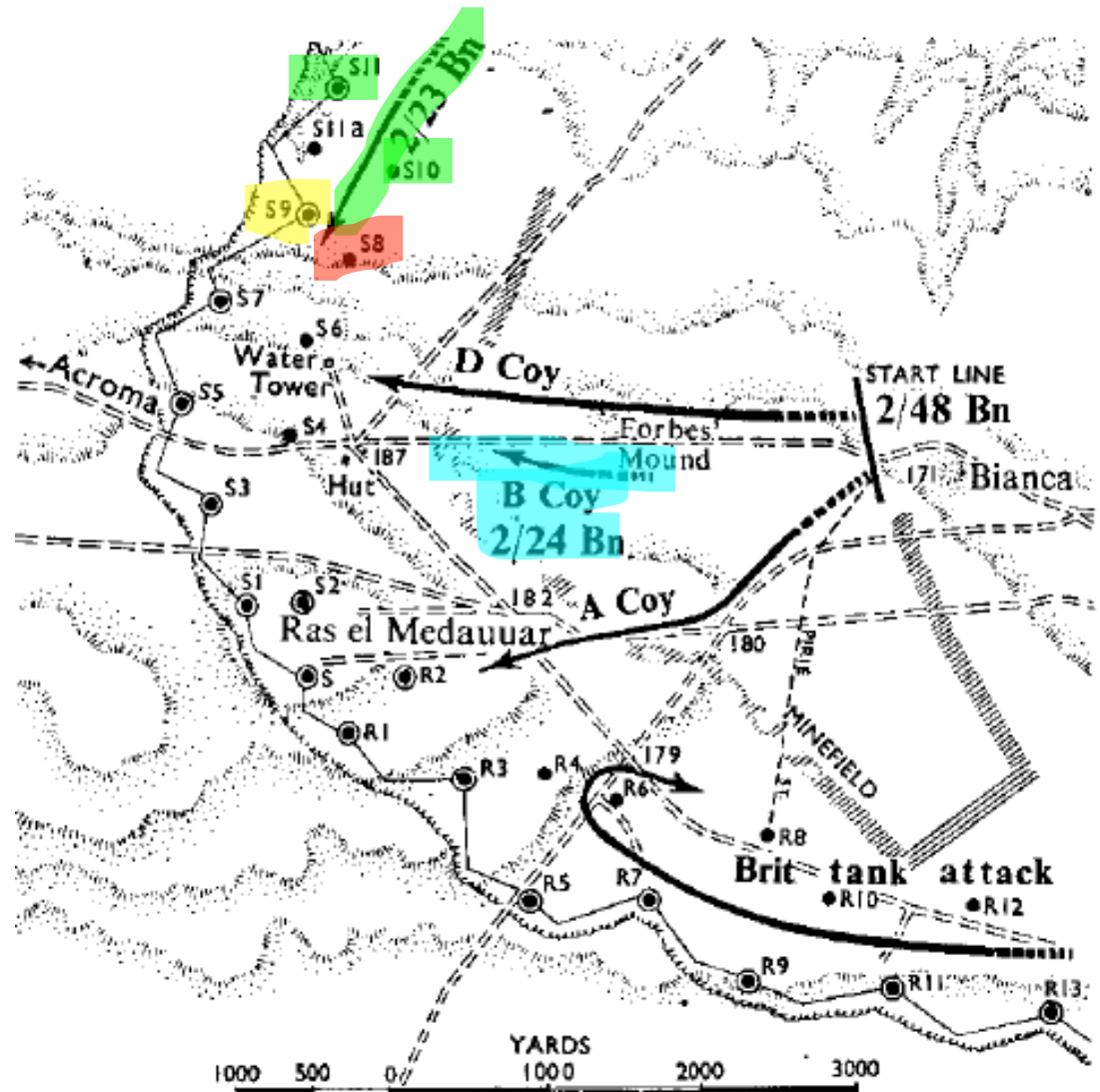
- Sergeant Legg, in charge of the remaining two sections of 18 Platoon, took another forward bound, which met with greater success. They were followed by 17 Platoon, now in charge of Corporal Evans, with Robbins' platoon and Tucker's company not far in rear.
- Woods then decided to rush the enemy machine-gun in a bayonet charge. With his company sergeant-major, Noble, and two runners, he crawled forward to locate it. Robbins moved his platoon up. Woods got within earshot of the enemy, but in the dark was still unable to locate the positions.
- The Germans called on the Australians to surrender and one of Woods' men hurled back abuse. The enemy replied with heavy fire. Woods was severely wounded. Noble came to Woods' assistance but Woods told him to go back to Robbins with a message that in Woods' opinion the company could not be got forward: Robbins was authorised to withdraw the company if Tucker agreed. Robbins and Tucker conferred and decided (about 9.30 p.m.) to withdraw. Then Robbins and Noble went forward again and, while the enemy, about 100 yards away, were calling upon them to surrender, rescued Woods. But Woods was mortally wounded.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

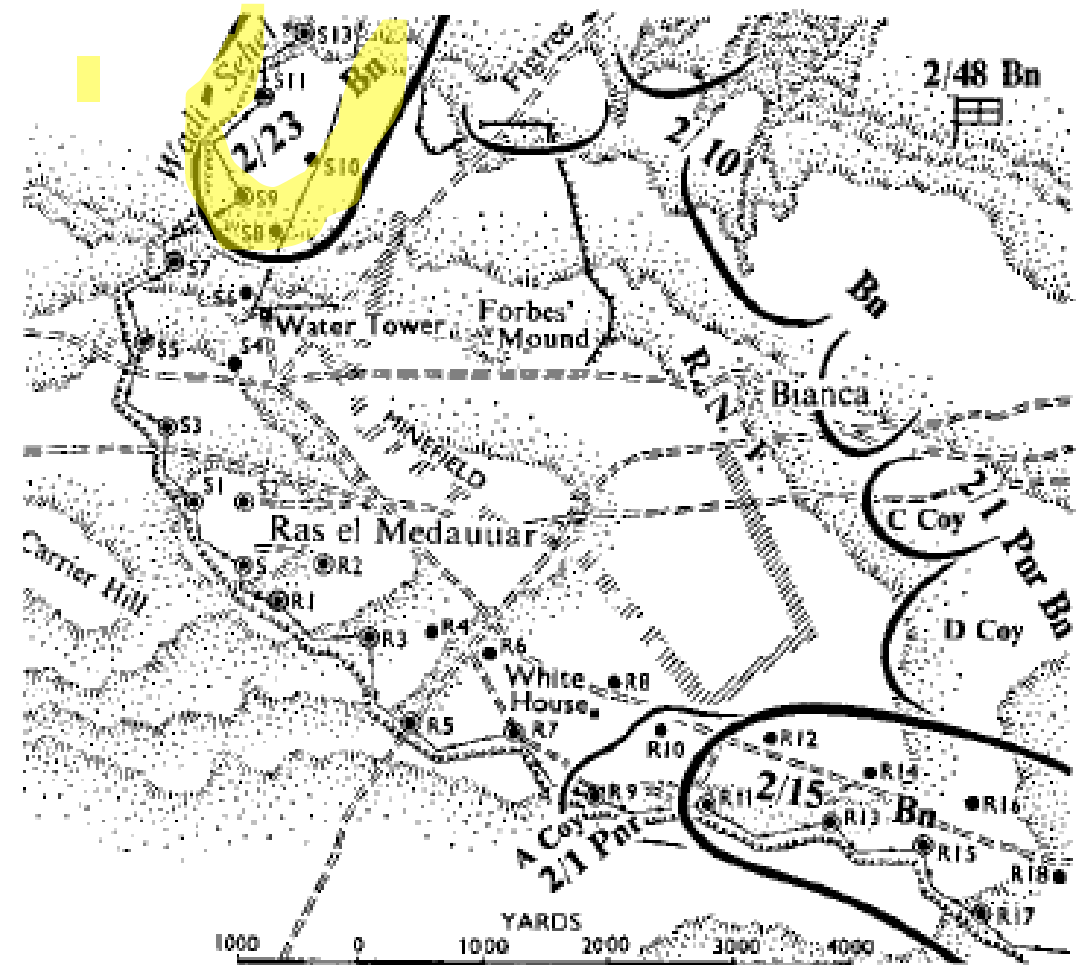
- "B" Company of the 2/24th Battalion, which had attacked along the Acroma Road, had been pinned down by machine-gun fire after advancing 600 yards.
- More success was achieved by Captain Malloch's company of the 2/23rd in operations below the escarpment on the right of Woods' company. Moving southwards with carriers on the flank at the time when Woods' company was struggling to get forward, Malloch's men first made contact with S11 and S10 and engaged near-by enemy machine-gun nests.
- Moving on to S8 they found the post garrison's fighting strength reduced to five.
- Next they found S9 to be surrounded. Attacking in the face of mortar and machine-gun fire, Lieutenant Bowden's platoon overran the investing troops, killing many and capturing 36 Italian prisoners in the anti-tank ditch round the post. They found that Lieutenant Christie and five men were still holding out in the post. Five men of Bowden's platoon were wounded.



The counter-attack, 1st May

1 May 1941 - Libya

- Windeyer reported the failure of his attack to Tovell and then spoke to Lloyd, who told him to assemble his battalion in rear of Bianca.
- Morshead had been forewarned of likely failure by reports through artillery channels from the forward observation officers and had already reached a decision that the perimeter line should be re-formed in the area of breach.
- When Windeyer's report was received, Morshead summoned Brigadier Tovell and Colonel Verrier to headquarters to make plans for a switch line to hold the gap between S8 and Bianca and thence to line up with the switch line already being formed by Brigadier Murray on the eastern side of the penetration. On the right the 2/23rd Battalion was to hold the original perimeter as far south as S8.
- the 2/48th Battalion was to link S8 with the right of the reserve company position of the 2/24th and the Blue Line ; and the 2/10th Battalion was to link up between the left of the 2/24th and the new 20th Brigade switch line.
- "B" Company of the 2/24th had returned to its original position after the counter-attack, there relieving Forbes' company which rejoined the 2/48th.



Morning, 2nd May

1 May 1941 - Crete

- Freyberg (photo) received the estimate of the possible scale of a German attack on 1st May. He decided that the sooner he "introduced a little reality into the calculations for the defence of Crete the better", and immediately sent a telegram to Wavell stating that his forces were "totally inadequate to meet attack envisaged", and that unless the fighter aircraft were increased and naval forces made available he could not hope to hold out with a force devoid of artillery, with insufficient tools for digging, inadequate transport, and inadequate reserves of equipment and ammunition.
- He urged that if naval and air support were not available, the holding of Crete should be reconsidered, and announced that it was his duty to inform the New Zealand Government "of situation in which greater part of my division is now placed".
- Thereupon he cabled to his Prime Minister:
- "Recommended you bring pressure to bear on highest plane in London either to supply us with sufficient means to defend island or to review decision Crete must be held."



2 May 1941 - Libya

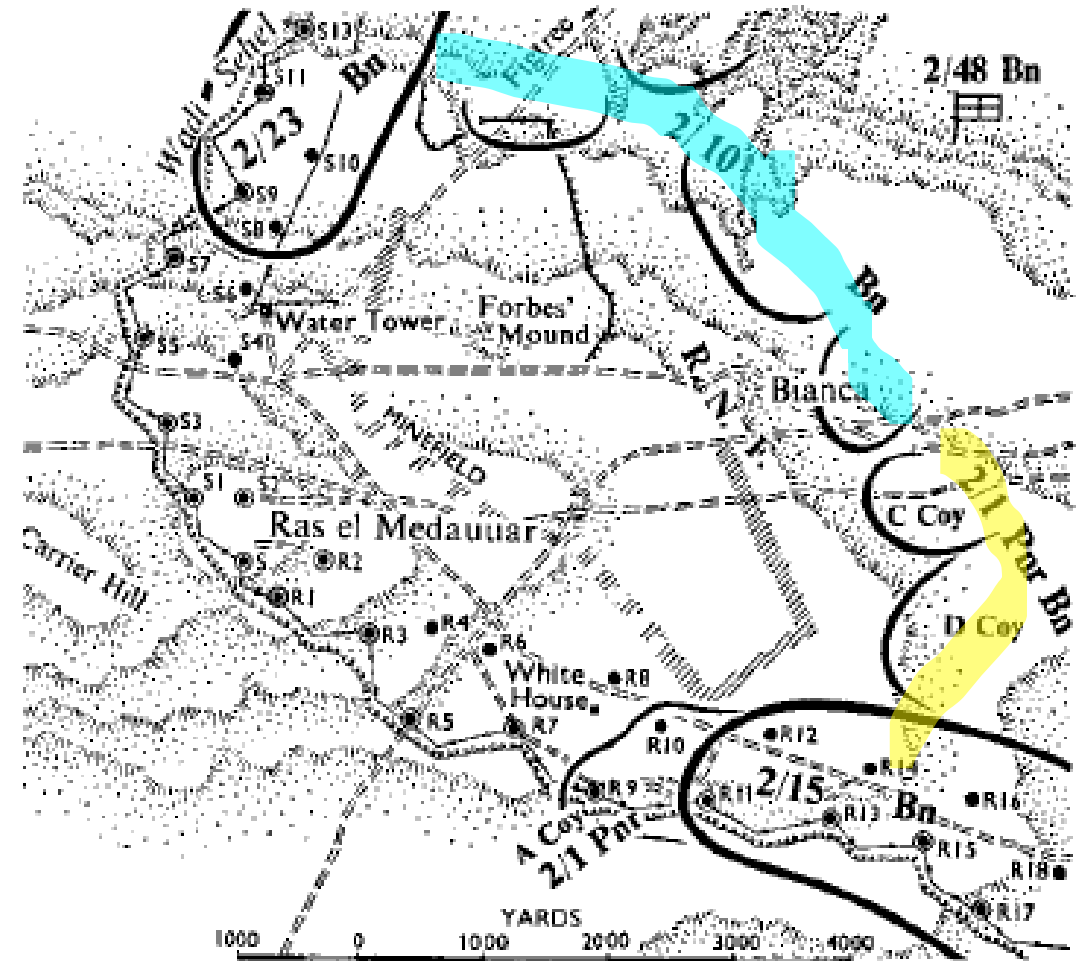
- Next morning, Jones, in R 7, made "a hurried neck-jerking survey" just after daybreak and saw infantry assembling for an attack. Powerless to hit back, he surrendered his men.
- After they had been taken back, General Rommel (photo) spoke to them. "For you the war is over, " he said, "and I wish you good luck."



Rommel talking with his staff near El Agheila, 12 January 1942.

2 May 1941 - Libya

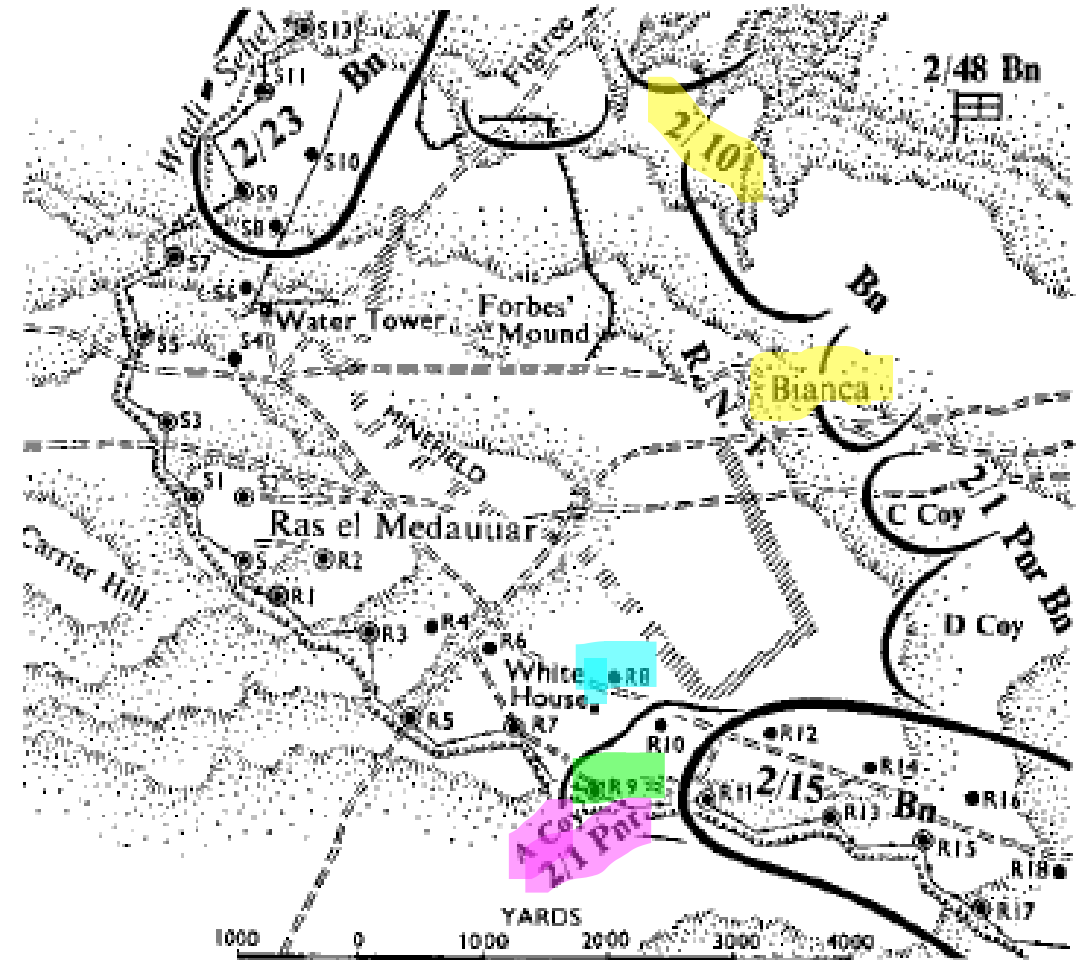
- The diarist of the 2/10th noted that at 6 a.m. all companies were moving to their new positions: no reconnaissance had been made; all movement was by map and compass. The advance was executed with three companies forward less one platoon sent to an artillery battery on the previous day. The diarist also recorded that the move was completed by 6.30 a.m.
- Before first light "D" Company of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion had moved forward to take up a line running north from R14 to the left flank of "C" Company, thus completing the new front line.
- The day's operations developed into an artillery duel while the infantry of both sides consolidated their positions.



Morning, 2nd May

2 May 1941 - Libya

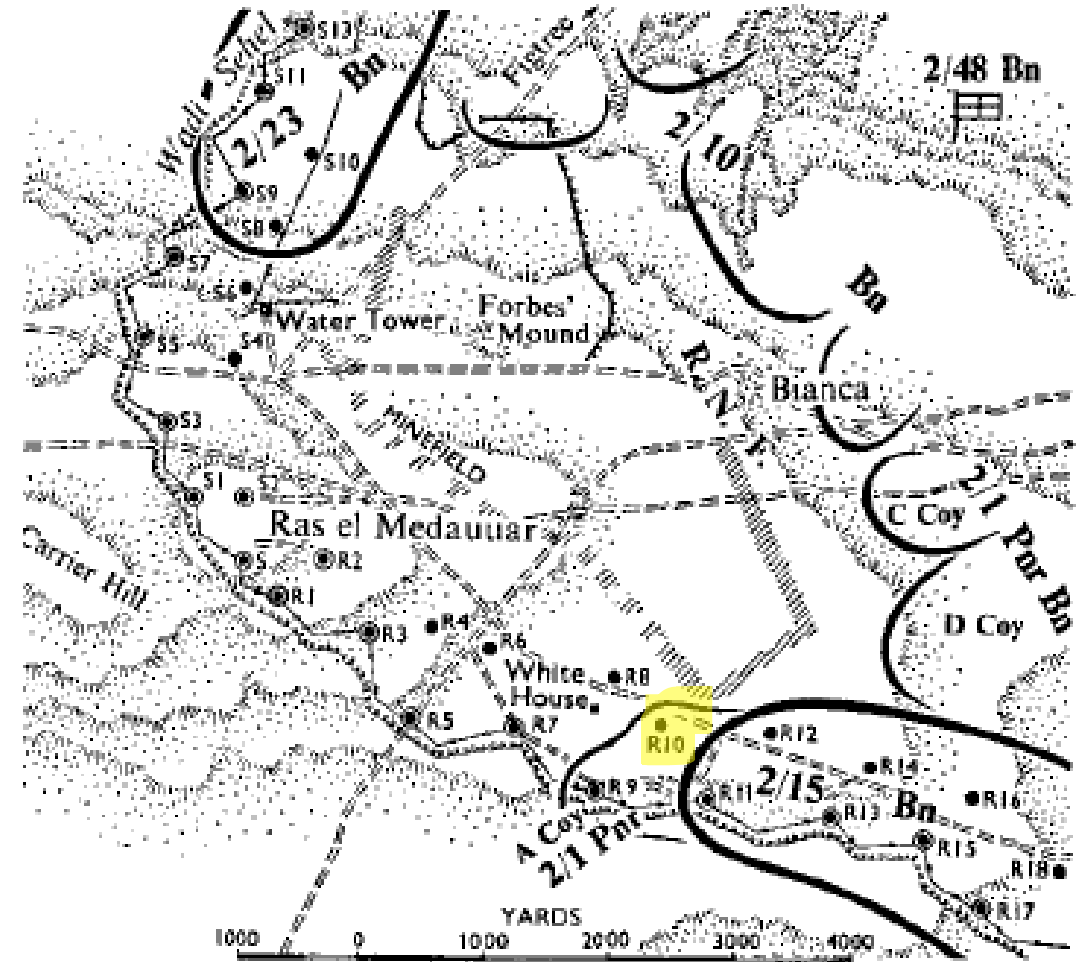
- At 6.45 a.m. the enemy appeared to be assembling a mixed force of infantry and 30 tanks for a renewed thrust against R8 but they were dispersed by concentrated gunfire.
- About 2 p.m. a flame-thrower was brought up to attack Post R9 under cover of two light tanks and an armoured car. The post's garrison set the flame-thrower afire with a hit from its Boyes rifle. The light tanks and armoured car were then engaged with rifles and withdrew.
- In the early afternoon enemy infantry also began to close in on the 2/1st Pioneers in the new salient. Just before 5 p.m. Sergeant Christsen took out a carrier patrol to come to their assistance. The patrol ran into heavy fire, and one man was killed and one wounded. One carrier broke down but Christsen, under heavy fire, linked it to his own carrier and towed it back.
- At 5 p.m. guns began bombarding the 2/10th Battalion's positions. Fifteen minutes later about 600 German infantry advanced upon the left company of the 2/10th in the direction of Bianca. This attack and a second thrust half an hour later were both broken up with help from the artillery and the machine-guns of the Fusiliers on Bianca. Tanks in rear approaching the minefield were shelled



Morning, 2nd May

2 May 1941 - Libya

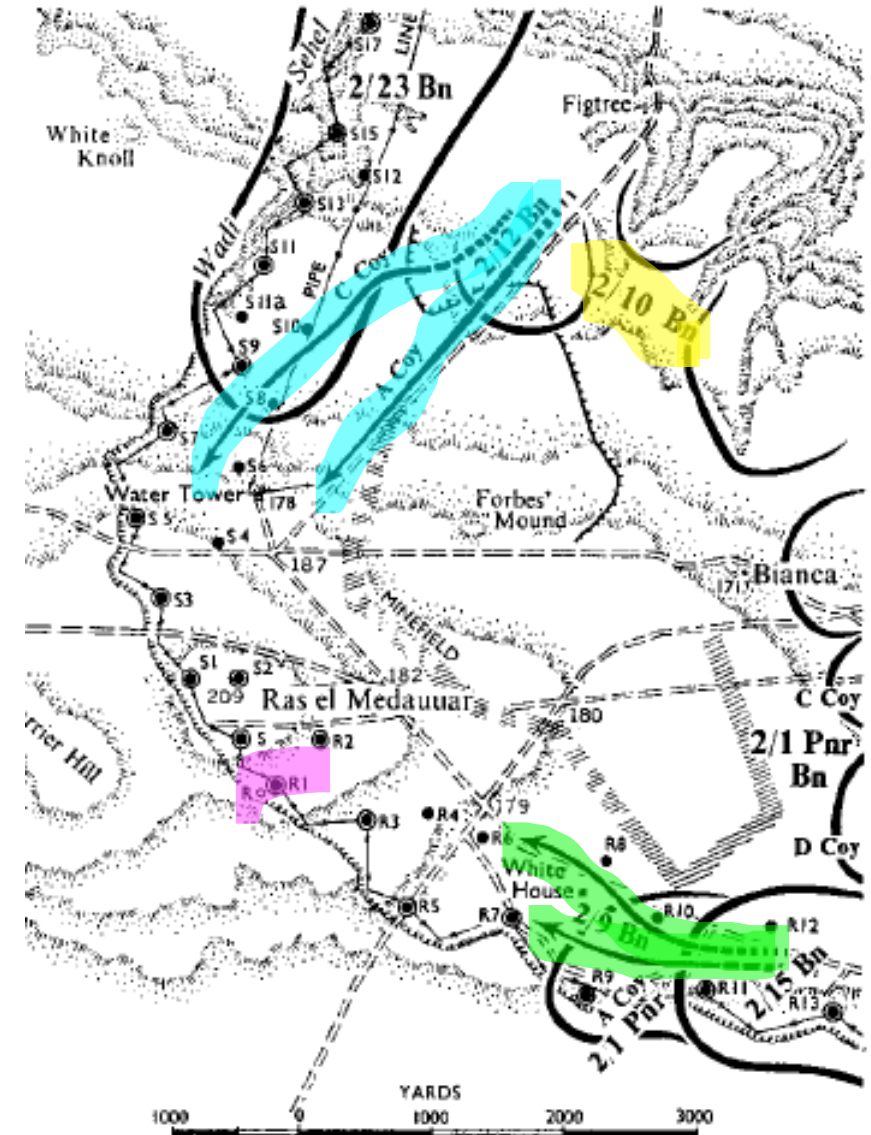
- Towards 5.30 p.m. the dust cleared, revealing about 100 vehicles and tanks on the forward slopes of Medauuar. The 51st Field Regiment brought forward a section of guns and the enemy vehicles were driven back to dead ground in some confusion.
- In the succeeding two hours before dusk the enemy endeavoured to assemble a strong, mixed force of tanks and infantry for an attack on the left flank but the force was scattered and broken by continual fire.
- Finally a night attack was made on R10 just before 11 p.m. but was held off by artillery concentrations.
- Each gun of the 1st R.H.A. fired about 900 rounds that day.
- Three gun detachments of the 3rd R.H.A., overrun and missing in the previous day's operations, found their way back, bringing their breech blocks with them.



Morning, 2nd May

3 May 1941 - Libya

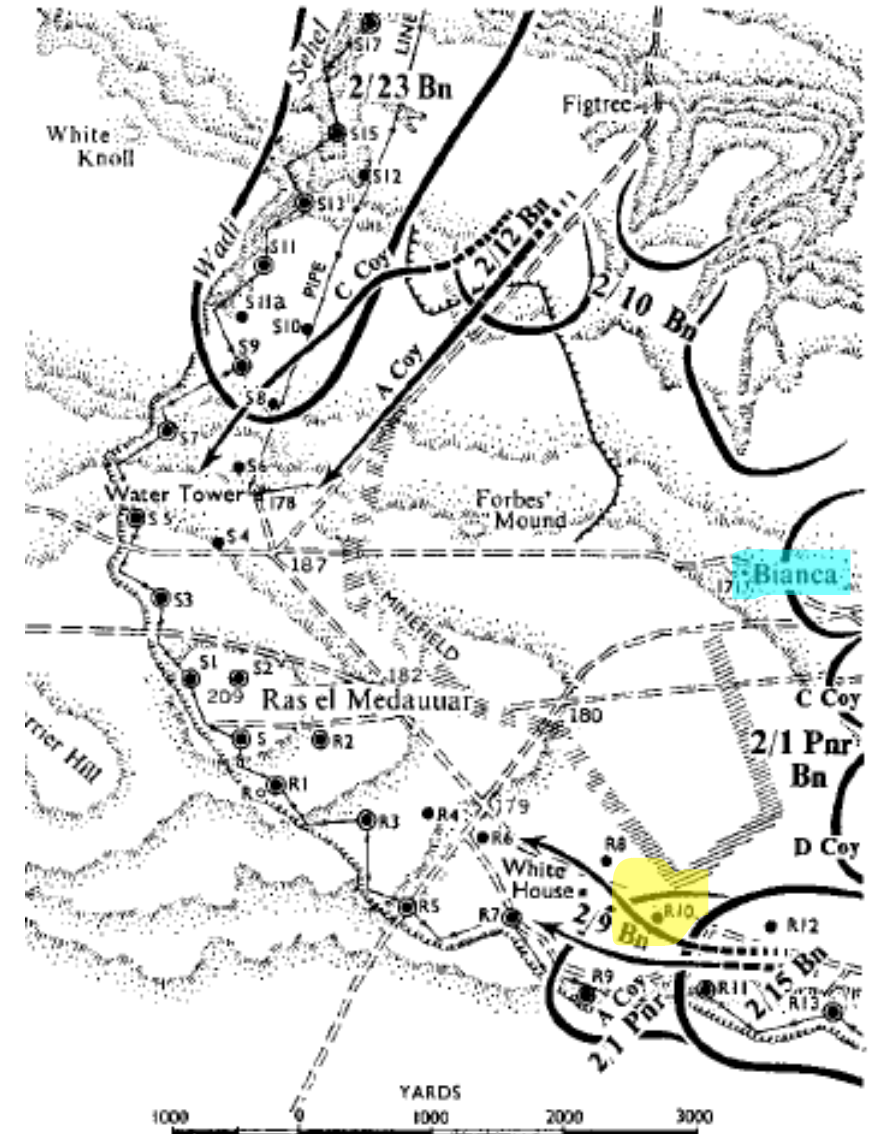
- As the enemy failed to resume the offensive, Morshead planned to use his reserves in a counter-attack to retake the lost territory. Orders for the operation were given on the morning of 3rd May.
- Wooten planned a night attack from the flanks with artillery support, to get in behind the forward enemy positions in the Salient. The attack was to be made by two battalions attacking from right and left along the perimeter and rolling up the enemy's flanks to the apex at Ras el Medauuar.
- The 2/12th Battalion (Lt-Col Field), on the right, was to attack through to Medauuar, the 2/9th (Lt-Col Martin), on the left, up to the left shoulder of that feature, stopping at R1.
- The 2/10th Battalion was to push forward from its positions in the centre to support the left flank of the 2/ 12th Battalion's attack.
- Approximately three artillery regiments were to support the operation. Barrages were to move to the first objectives at 100 yards in three minutes, then fire on the second objective for 90 minutes, followed by timed concentrations of less duration on subsequent objectives.
- The start-time was fixed at 8.45 p.m.
- An anti-tank regiment, 2 platoons of machine-guns, 12 light tanks and 7 infantry tanks were to be available for consolidation.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

3 May 1941 - Libya

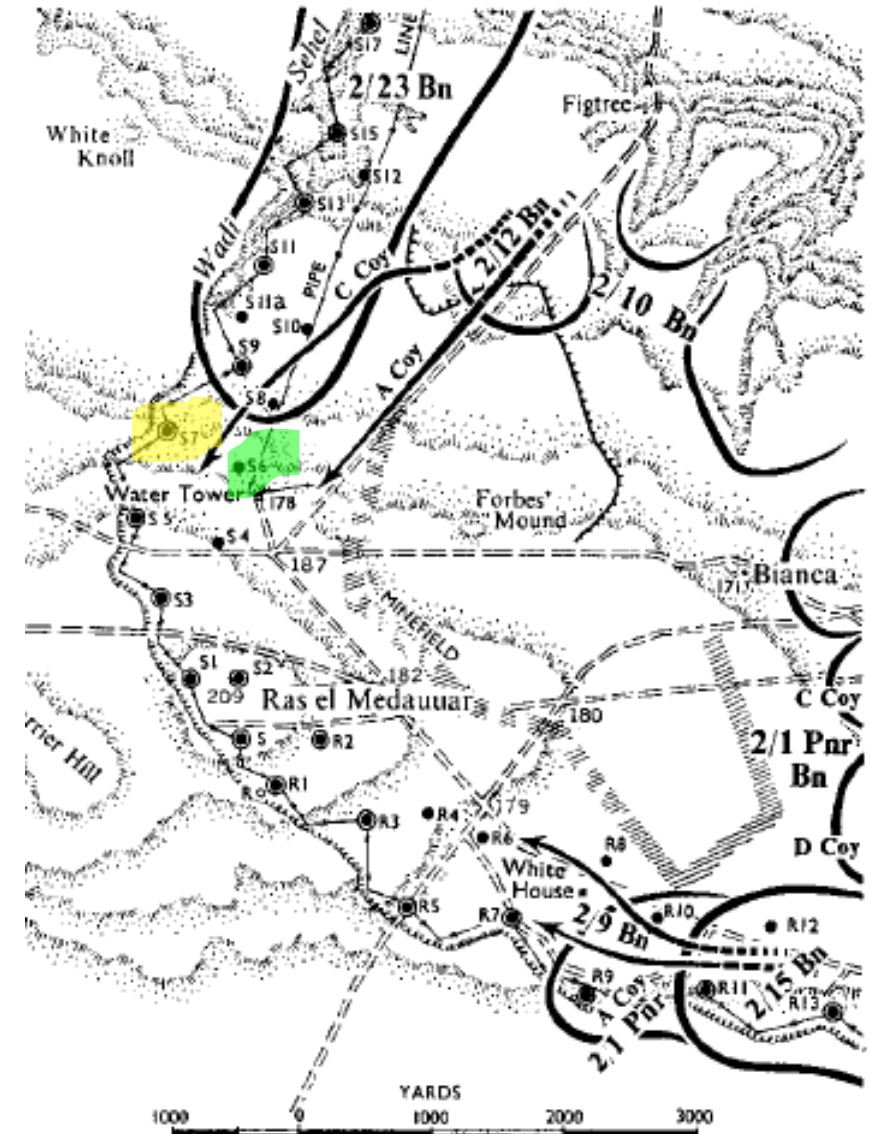
- The 3rd of May was a quiet day.
- At 9.30 a.m. two companies of enemy infantry advancing on R10, the isolated rear perimeter post on the extreme left flank, were dispersed by artillery fire from "B/O" Battery and beat a hurried withdrawal through the wire.
- A further attack of about one-company strength was similarly dispersed.
- At 10 a.m. a considerable enemy force formed up in front of Bianca but was successfully engaged by the artillery, the machine-guns of the Fusiliers and the mortars of the 2/10th Battalion.
- Throughout the morning enemy were observed lifting mines on the B1 minefield and subjected to harassing fire.
- The positions of the Fusiliers covering Bianca were subjected to much interference from enemy machine gunners located near a white house forward of the extreme left flank.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

3 May 1941 - Libya

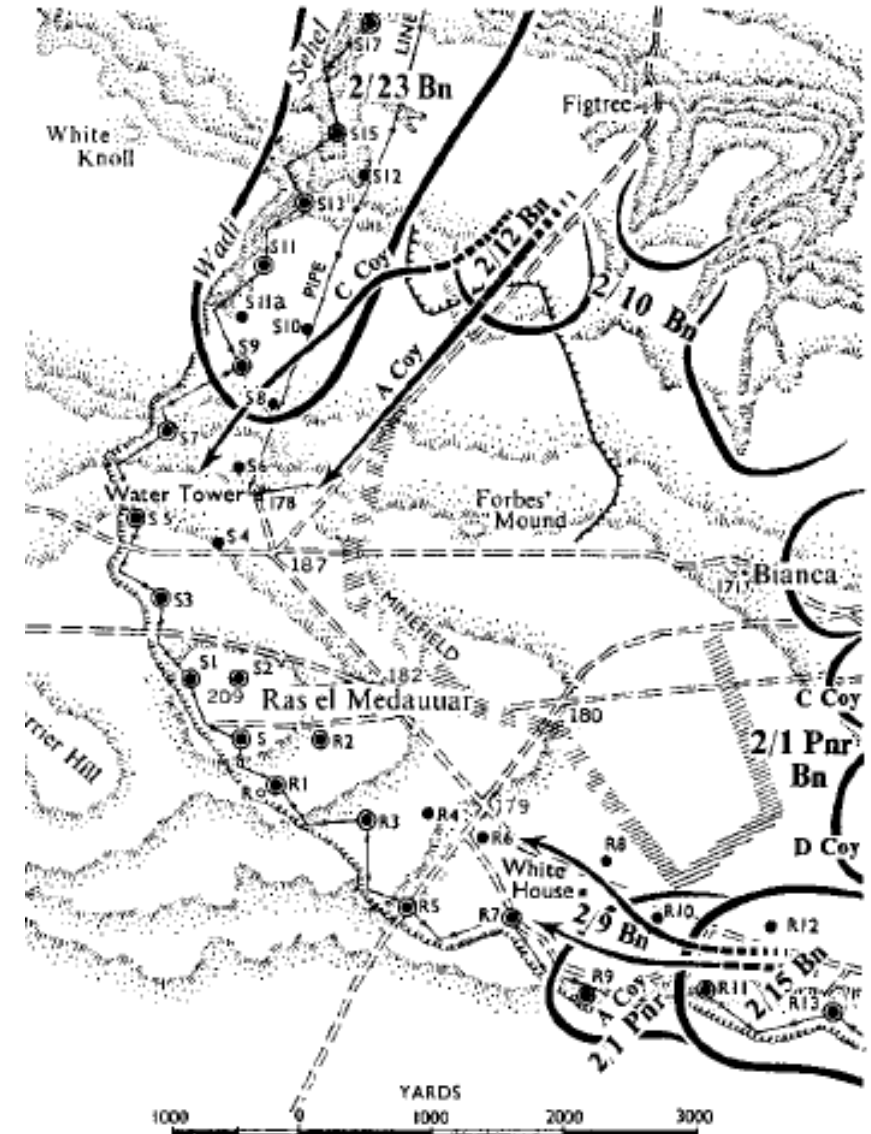
- Wootten's counter-attack was made in almost pitch darkness with little aid from a low moon which was in its first quarter and obscured by a slightly overcast sky. Field's battalion on the right started on time, but Martin's battalion was late in coming forward, necessitating half an hour's postponement of its attack.
- Field's battalion moved, without drawing any fire, to the start-line on the right of the Fig Tree Road behind the 2/10th Battalion's forward positions. The attack was made on a frontage of 500 yards with two companies up, "C" and "A" Companies in front ("C" on the right), "D" and "B" Companies ("D" on the right) followed 100 yards in rear. "C" Company was to take the first three posts encountered (S7, 6 and 5); "D" was then to come round and take the next two.
- After passing through the 2/10th Battalion positions the forward companies
- ran into cross-fire from each flank fired from machine-guns situated, both outside the perimeter, and deep within the Salient. This put the troops to ground, and the noise and darkness combined to render coordinated movement forward extremely difficult. On the right some groups were able to infiltrate outside the perimeter along the anti-tank ditch past S7, and on the left other groups got forward to the vicinity of S6 by following a pipe-line ditch. Many of the men simply got lost.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

3 May 1941 - Libya

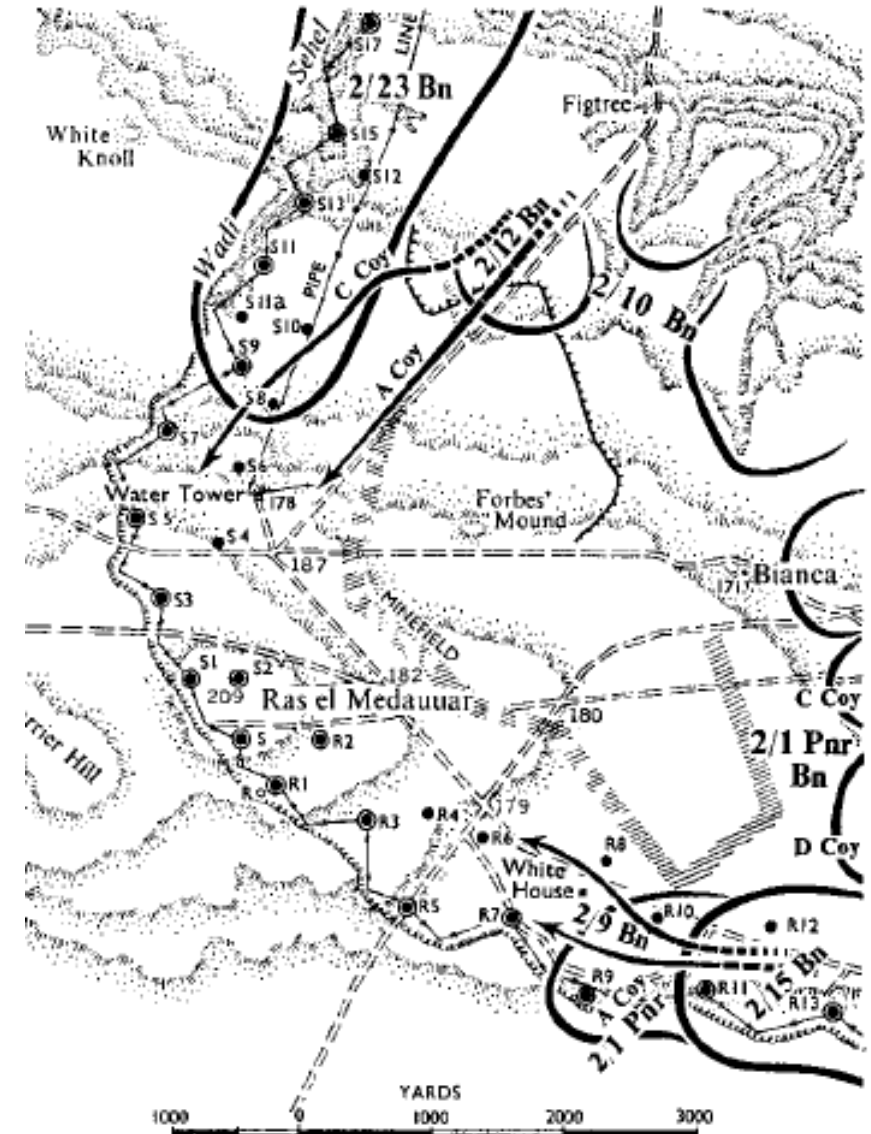
- For four and a half hours efforts were made to re-establish organisation and infiltrate the troops forward while the ground continued to be lacerated by machine-gun and mortar fire from nests mainly outside the zone covered by the artillery program.
- At 12.30 a.m. the commander of "C" Company informed Field that he would be able to mount an assault on S6 and S7 if 15 minutes of artillery fire could be arranged.
- Field at first tried to arrange an artillery program on the unneutralised machine-gun positions on the flanks but found that to do so would require lengthy calculations, which ruled it out as an immediate possibility.
- Eventually a repetition of the original program was arranged for 15 minutes from 1.15 a.m. The enemy fire was not neutralised, however, and the attack could not be pressed home.
- Field reported the failure to Wootten.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

3 May 1941 - Libya

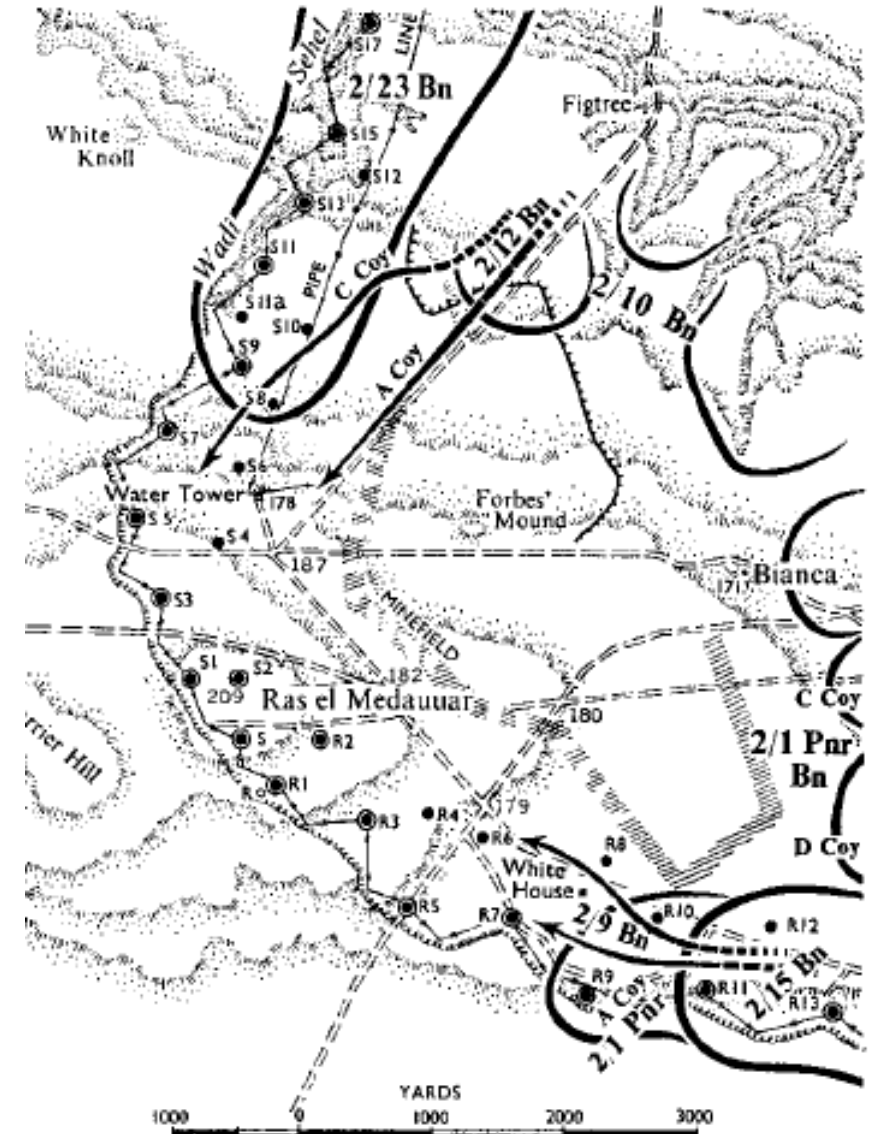
- On the left, the 2/9th Battalion was late in arriving, but it proved possible to defer the artillery program for half an hour. Even so, the battalion did not arrive at the start-line until just as the guns started up. The men hurried forward without properly forming up.
- The battalion was to attack in two phases with two companies up for each phase, "A" and "D" ("A" on the right), followed by "C" and "B" ("C" on the right). The first phase included the capture of the four posts, R8, 7, 6 and 5 and the White House near R8.
- In the second phase Posts R4, 3, 2 and 1 were to be taken. The area to be attacked was found to be garrisoned mainly by Italians.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

3 May 1941 - Libya

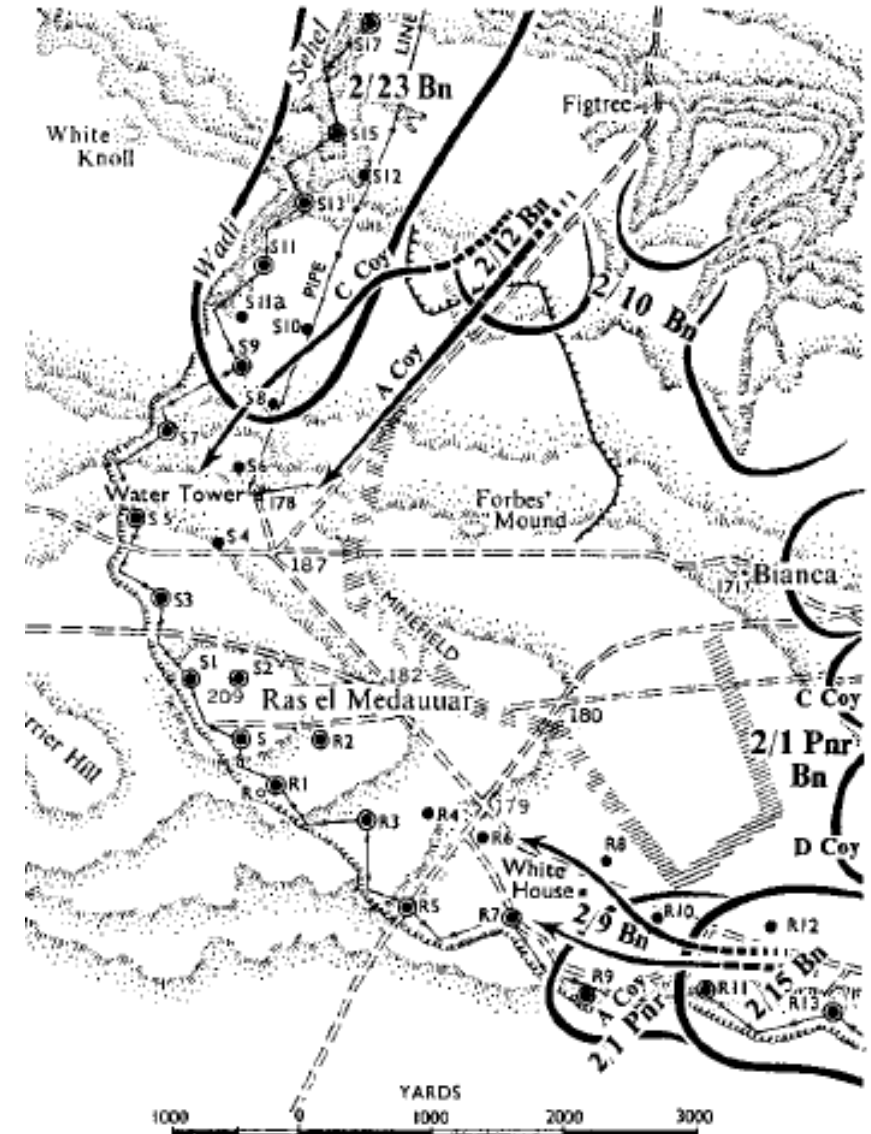
- gunfire falling on the start-line as the men set off caused some confusion and intermingling between the forward and rear companies.
- Lt Noyes platoon's objective was Post R8. He searched for it in vain on the left of the road he was following; it was in fact on the right.
- The platoon pushed on, encountered an enemy position behind a mound of stones, threw in grenades and charged in with the bayonet. They killed a large number and drove out the rest of the garrison, which Noyes reported to be about 80 strong. This position was to the north of R7.
- Three Italian light tanks then came down the road towards Noyes' platoon. Noyes and Sergeant Hobson sneaked up to the tanks, lifted the turret lids and dropped hand grenades inside. The tanks burst into flames but this drew the enemy's fire.
- Noyes led his dwindling platoon on, striking some more enemy in shallow ditches near R6. These were also cleaned up.
- With the remnants of his platoon, now numbering only six men, Noyes turned back to find the rest of the company. Coming back on the north of the road he stumbled upon his original objective, R8, only to find that the post had not been occupied.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

3 May 1941 - Libya

- Soon afterwards most of Captain Lovett's company arrived at R8 and decided to carry on where Noyes left off. The company, however, veered to the left and encountered Post R7. The post was assaulted, most of the garrison were slain and two prisoners were taken. Four 47-mm guns and a heavy Breda machine-gun were found in the post. Almost immediately, however, the Australians were counter-attacked by a medium tank and three armoured cars. The Australians fell back.
- By this time the battalion, fragmented into small groups, had become disorganised. With the exception of a garrison in R8 there was a general withdrawal to the area of R14, where the battalion began to reorganise for a further attack directed at Posts R5 and R6. It was planned to mount the second attack at 4.15 a.m.
- Meanwhile Wootten reported the situation on both flanks just before 3.40 a.m. Morshead then ordered the attack to be broken off.
- The assault battalions were withdrawn into reserve before daylight.



18th Brigade attack, 3rd-4th May

4 May 1941 - Sydney

- The Dominions Office cablegram, about the transfer of the American Pacific fleet, and one sent post-haste after it by Menzies were considered at an emergency meeting of the Australian War Cabinet held in Sydney on Sunday, 4th May.
- By the chance of travel the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr Fraser, was in Sydney and was invited to be present. Simultaneously, the Defence Committee met in Melbourne. There was little that War Cabinet could do but concur.
- They appreciated, too, the significance of the growing American activity and help which the proposal demonstrated. In their reply they urged as firmly as they could their view, first, that the minimum force that should be left in the Pacific was six capital ships and their organisation of cruisers and destroyers plus two aircraft carriers and, second, that with the transfer of United States ships to the Atlantic, consideration should immediately be given to the reinforcing of Singapore with British battleships.
- The fact that there had been lack of consultation lasted longer in the minds of the Australian Government than the effect of the transfer which, once accepted, simply became a new factor in the war situation.

4 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- After working up exercises, fleet duties, and some weeks of North Atlantic convoy work, two of the five new Australian Manned “N” class destroyers* HMAS Napier and HMAS Nizam sailed for the Mediterranean via the Cape.
- They parted company at Aden on the 30th April, and Nizam swept ahead of Convoy US10A (Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary carrying 10,000 A.I.F. troops and 1,000 R.A.A.F.) through the Red Sea to Suez, where they arrived on 3rd May. Nizam went on through the Canal, and reached Port Said the following day.
- *Napier, Nizam, Norman, Nepal and Nestor, 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts. The ships were manned by the RAN but they remained the property of the British Government. The other 3 ships of the class were HNLMS Van Galen and Tjerk Hiddes and the Polish Piorun.



HMAS Nizam in May 1945

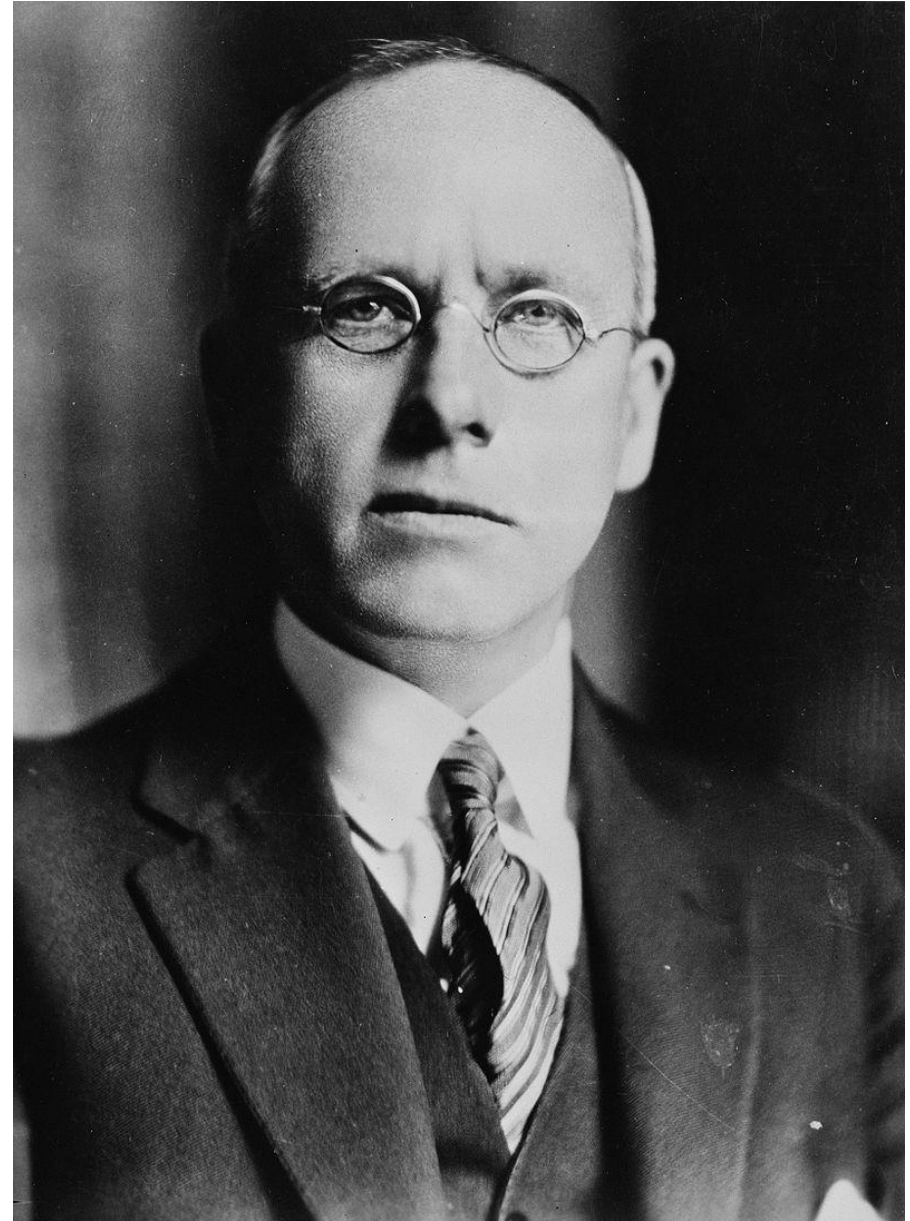
4 May 1941 - Libya

- Congratulations on the garrison's successful resistance reached General Morshead from all sides, including messages from Mr Menzies and General Blamey.
- General Wavell signalled Morshead:
- “Your magnificent defence is upsetting the enemy's plans for the attack on Egypt and giving us time to build up force for counter offensive. You could not be doing better service. Well done. . . .”
- And from Churchill:
- “To General Morshead from Prime Minister of England. The whole Empire is watching your steadfast and spirited defence of this important outpost of Egypt with gratitude and admiration.”



4 May 1941 - Wellington

- From New Zealand, the acting Prime Minister cabled to Freyberg on the 4th that his government had made urgent representations to the United Kingdom Government on the lines he had indicated.
- Churchill, appealed to by Fraser (photo), could not do much more than assure him that the holding of Crete was of high importance, and that all things physically possible would be done to help its garrison. Freyberg, in fact, had to do the best he could.



- Thanks for your attention.