

# Australia's War: 80 years ago this week

## 5 May 1941





Construction of  
**NORFOLK I<sup>SLD</sup> AERODROME**

1942 — 43

This Aerodrome was constructed for the *United States Army* which supplied most of the equipment and whose representative on the work was *Capt. J. W. Doverspike*.

The Constructing Authority was the Department of *Main Roads N.S.W.* whose Engineer-in-Charge, *M. V. Douglas*, organised and controlled the work.

# Norfolk Island - 1942

- Norfolk island's part in the Pacific war was to serve as a base for anti submarine air patrols, a landing place for aircraft in distress and a staging post for aircraft on the long sea flight from Australia or New Zealand to New Caledonia and beyond.
- Without an airfield Norfolk could be defended by 6 men and a bren gun.
- With an airfield a stronger force was required.
- N Force was a New Zealand formation, it consisted of the 36th infantry battalion, the 215th composite antiaircraft battery, the 152nd heavy battery and a mobile field troop.
- The anti-aircraft battery had 4 static high angle 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns and 8 40 millimetre Bofors quick firing antiaircraft guns. The 152nd heavy battery's weapons were 4 American 155 millimetre guns with the field troop equipped with mobile 25 pounder guns. Bren gun carriers, trucks and jeeps completed the force's equipment.
- N force landed on the 12th and 17<sup>th</sup> October 1942 from the transports Wahine and Monowai.
- All up the force contained 1,488 men, so the island's population had trebled in five days, requiring care in ensuring that all the various elements, civilian, constructional and military were adequately supplied with provisions.
- The increased numbers made for a lively time in both work and recreation.
- As can be seen in the photo of the first landing the airfield was surfaced with 800 tons of Marston Mat.

# 29 January 1941 - London

- Menzies writes in his diary:
- The new C in C. of the Far East, Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, looks like the late Baden-Powell.
- Winston Churchill had lunched him in London before he came out to this appointment, and he was boyishly pleased that Winston's farewell exhortations to him had contained more than a hint of the forlorn hope ("Hold out to the last, my boy, God bless you. If your grandfather had not broken his neck playing polo at Poona he would be proud of you this day!").



# 7 February 1941 - Egypt

- Menzies writes in his diary:
- ...to the fleet, where I meet Admiral Cunningham—slim, red faced, blue eyed, radiating optimism, faith in his ships and his men.
- This is the No 1 personality I have so far encountered on this journey: compared to him Chatfield is a stuffed clothes man.
- Sad to see French warships in port—neat but useless.



While in the Middle East, Menzies visited units of the Mediterranean Fleet. He is photographed here with Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean.



# 8 March 1941 - London

- Menzies wrote in his diary:
- To the Admiralty, where A. V. Alexander certainly impresses as knowing his Department thoroughly. I emphasise the uselessness of rhetorical phrases such as “cutting our losses in the Mediterranean and proceeding to your assistance”. A. V. agrees. They are to give me a realistic statement of—
- (a) What ships can come East in the near future
- (b) What ships could come East if war with Japan broke out.
- The real truth, which we are all beginning to see, is that air reinforcement to Singapore and the Far East is the great deterrent (apart from USA) to Japan. The Jap is reported here a bad airman. Even on the naval side, the Second Sea Lord (Phillips) said British fleet would be happy to attack with only 60% of the Japanese force! The Japanese experience in China seems to point to a similar state of affairs in the Army!



# 10 April 1941 - Iraq

- The new regime in Iraq intended to refuse further concessions to Britain, retain diplomatic links with Fascist Italy, and exile prominent pro-British politicians. Ali also tried to restrict British rights under Article 5 of the 1930 treaty when he insisted that newly arrived British troops be quickly transported through Iraq and to Palestine.
- On 1 April 1941, British forces in Iraq were small. AVM Smart commanded Number 1 Armoured Car Company RAF, six companies of Assyrian Levies, about 2,000 strong and No. 4 Flying Training School RAF (4FTS) at RAF Habbaniya.
- The armoured-car company had 18 ancient Rolls Royce armoured cars built for the RAF in 1921 on converted chassis of World War I design
- 4FTS had a miscellany of obsolescent bombers, fighters and trainers. Many of the 84 aircraft were unserviceable or were not fit for offensive use. At the start of hostilities, there were about 1,000 RAF personnel but only 39 pilots.

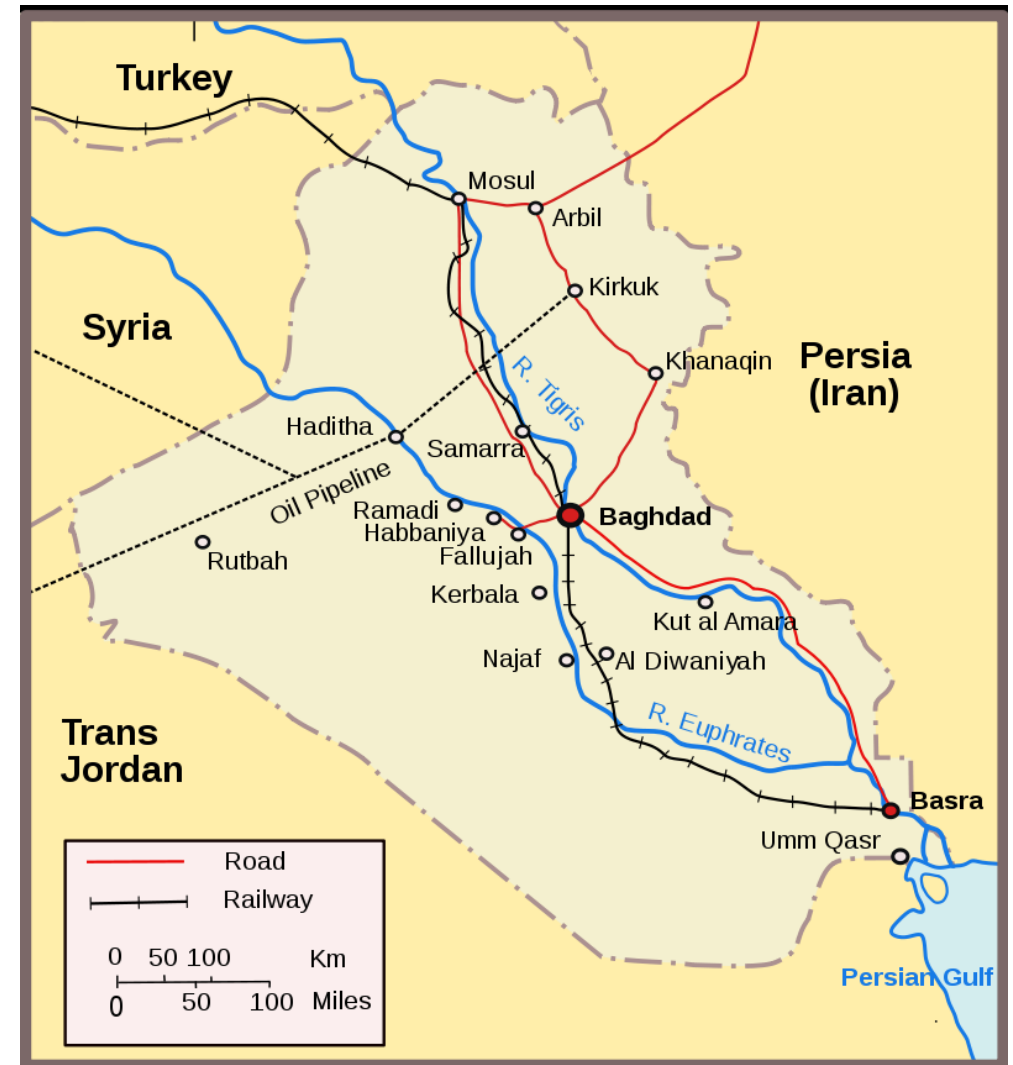


Gloster Gladiators of No. 94 Squadron RAF, guarded by Arab Legionnaires, refuel during their journey from Ismailia, Egypt, to reinforce Habbaniya



# 10 April 1941 - Iraq

- On 8 April, Churchill asked what force could be quickly sent from India to Iraq. The response was that
  - most of a brigade group due to set sail for Malaya on 10 April, could be diverted to Basra and the rest sent ten days later;
  - 390 British infantry could be flown from India into RAF Shaibah and when shipping was available, the force could quickly be built up to a division.
- On 10 April this offer was accepted by London, and the move of these forces was confirmed.
- That day Wavell told London that he could no longer spare the battalion in Palestine and urged diplomacy and possibly a demonstration of air strength, rather than military intervention.
- On 10 April, Major-General Fraser assumed control over Iraqforce, the land forces from India headed for Basra with orders to occupy the Basra-Shabai area to ensure the safe disembarkation of further reinforcements and to enable a base to be established in that area.
- Fraser was to closely co-operate with the navy commander. If the landing was opposed, Fraser was to defeat the Iraqi forces and establish a base, but Fraser was not to infringe Iranian neutrality.
- In early April, preparation for hostilities began at Habbaniya, aircraft were modified to carry bombs and light bombers such as the Audaxes were modified to carry larger bombs.



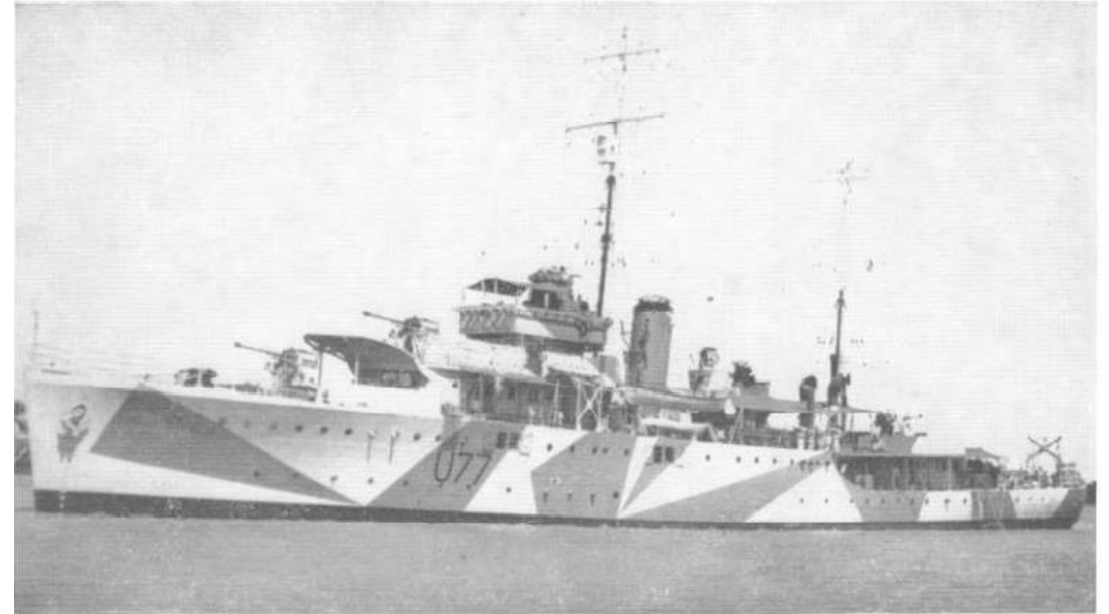
# 12 April 1941 – Wellington

- In a telegram dated 12 April to the High Commissioner in London, the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser (photo), said the Government would not, of course, press the matter unduly if the Admiralty, 'on balancing their requirements in all theatres of war', still felt that an extension of the New Zealand cruiser's period of overseas service was desirable.
- Nevertheless, the need for another cruiser for the protection of shipping in the New Zealand area was still greatly felt and the Leander 'could very usefully be employed' there.



# 12 April 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Yarra had been in Bombay, where she docked and refitted until 9th April. On that date she sailed for Aden, but the following day was diverted to Karachi where she arrived on the 11th.
- On the 12th she sailed as escort to the Basra convoy of eight ships (BM.7) diverted from Malaya to Iraq.



*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*  
H.M.A.S. Yarra in Persian Gulf, August 1942.

# 13 April 1941 – Indian Ocean

- The cruiser Leander proceeded to Madras, whence she sailed on 11 April escorting a convoy of four large transports carrying Indian troops for Singapore.
- Next day the Leander turned the convoy over to HMS Ceres and shaped course for Trincomalee, arriving there in the morning of 13 April to refuel.
- Nine hours later the New Zealand cruiser was ordered to raise steam and sail at once for Colombo, where she arrived the following afternoon.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

302431

PORT SIDE VIEW OF THE LIGHT CRUISER HMS LEANDER AS BUILT WITH SINGLE 4 INCH MARK V GUNS ON MARK IV MOUNTINGS ABREAST THE FUNNEL. TWIN 4 INCH MOUNTINGS HAD BEEN FITTED BY 1937.

# 13 April 1941 – Indian Ocean

- On 12 April, Convoy BP7 left Karachi composed of eight transports escorted by HMAS Yarra.
- The forces transported by the convoy, under the command of Major-General Fraser, were the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade and certain ancillary troops.
- On 13 April, the Royal Navy force of four ships in the Persian Gulf were reinforced by the aircraft carrier HMS Hermes and two light cruisers, HMS Emerald and HMNZS Leander. HMS Hermes carried the Fairey Swordfish torpedo bombers of 814 Squadron.
- Emerald arrived at Basra on the 13th.



HMAS Yarra (2)  
1,000 tons  
3 4inch guns  
16.5 knots

# 14 April 1941 – Indian Ocean

- The Commander-in-Chief East Indies (Vice-Admiral R. Leatham) embarked in the New Zealand cruiser, Leander, on 14 April, and after fuelling she sailed that evening for the Persian Gulf.



# 17 April 1941 - Iraq

- On 17 April, Ali asked Germany for military assistance in the event of war with Britain.

# 18 April 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Yarra and BM7 reached Basra on the 18<sup>th</sup> having been joined en route by H.M. Ships Falmouth and Cockchafer.
- H.M.S. Emerald was there, and a few hours later Admiral Leatham (photo), the CinC, East Indies, arrived in Leander having steamed at 26 knots from Colombo.
- The landing of the troops at Basra was unopposed and the official attitude was friendly; but the Iraqi Government said no more troops could land until those already in Iraq moved on.
- The British Government replied that in view of the situation in Egypt, additional troops were already on their way. (They were in convoy BP.1, which left India on the 22nd April.)



# 19 April 1941 – Persian Gulf

- at five o'clock next morning (19<sup>th</sup>) the Commander-in-Chief transferred to HMS Seabelle and proceeded to Basra. The Leander sailed soon afterwards and arrived at Kuwait about midday.
- Responsibility for control of the force in Iraq was then transferred to the CinC India General Sir Claude Auchinleck (photo).

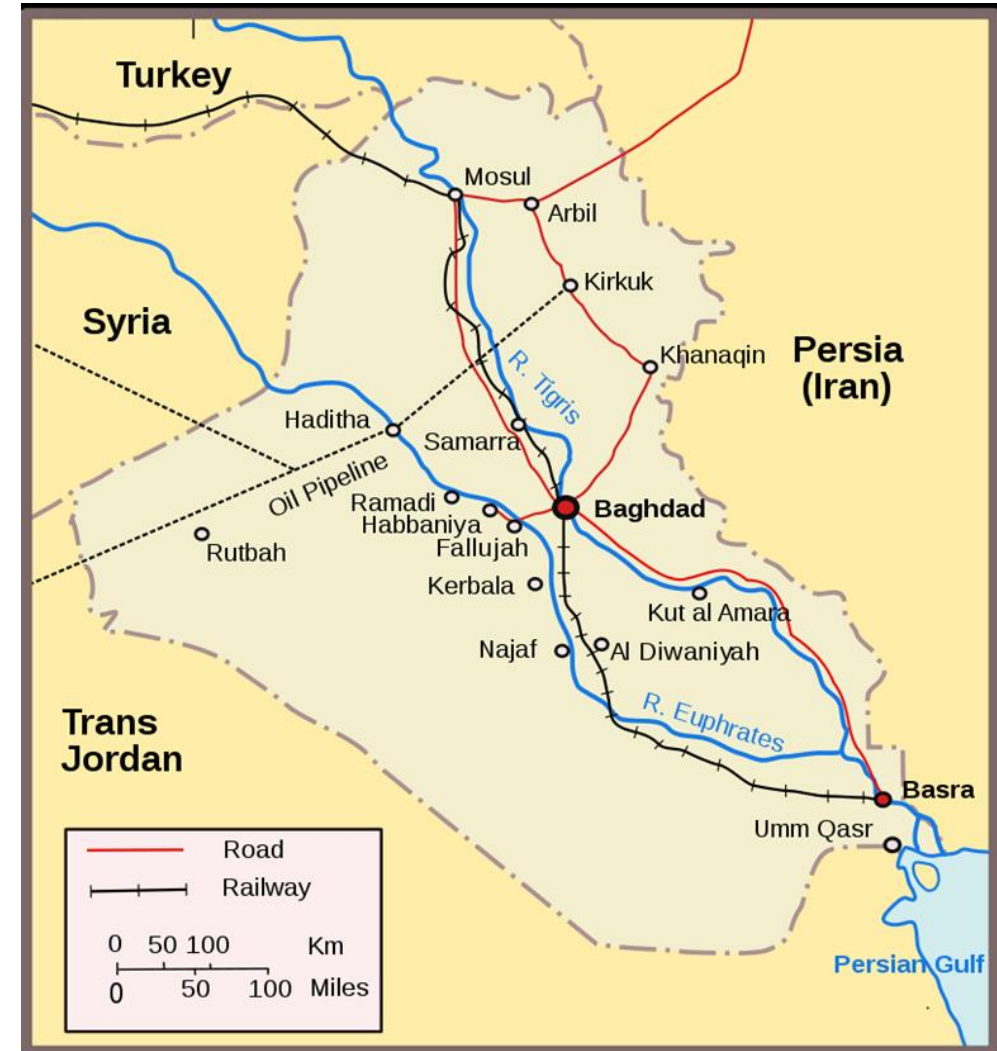


## 25 – 29 April 1941 – Indian Ocean

- On 25 April, the Empire Light, 6950 tons was sunk by a German raider in the north-west area of the Indian Ocean. No distress message was picked up from this ship, whose radio-room was wrecked by gunfire.
- Three days later (28 April) the Clan Buchanan was sunk by the raider, and it was a wireless message from that ship that started Force 'V' on the hunt for the raider.
- The Cornwall sailed from Mombasa, Kenya, at midday on 28 April and proceeded at 25 knots for her search area. She was followed from that port by the Eagle and Hawkins.
- The Leander had returned to the Shatt-el-Arab in the evening of 22 April and embarked Admiral Leatham early next morning. She refuelled at Bahrein and then proceeded on her return passage to Colombo, whence, having landed the Commander-in-Chief, she put to sea again in the afternoon of 29 April.
- After leaving Colombo, the Leander proceeded at 25 knots and passed through Khardiva Channel in the Maldiv Islands about seven o'clock in the morning of 30 April. She then eased to 20 knots on a westerly course for her search area. The Leander launched her aircraft on reconnaissance morning and afternoon during her patrol but nothing suspicious was sighted.

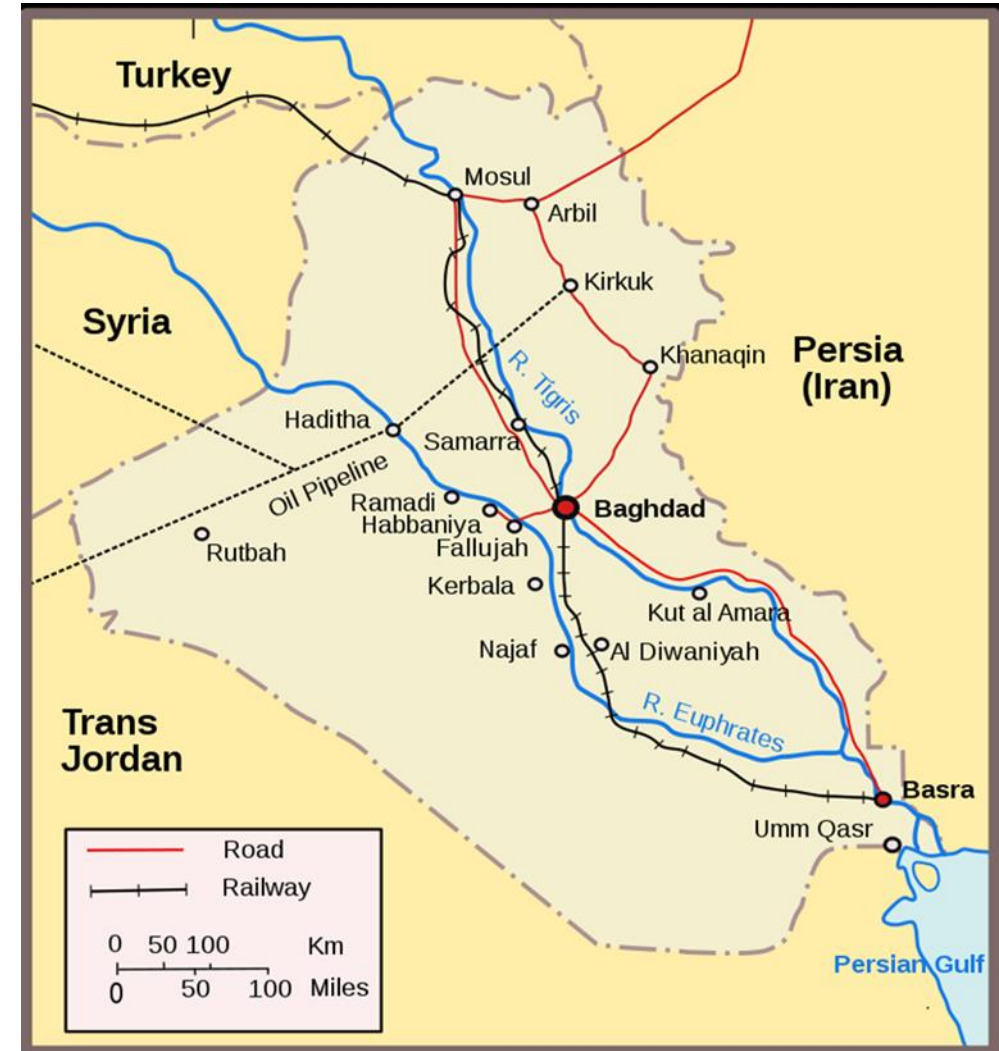
# 29 April 1941 – Iraq

- On 28th April the British force at Basra was slightly reinforced.
- The following day two infantry brigades of the Iraqi army supported by armoured cars and artillery—twelve 18-pounder guns and some howitzers—surrounded the British cantonment at Habbaniya and trained their guns on it.
- Habbaniya, on the south bank of the Euphrates 50 miles west of Baghdad, contained Air Vice-Marshal Smart's headquarters, No. 4 Flying Training School (about 1,000 men of the R.A.F. in all), a company of eighteen RAF armoured cars, and five companies, totalling 1,000 men, of Assyrian and Kurdish troops led by twenty British officers.
- The area was surrounded by a fence along which, at intervals of 500 yards, were fourteen blockhouses, but was overlooked by a plateau.



# 30 April 1941 – Iraq

- The eighty training aircraft in the flying school were hastily formed into four squadrons manned by instructors and students.
- Smart could also call on some Wellingtons that had been flown to Shaiba, where there was also an army cooperation squadron, No. 244, supporting the force at Basra.
- On the 30th 350 men of a British battalion were flown in from Basra.



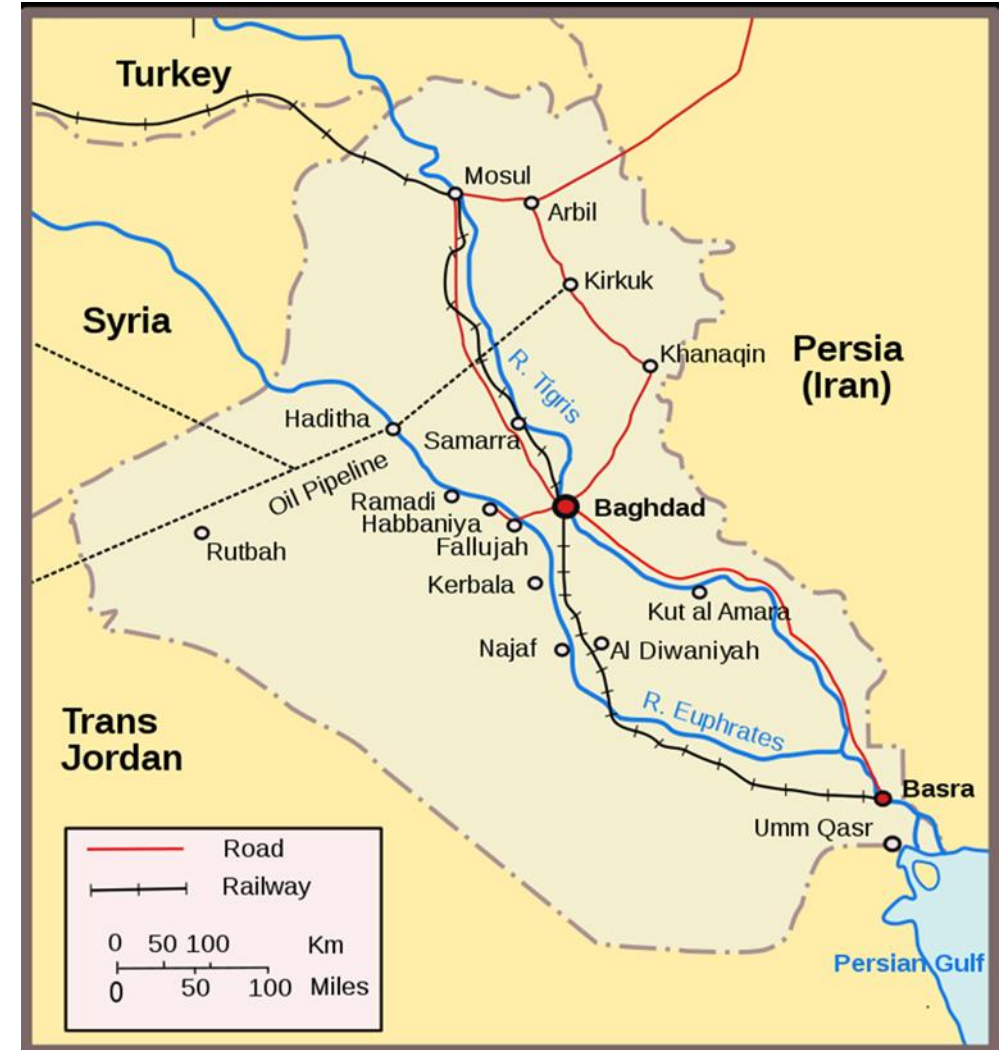


# 1 May 1941 - London

- Replying on 1 May, the High Commissioner reported that the First Lord of the Admiralty had informed him that the Leander was engaged in most important duties and that HMS Neptune would leave (for New Zealand) in late May or early June. Both the First Lord and the First Sea Lord were grateful for New Zealand's assistance by allowing the Leander to remain overseas and they hoped that the loan of the Neptune would be satisfactory.
- The Leander would be returned later if circumstances warranted.
- Neptune was in the same class as Leander.
- Leander had a New Zealand crew.
- Leander was in the Indian Ocean, Neptune was in the Mediterranean.
- Neptune does not appear to have actually left for New Zealand.

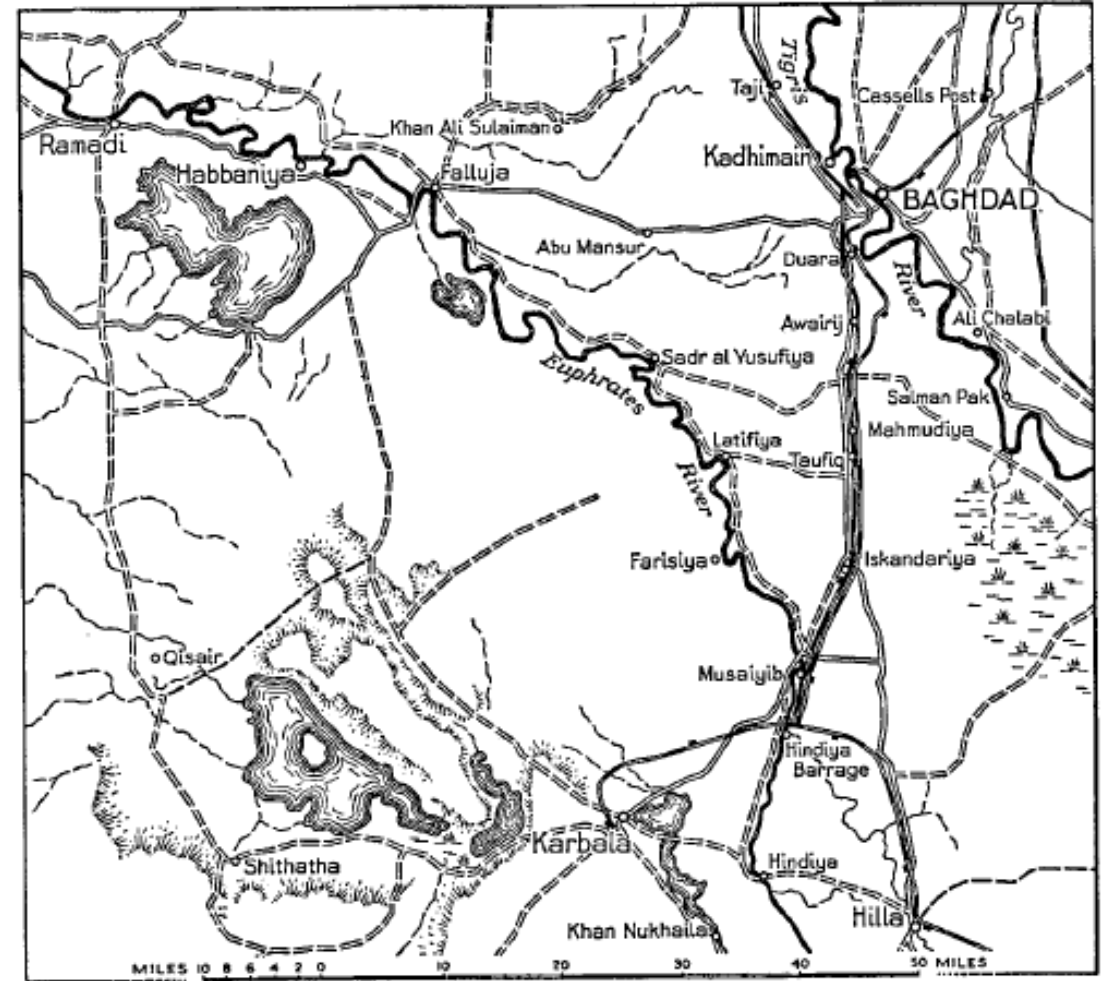
## 2 May 1941 – Iraq

- When asked to withdraw, the Iraqi commander replied that he would open fire on troops or aircraft leaving the camp.
- Thus the situation remained until dawn on 2nd May when, on Smart's orders, all the available training aircraft were loaded with bombs and took off from the airfield.
- Within a minute the Iraqi artillery opened fire.
- The aircraft bombed and strafed the Iraqi gun positions.



## 5 May 1941 – Iraq

- In three days the aircraft silenced more than half of the guns; but this did not dissuade the Iraqis from continuing the siege.
- The garrison was outnumbered and had no artillery except two old 18 - pounders. Nevertheless it patrolled vigorously by night and, on 5th May, achieved such success that the Iraqis began to withdraw to a safer distance.



# 5 May 1941 - Ethiopia

- On 5 May 1941, Haile Selassie entered Addis Ababa and personally addressed the Ethiopian people, exactly five years after the fascist forces entered Addis Ababa:
- “...let not our rejoicing be in any other way but in the spirit of Christ. Do not return evil for evil. Do not indulge in the atrocities which the enemy has been practicing in his usual way, even to the last.
- Take care not to spoil the good name of Ethiopia by acts which are worthy of the enemy. We shall see that our enemies are disarmed and sent out the same way they came. . . . let us unite with our allies in everlasting friendship and amity in order to be able to stand against the godless and cruel dragon which has newly risen and which is oppressing mankind.”



Haile Selassie with Brigadier Sandford (left) and Colonel Wingate (right) in Dambacha Fort, after its capture, 15 April 1941.

# 5 May 1941 – Egypt

- At a conference in Cairo on 5th May with Wavell, the de Gaullist general, Catroux, pressed the case for an invasion (of Syria) by the Free French.
- General Catroux was the former Governor of French Indo-China, who was superseded when he refused to carry out the instructions of the Vichy Government. He joined General Charles De Gaulle's staff with the Free French forces.

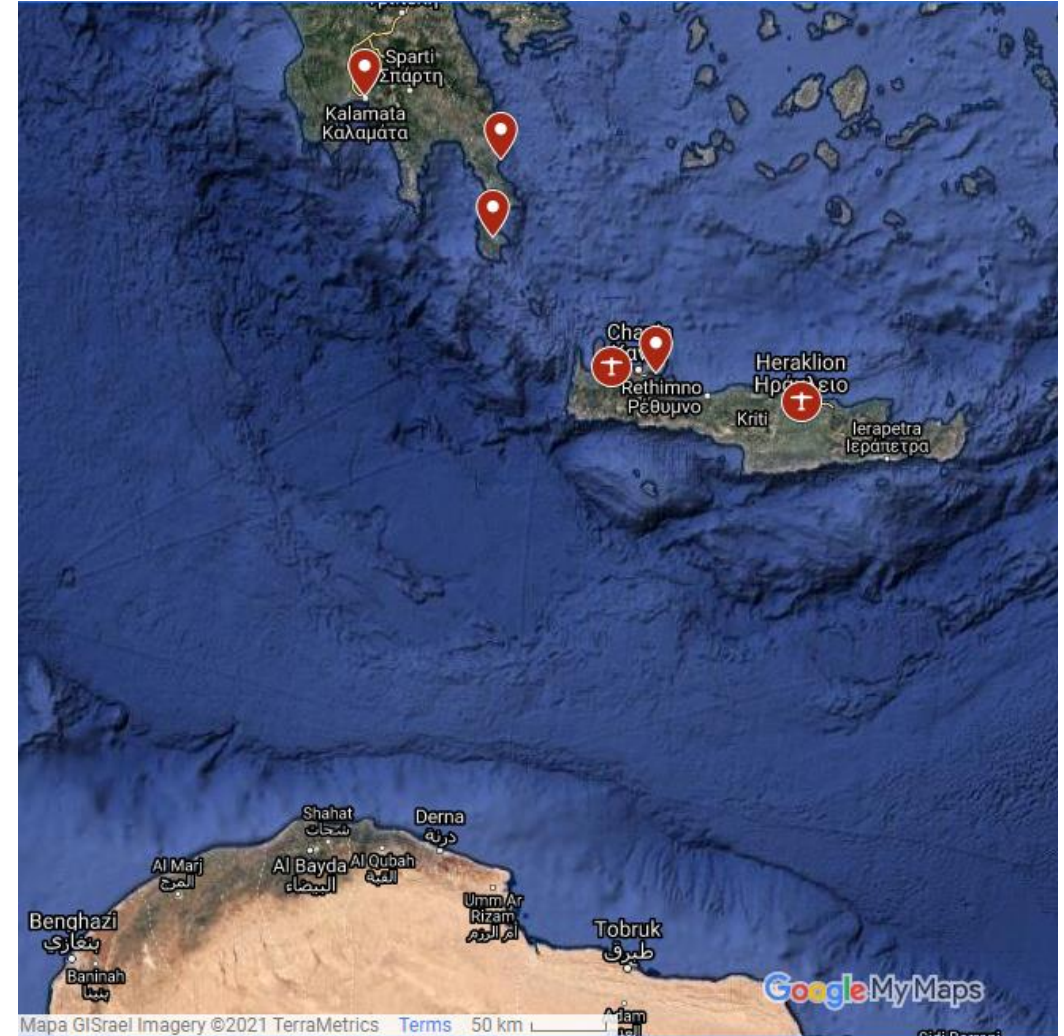


Left to right: Air Chief Marshal Longmore, General Wavell, General de Gaulle, General Catroux.



# 5 May 1941 – Crete

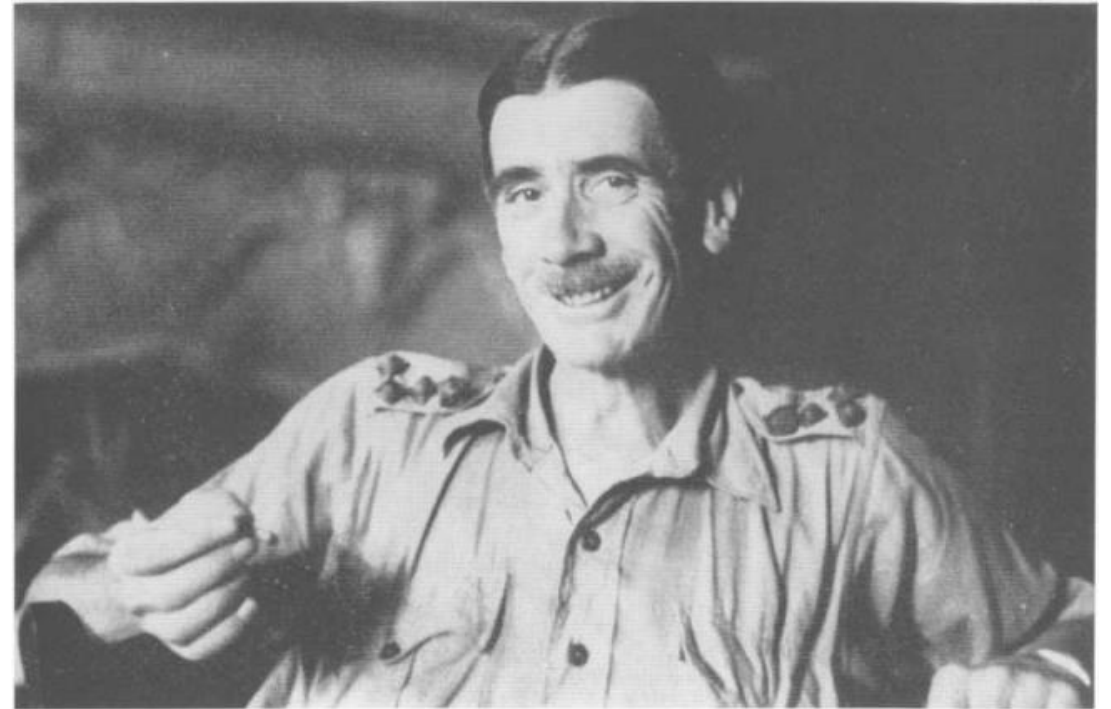
- Freyberg sent a cable to Churchill in the course of which he said that he was "not in the least anxious about an airborne attack" and added:
- I have made my dispositions and feel that with the troops now at my disposal I can cope adequately. However, a combination of seaborne and airborne attack is different. If that comes before I can get the guns and transport here the situation will be difficult. Even so, provided the Navy can help, I trust that all will be well.
- Freyberg sent a message to Wavell that day urging that about 10,000 men who were without arms "and with little or no employment other than getting into trouble with the civil population" should be evacuated.





# 5 May 1941 – Crete

- Brigadier Vasey, as senior Australian officer in Crete, found himself not only in command of an Australian brigade group but responsible for some 8,500 troops, including almost-unarmed units equivalent to a second brigade, besides parties of varying size belonging to about thirty other separate units.
- Vasey, like Freyberg, was anxious to send his unarmed men to Egypt. On the 5th May he dispatched a message to A.I.F. headquarters recommending the removal of some 5,000 such troops and stating that he had organised four battalions with the 2/8th Field Company, a company of the 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion, and the 2/7th Field Ambulance for garrison duties. The implication was that other units and detachments should be removed.



*(Mrs. G. A. Vasey)*

Brigadier G. A. Vasey, who commanded the Australians on Crete.

# 5 May 1941 - Libya

Fortress casualties from 29th April to 4th May were:

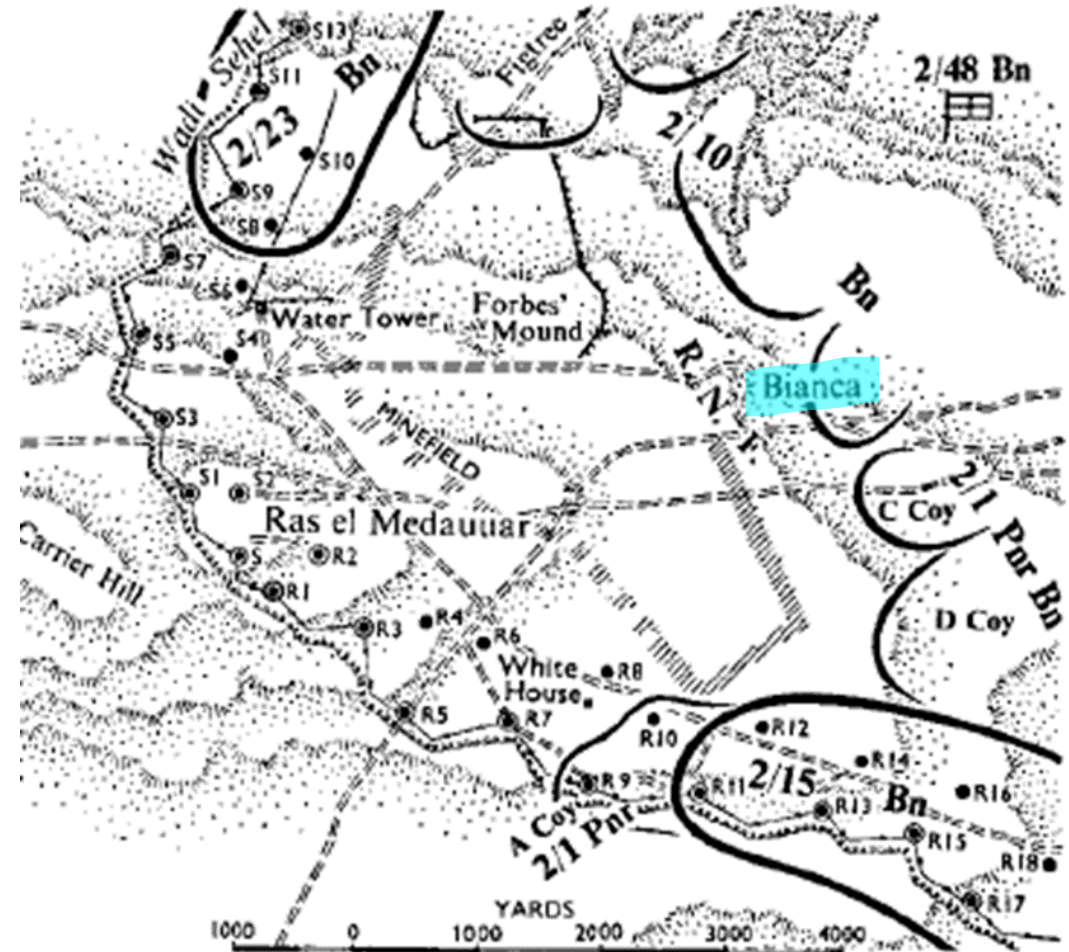
Killed		Wounded		Missing		Total
Offrs	OR's	Offrs	OR's	Offrs	OR's	
7	52	16	339	13	370	797

In the operations from 30th April to the evening of 3rd May the Axis forces had lost:

		Killed		Wounded		Missing		Total
		Offrs	OR's	Offrs	OR's	Offrs	OR's	
German	. .	7	108	19	340	1	127	602
Italian	. .	2	50	10	205	1	84	352
Total	. .	9	158	29	545	2	211	954

# 5 May 1941 - Libya

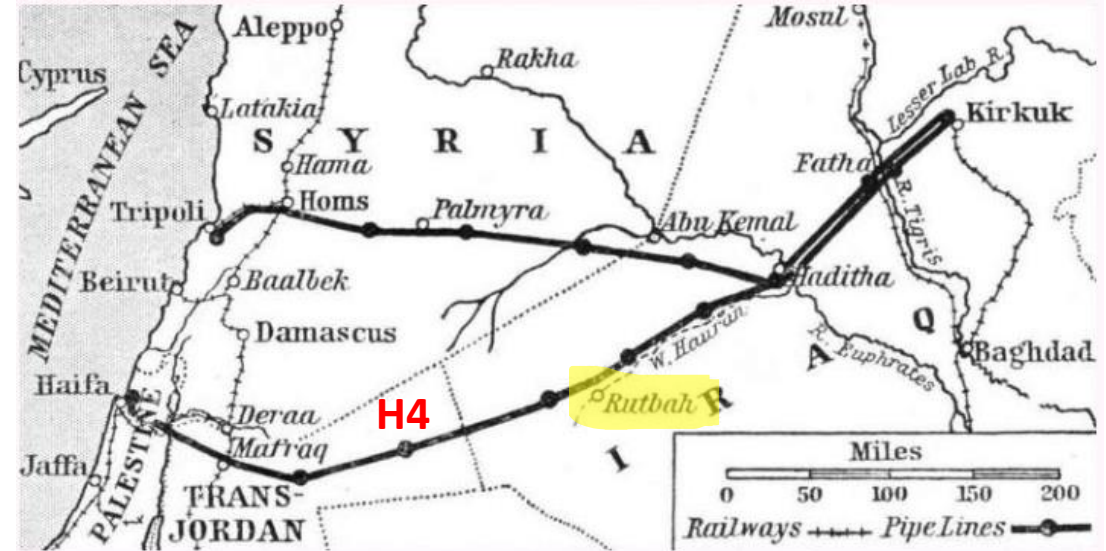
- On the morning of 5th May Colonel Martin, surveying the positions he had taken over during the night from the left company of the 2/10th Battalion and the right company of the 2/1st Pioneers, found his battalion (2/9<sup>th</sup>) holding a general north-south line running through the important track junctions (not all printed on the map) behind and east of Bianca. Appreciating the need of denying to the enemy that dominant point of vantage and observation, Martin at once decided to push his line forward.
- The move was executed in the early afternoon under intense machine-gun fire and shelling. Ten men were killed and 22 wounded (one mortally) and 2 men were reported missing; but though costly in life the realignment added greatly to the security of the defence at its weakest point and moreover enabled an excellent, if vulnerable, observation post for the artillery to be established.



Morning, 2nd May

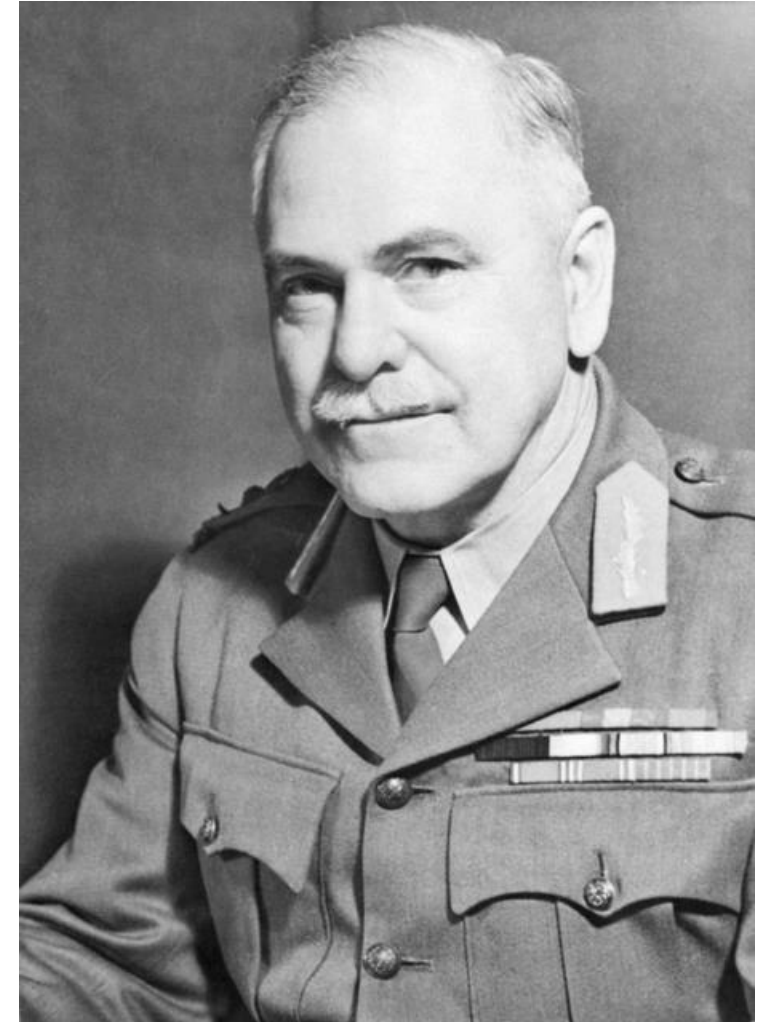
# 6 May 1941 – Iraq

- Next day the British troops and Iraqi levies defeated an enemy rearguard and cleared the plateau, capturing more than 400 men and much useful equipment.
- Four Blenheim fighters had reinforced the squadrons at Habbaniya, and Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac, now commanding the air force in Palestine and Transjordan, had established a base at the "H.4" Pumping Station near the Iraq frontier to prevent the enemy, whether Iraqi or German, from landing aircraft at "H.3" or at Rutba.



# 6 May 1941 – Egypt

- Blamey, now in Cairo as Deputy C-in-C, agreed with the current estimates of the force needed to hold Crete.
- In response to a request from the anxious Australian Cabinet, Blamey cabled, on 6<sup>th</sup> May, that he considered that Crete should not be abandoned without the sternest struggle. A possible scale of attack would be by one airborne and one seaborne division, the first sortie being made by one-third of an air -borne division.
- The troops required to defend the island were three infantry brigade groups with coastal and harbour defences and a "reasonable air force":
- the forces available were the 14th British Brigade and troops from Greece who were adequate in numbers but had no artillery. He considered that the 16th British Brigade, more artillery and fighter squadrons should be sent.
- "Situation far from satisfactory," he added, "but everything possible being done to improve it." He expected that most of the A.I.F. would be withdrawn as soon as the 16th British Brigade could be sent in.



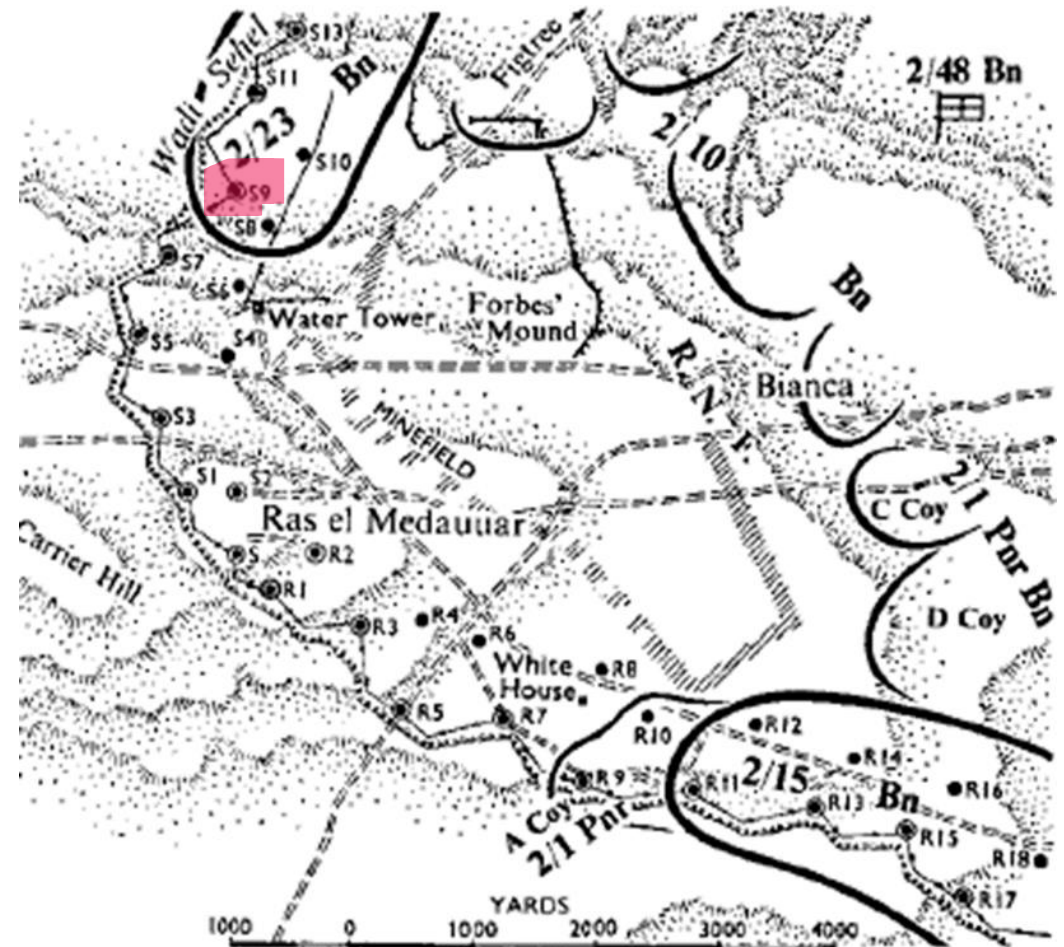
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

022111



# 6 May 1941 – Libya

- About 7.30 a.m. a strong German fighting patrol closed in on **Post S9** in the area held by Captain Malloch's company of the 2/23rd Battalion. The attack was driven off with the help of artillery fire and supporting fire from Post S8 but one man in the post was killed and another wounded. More enemy, estimated to be in excess of one company, were then observed about 300 yards from the wire; but after enduring fire for two hours the enemy withdrew at 9.30 a.m.
- Henceforward the positions in the Salient were steadily improved by digging, wiring and mining, and were edged forward when opportunity offered. As each side developed its positions and pushed them out towards the other, the strain on the men holding the front, particularly in the Salient, became intense.
- Morshead insisted that the defence should never be inactive. The mastery of no-man's land by all brigades was positively required and was unrelentingly maintained throughout the siege by patrols and excursions beyond the wire and aggressive employment of the artillery.



Morning, 2nd May



# Libya

- As the siege progressed, the bush artillery developed into a useful harassing arm linked into the artillery but not curtailed by ammunition shortage as the British field pieces were for long periods: the garrison's reserves of captured Italian ammunition were almost inexhaustible.
- These guns had not been commandeered by the artillery because they were defective in one or most respects, such as lack of sights. In time some defects were made good from "scrounging" or by using parts taken from enemy guns by night patrols.
- They were originally manned by "all hands and the cook", but in time the crews were more selectively chosen and were usually commanded by officers having some training in the handling of medium-range weapons.
- Chester Wilmot in "Tobruk" tells a story, probably true, of a bush-gun crew who combined pleasure with profit by charging passers-by "2 piastres a pop" for the privilege of firing their gun at the enemy.
- The business was closed down on the protest of a neighbouring infantry commander whose headquarters became the delivery point for returns.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

020648

MEN OF THE 2/28TH BATTALION AND 104TH ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY, MANHANDLE A 149MM ITALIAN FIELD GUN.

# 6 May 1941 – Mediterranean

- In Operation Tiger, convoy WS 8, five 15 knot merchant ships loaded with tanks and Hurricanes for Egypt, passed Gibraltar on 6 May accompanied by Force H, along with a battleship, Queen Elizabeth, and two cruisers, Naiad and Fiji, en route to Alexandria to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet. Air cover was provided by Fulmars from the Ark Royal and newly arrived long range twin engine Beaufighters based in Malta.
- The Mediterranean Fleet left Alexandria the same day to take over the Tiger convoy from Force "H" south of Malta and taking the opportunity to cover the passage of two supply convoys from Alexandria to Malta.
- On the same day two Italian cargo ships, each about 2,000 ton were torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean 3 miles off the Calabrian coast, one by HMS Truant one by HMS Taku.



HM Submarine Taku, 1,090 tons surfaced, 1,575 tons submerged. Length 275 ft, Six internal forward-facing 21 inch torpedo tubes, Four external forward-facing torpedo tubes, Six reload torpedoes, One 4-inch gun.

# 7 May 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Shortly after five o'clock in the morning of 7 May the tanker British Emperor, 3663 tons, on passage from Durban in ballast for Abadan, in a position about 375 miles east-south-east from Cape Guardafui (8°30'N 56°25'E) was intercepted and sunk by a surface raider. The tanker was able to transmit a wireless distress message when she was attacked.
- HMS Cornwall had just crossed the Equator on her way to refuel at the Seychelles Islands when she intercepted the British Emperor's message. She was then about 520 miles south of the indicated position. Altering course to north-north-west, the Cornwall increased speed to 20 knots. A plan for intercepting the raider with the aid of aircraft was worked out on the principle of closing the enemy's 'furthest on' line and then starting a search to cover the largest possible variations of the raider's speed and course. During the morning the Cornwall increased speed to 25 ½ knots and headed north to cover the gap between the Seychelles and the Chagos Archipelago.
- Leander was steaming westward at 25 knots from Nine Degree Channel towards Socotra, while HMS Liverpool, from an early morning position due north of Cape Guardafui, proceeded towards Eight Degree Channel on her way to Colombo.
- HMS Glasgow, also from the Gulf of Aden, passed Cape Guardafui that morning at 23 knots to a position about 100 miles south-east from that headland, and then steamed south-west at 20 knots towards a position on the Equator about 300 miles from the African coast.
- Farther west, HMS Hector, armed merchant cruiser, covered shipping by patrolling from the Equator to a position 300 miles to the southwest.

# 7 May 1941 – Indian Ocean

- During the afternoon of 7 May the Cornwall flew both her aircraft on reconnaissance for three hours and then shaped course to get on the line of the main Vignot search. This was plotted for a mean speed of 13 knots for one hour after the time of the raider report, on the assumption that the raider would take an hour to deal with the British Emperor and then proceed at full speed until dark. At 9.30 p.m. the Cornwall altered course to east-south-east and reduced speed to search on this line before the moon set.



# 7 May 1941 – Iraq

- Lieut-General Quinan arrived from India on 7th May to take command. He was informed that he was to develop and organise the port of Basra "to any extent necessary to enable such forces, our own or Allied, as might be required to operate in the Middle East, including Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, to be maintained", to secure control of all communications in Iraq, and be ready to protect the Kirkuk oilfield and the pipe-line to Haifa, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's installations, and the R.A.F. depots at Habbaniya and Shaiba.
- He was informed that his force would be increased to three infantry divisions and possibly one armoured division.
- At this stage control of operations in Iraq were transferred from Auchinleck to Wavell, who could not, however, send help on the scale envisaged.



Generals Wavell and Quinan (left) meet in the Middle East

# 7 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- "AN.30" was originally of four ships which sailed for Crete on the 6th May, one from Haifa, two from Port Said, and one from Alexandria, escorted by Auckland, Grimsby, Flamingo and Vampire, to rendezvous with Stuart and Waterhen at 11.30 a.m. on the 7th.
- Due to a variety of circumstances, Waller in Stuart did not get his convoy and escorts formed up until 6.30 p.m., matters being made difficult by the fact that one of his charges, Rawnsley (5,000 tons), could not steam at more than eight knots while another, Lossiebank (5,627 tons) could not steam at less than eleven.
- At this juncture Stuart's engines broke down, and Waller had to return to Alexandria, and carried out a six-hour attack on a submarine on the way.
- The convoy proceeded north in charge of Auckland.



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



# 7 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- The Hunt-class minesweeper HMS Stoke (710t, 1918) was bombed and sunk by three direct hits at Tobruk, Libya by Junkers Ju 87 aircraft with the loss of 21 crew. Survivors were rescued by HMS Ladybird.
- The German weather ship Munchen (306 GRT, 1927) was captured south east of Iceland by HMS Somali.
- She was reported to have been scuttled by her crew, to prevent the Germans from learning that an Enigma cypher machine had been captured.



British Hunt class minesweeper

# 7 May 1941 - Crete

- On the 7th Wavell sent a cable to Freyberg and asked Freyberg to cable his principal requirements. Freyberg replied:
- First. Agree not desirable at this juncture to attempt to land 16th Inf Bde and broadly speaking do not require additional personnel of any arm as a first priority. Prefer concentrate on landing essential equipment and stores. Second. Agree infantry tanks with crews and light tanks valuable also carriers. Third. Ample artillery personnel available also sights and directors without stands. 25pr ammunition could be unloaded off Runo if guns available. Otherwise hasten despatch of 75 mm guns. Tractors and artillery signal equipment will also be needed. Fourth. Other weapons required. Vickers guns and belts complete at least 24. Tripods for existing guns 30. Bren guns with magazines all possible to meet existing shortage of 300 and magazines for existing 300 guns. Rifles and bayonets 5000 for British plus 500 for Greeks. Mortars 2-inch and 3-inch as many as possible. Fifth. Hasten despatch of 20 cars and of motor-cycles already asked for but increase from 30 to 100. Also expedite 70 15-cwt trucks and balance of one reserve MT Coy predicted in fourth of your [signal] of 3rd May as part of next convoy. Sixth. Ammunition. .303 inch bandoliers 5 million carton 2 million stripless belts half million . ATK rifle 10000.

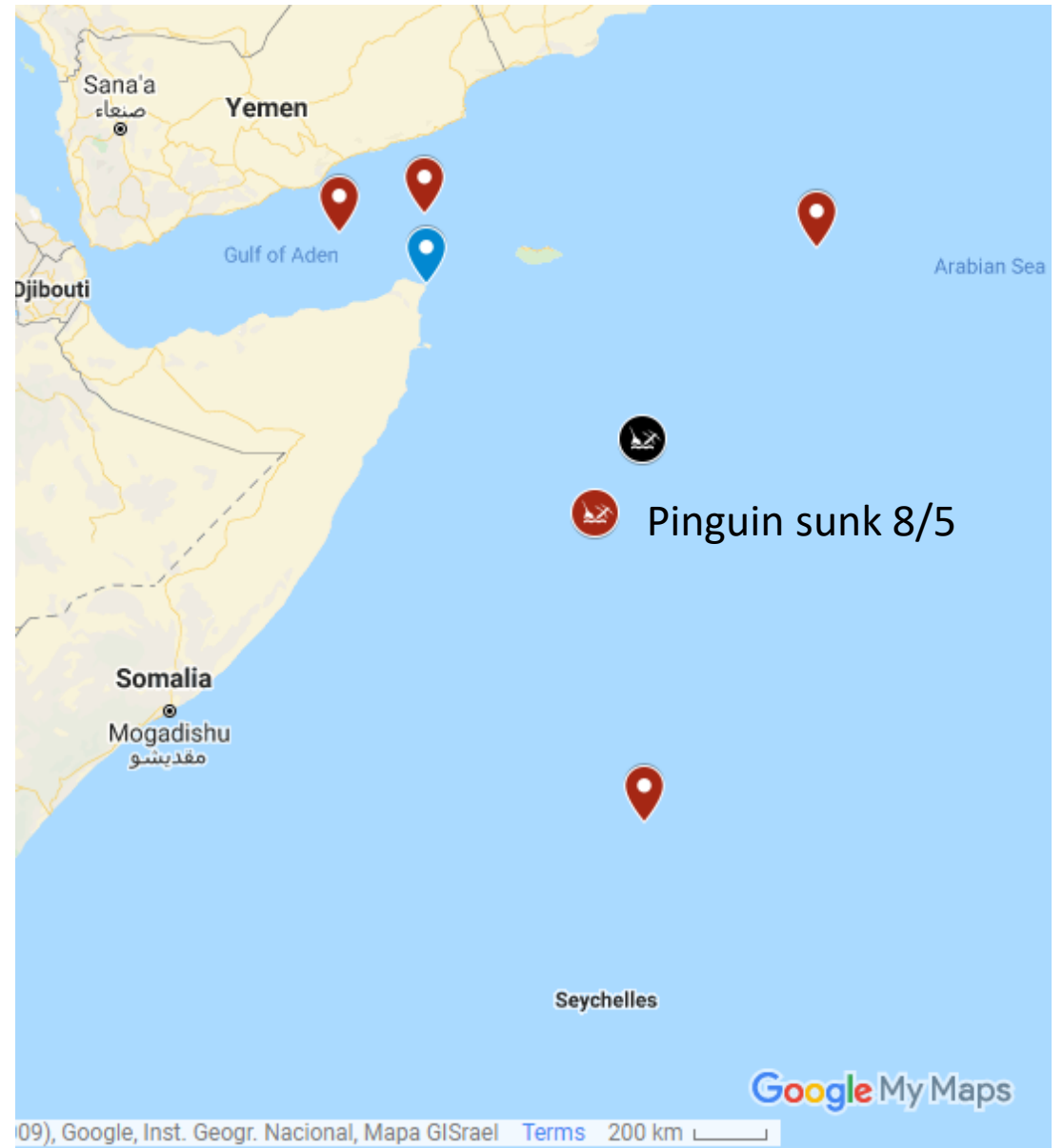


# 8 May 1941 – Indian Ocean

- At daybreak (8 May) the Cornwall launched both aircraft on a search to cover a variation of three knots on either side of the enemy's estimated speed. The cruiser herself altered course to east at 18 knots. At 7.7 a.m. one of the aircraft sighted a ship of the suspected type going south-west at 13 knots, about 65 miles west from the Cornwall, but made no report before returning about eight o'clock. At 8.25 a.m. the cruiser altered course to about west by south and increased speed to 23 knots. The second aircraft was launched again at 10.15 a.m., and when it returned at 12.23 it reported that the unknown ship was steaming at 15 knots and had hoisted signal letters. These were identified as those of the Norwegian motor-vessel Tamerlane, which the raider closely resembled but which was not in the Cornwall's list of expected ships.
- The cruiser accordingly increased speed to 26 knots and at one o'clock to 28 knots. At 1.45 p.m. she catapulted an aircraft to keep her informed by wireless of the bearing, course, and speed of the suspected ship, which was finally sighted from the bridge of the Cornwall at 4.7 p.m. The stranger then began sending wireless 'raider reports' stating that she was the Tamerlane. Notwithstanding frequent signals ordering her to heave-to and two warning shots from the cruiser, the ship kept her course and speed for more than an hour until the range was inside 12,000 yards. At 5.10 p.m. the Cornwall turned to port and the stranger, apparently convinced that the former was about to open fire in earnest, made a large alteration of course to port and got in first blow by opening fire with five guns just before 5.15 p.m.

# 8 May – Indian Ocean

- Due to mechanical failures, the Cornwall was unable to reply for a minute or two and was frequently straddled by rapid and fairly accurate gunfire before getting off two salvos from her forward 8-inch turrets.
- Her fore steering gear was disabled by a 5.9-inch shell hit, but the after steering gear was quickly brought into use and the ship was out of control for a matter of seconds only.
- By 5.18 p.m. all the Cornwall's turrets were firing, and at 5.26 a salvo hit the enemy ship, which blew up and sank in a position about 300 miles from where the British Emperor was sunk and about 500 miles north of the Seychelles.
- The ship, which was, in fact, the raider Pinguin, had a complement of about 350, as well as 180 prisoners from merchant ships sunk by her. The Cornwall picked up 58 German and 25 British survivors.
- 45 of the crew of the British Emperor were lost between the sinking of their own ship, and that of the Pinguin.





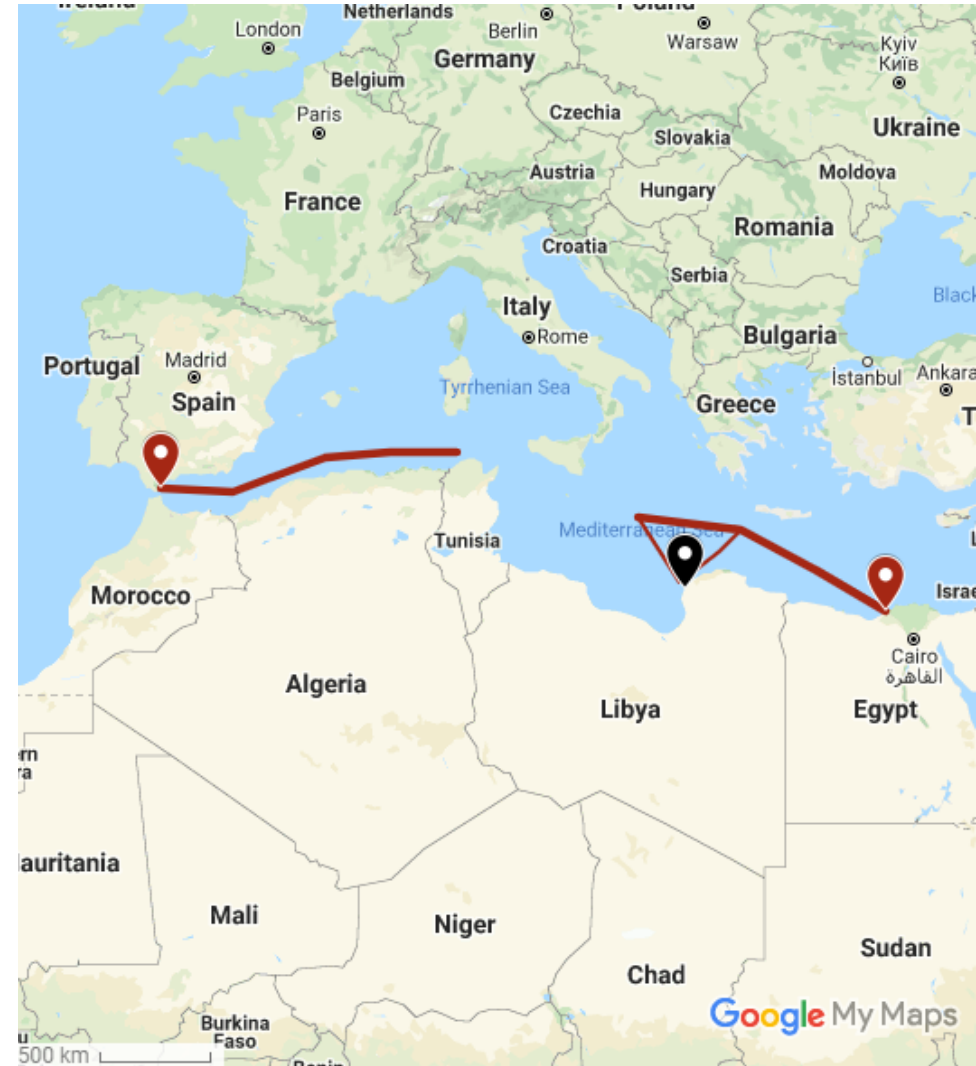
# 8 May 1941 - Melbourne

- Mr Curtin (photo), the leader of the opposition, was not, however, in agreement with the Government's adherence to British strategy in the Mediterranean.
- In the Advisory War Council on the 8th May he suggested that consideration should be given to "the vacation of the Mediterranean before the British Fleet was hemmed in there", and that from the point of view of Australia's defence the defence of India was of greater importance than the defence of Egypt.



# 8 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- Tiger had reached a point South of Sardinia before being spotted by the enemy on 8 May. Air attacks followed but they were hampered by poor weather and achieved no success.
- The Italian cargo ships Capitano A. Cecchi (2,321 GRT, 1934) and Tenace (1,142 GRT) were shelled and sunk at Benghazi, Libya by HM Ships Ajax, Havock, Hotspur and Imperial, which had been detached from the Mediterranean Fleet, as it headed to Malta to take over escort of the Tiger convoy from Force H.
- At 6.45 p.m. on the 8th, just south of Kaso Strait, Rawnsley was torpedoed in an air attack. Rawnsley was taken in tow by Grimsby escorted by Waterhen, and was anchored in Ierapetra Bay on the south coast of Crete.





# 9 May 1941 - Melbourne

- By the second quarter of 1941 the 32-squadron plan was being advanced again. The Air Board detailed the aircraft required for the program, which did not include any single seat fighters.
- The Beaufighter, a fast, twin-engined, long-range "intruder" aircraft was ordered after the War Cabinet had noted on 9th May that it "appeared to be the only type of aircraft meeting the Australian Air Staff's needs for a high performance, two-seater fighter".



The unarmed first prototype Bristol Beaufighter R2052 in July 1939.

# 9 May 1941 - Egypt

- On 9th May Churchill emphasised to Wavell the necessity of forestalling the Germans in Syria.
- Wavell (photo), with very limited forces at his disposal after losses in Libya and Greece, advised the Chiefs of Staff in London that an attack by the Free French alone was bound to fail and that he himself did not wish to move into Syria until he could do so effectively.



# 9 May 1941 - Crete

- On the 9th May 2,000 Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation Marines with their anti-aircraft guns arrived at Suda, "but the danger of losing ships through enemy air action was considered too great to allow any further M.N.B.D.O. storeships to be sent to Crete".



# 9 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- Operation Tiger / Convoy WS 8:  
The cargo liner Empire Song (9,228 GRT, 1940) struck a mine and sank in the Strait of Sicily (37°09'12"N 11°01'24"E) with the loss of 18 crew and passengers. Survivors were rescued by HMS Foresight.
- Also lost were 57 tanks and 10 crated Hurricanes.
- By the afternoon of 9 May the rest of Wavell's tanks were in the custody of the Mediterranean fleet after a massive rendezvous South of Malta.



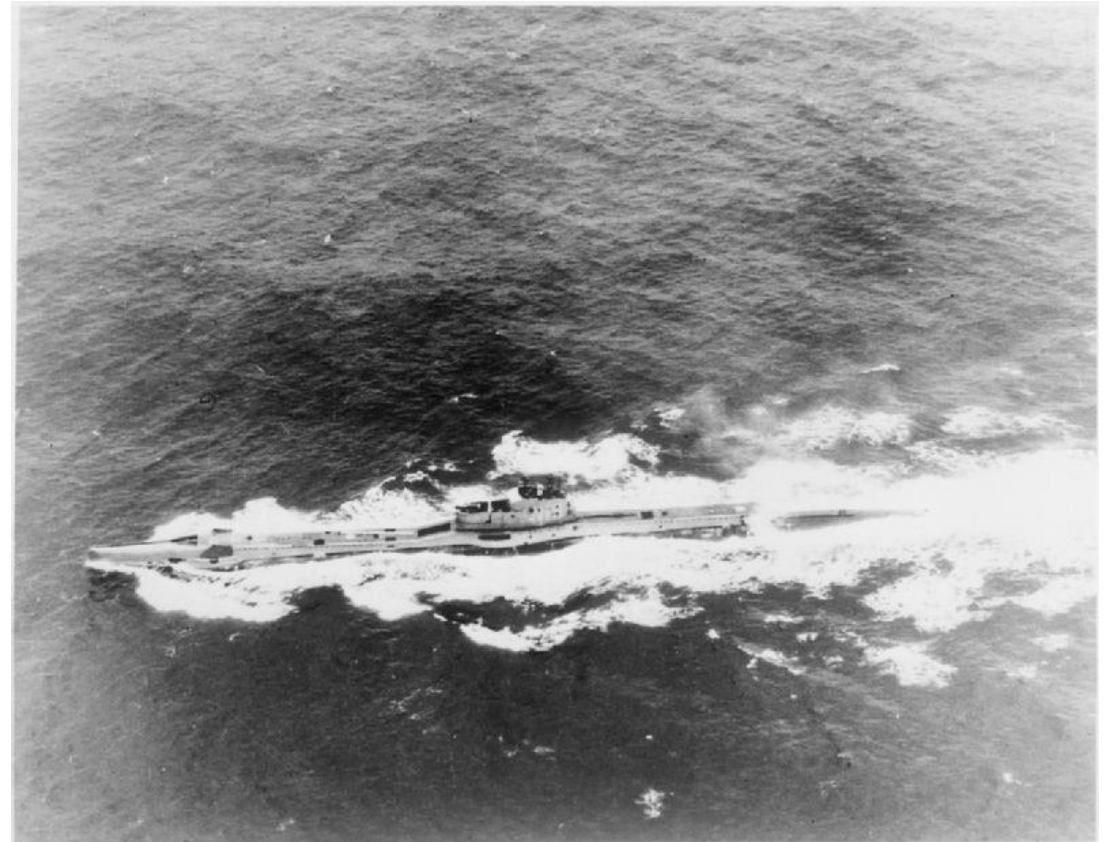
# 10 May 1941 - Malta

- While on detachment to the Mediterranean, No.10 Sqn Sunderland N9049 was sunk at its mooring by a strafing Messerschmitt, Bf-109.
- The bombardment of Benghazi was repeated by Mountbatten's destroyers, which accompanied the fleet thus far on the eastward passage, and then returned to Malta.



# 10 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- The Italian auxiliary cruiser Ramb III (3,667 GRT, 1938) was sunk in Benghazi Harbor by HMS Triumph.
- The fleet was accompanied by the carrier Formidable, but nature provided effective air cover in the shape of low overcast which safeguarded the ships from air attack in the danger area south of Malta; and a moonlight attack during the return journey to Alexandria on the 10th May was beaten off without loss to fleet or convoy.



British T Class Submarine HMS Triumph.



# 10 May 1941 – Iraq

- A flying column which eventually included an incomplete mechanised cavalry brigade (the 4th), an incomplete artillery regiment, 250 men of the Transjordan Frontier Force, part of the 1/Essex Regiment and a company of armoured cars of the R.A.F., was assembled at **H.4** and sent across the desert.
- It recaptured **Rutba** on 10th May.



# 10 May 1941 - Libya

- Private Jenkins, separated from his battalion in the withdrawal from Benghazi at the beginning of April, succeeded in rejoining his unit in Tobruk; he came into the perimeter along the coast with two English soldiers on the night of 10th May, almost six weeks later.
- His platoon and some others had waited by the anti-tank ditch for over two hours, had repelled with grenades an enemy party calling on them to surrender, and about 10.30 p.m. had managed to extricate themselves; but they were too late to make contact with the battalion before it withdrew. They moved on into the hills that night. In succeeding days Fraser and Peterson and their men continued moving eastwards, never catching up, however, with the retreating forces. Eventually this party of 2 officers and 23 men, helped continually by Senussi Arabs, reached Gazala in a body, having lost but a few of their number. Here they split up. Most were captured between 29th April and 4th May, some on the verge of the Tobruk perimeter.
- 4 Pte P. H. Jenkins, NX17368 ; 2/13 Bn. Station hand; of Cubbadoo Siding, NSW; b. Huelgoat, France, 28 Feb 1919.

# 10 May 1941 - Crete

- Encouraged by the success of the Tiger convoy Churchill suggested that one ship should unload a few tanks in Crete on the way eastwards but the Chiefs of Staff "deemed it inadvisable to endanger the rest of the ship's valuable cargo by such a diversion".
- Churchill then suggested that twelve tanks should be shipped to Suda Bay as soon as the main cargoes had been discharged at Alexandria, and this was ordered.
- Wavell replied, however, on 10th May that he had already arranged to send six infantry and fifteen light tanks to Crete.



# 10 May 1941 - UK

- The first fighter squadron to be formed under the EATS arrangements, No. 452 Squadron RAAF had begun to form on 8th April 1941 at R.A.F. Station, Kirton-in-Lindsey in Lincolnshire, with sixteen Spitfire Mark I aircraft.
- By 10th May twenty R.A.A.F. pilots had arrived from operational training units and a vigorous training program was initiated.
- The commanding officer, Squadron Leader Dutton, and the two flight commanders, Flight Lieutenants Finucane and Douglas, were all R.A.F. officers.





# 10 May 1941 - Washington

- Menzies writes in his diary:
- Roosevelt was in bed recovering from a touch of gastritis. He looks older and more tired, but my hour with him, with fair give and take of conversation, was most vigorous. He (and Hull) agreed that we all ought to tell Japan where she gets off, but each of them stops short of actually instructing the USA Ambassador to do so. But, I am left in no doubt (without words) that America will not stand by & see Australia attacked. I plead for reality about N.E.I. and Singapore.
- Don't think Pacific will be denuded of USA naval forces.



Menzies arrives at La Guardia Marine Terminal, New York, after Clipper crossing from Portugal. With him is Major Elmer Haslett, La Guardia Field Manager.

# 10 May 1941 - Washington

- Menzies' diary continues:
- Roosevelt is a little jealous of Winston's place in the centre of the picture. I tell him they should have a meeting.
- R. is not an organiser—very like Winston—and co-ordination of effort is not conspicuous.
- Hull is loquacious but very sound and clear-minded about the war—much clearer than many of the officers of his department.
- He, & all the leading ministers, are for war and nothing less.
- But the President, trained under Woodrow Wilson in the last war, waits for an incident, which would in one blow get the USA into war and get R. out of his foolish election pledges that "I will keep you out of war".



Menzies faces questions from American newspapermen on his arrival at La Guardia Marine Terminal, New York.



# 10 May 1941 - Washington

- Menzies writes in his diary:
- The Casey's are a very great success, but once more I am embarrassed.
- Dick asks for (a) the C.H. (b) a roving commission to cover U.K. and Middle East!!! He asks for each in Maie's presence!
- He is the bitterest disappointment of my life. Is quite plainly on the make.
- Moral, in politics, trust nobody!



On arrival in New York, Menzies meets up with former Cabinet colleague and Australia's representative in the United States, R. G. Casey.

# 11 May 1941 - Mediterranean

- The U-class submarine HMS Undaunted (630/730 t, 1940) failed to return from a patrol off Tripoli on 11 May.
- U Class submarines length 191 feet, 11 knots surfaced, 10 knots submerged, crew 27-31, 4 bow internal 21 inch torpedo tubes - 8 - 10 torpedoes 1 - 3-inch gun.



HM Submarine ULTIMATUM setting off from Holy Loch.

- Thanks for your attention.