

Australia's War: 80 years ago this week

2 June 1941



2

2 June 1941 - Brisbane



BRITISH warship unloading supplies at Suda Bay, Crete. Since this picture (received last night from the Department of Information) was taken Suda Bay has suffered terrific attacks by Nazi dive bombers and the British have lost control of it.

May 1941 - Crete

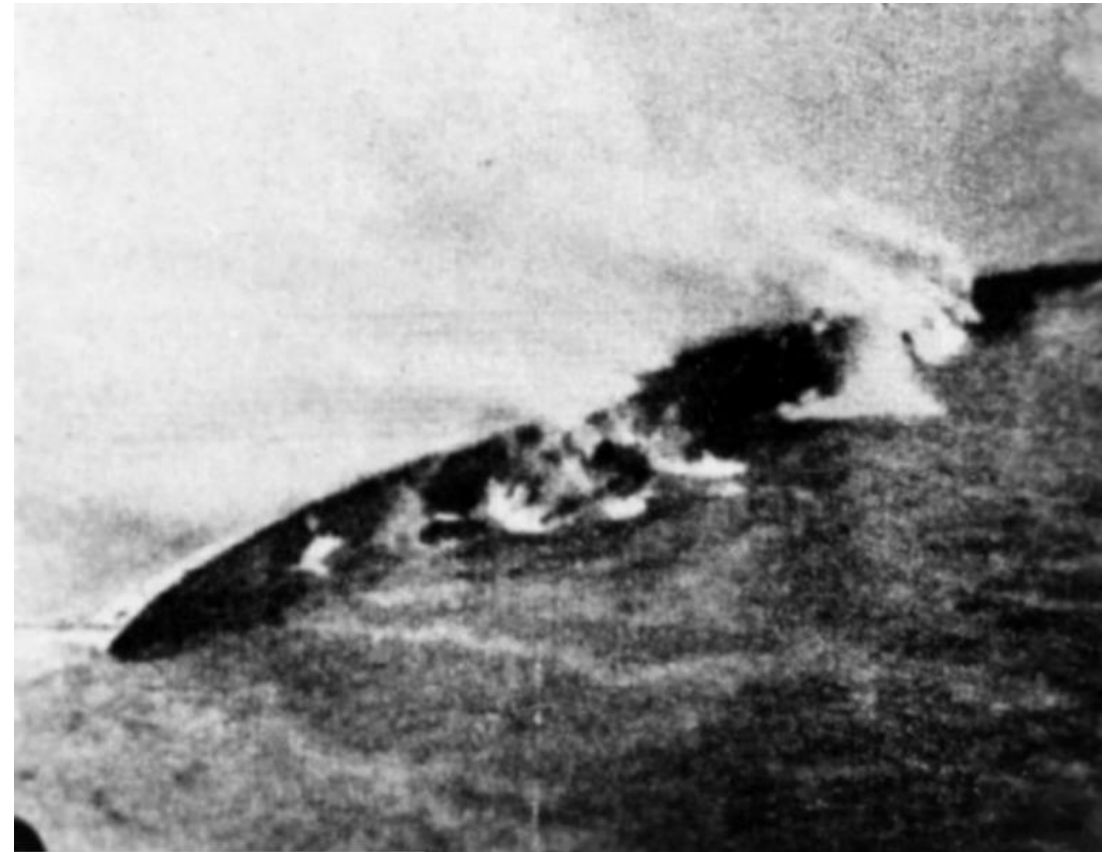
- The total strengths of the British, New Zealand and Australian contingents on Crete on 20th May were: British 17,000, New Zealand 7,700, Australian 6,500. About 16,500 were embarked. The losses suffered by these contingents were:

	Killed	Wounded	Prisoners
New Zealand . . .	671	1,455	1,692
British Army . . .	612	224	5,315
Australian . . .	274	507	3,102
Royal Marines . . .	114	30	1,035
Royal Air Force . .	71	9	226

The German Fourth Air Fleet reported the loss of 3,986 killed or missing, of whom 312 were air crew; and 2,594 wounded; 220 German aircraft were destroyed.

May 1941 - Crete

- The Crete campaign cost the navy heavily. Over 2,000 officers and men were killed. Of this Cunningham wrote in his dispatch:
- More than once I felt that the stage had been reached when no more could be asked of officers and men, physically and mentally exhausted by their efforts and by the events of these fateful weeks. It is perhaps even now not realised how nearly the breaking point was reached, but that these men struggled through is the measure of their achievement and I trust that it will not lightly be forgotten The Mediterranean Fleet paid a heavy price for the achievement. Losses and damage were sustained which would normally only occur during a major fleet action, in which the enemy fleet might be expected to suffer greater losses than our own. In this case the enemy fleet did not appear (though it had many favourable opportunities for doing so) and the battle was fought between ships and aircraft.



Photograph taken by a German airman recording the sinking of Gloucester off the coast of Crete, 22 May 1941

May 1941 – Greece and Crete

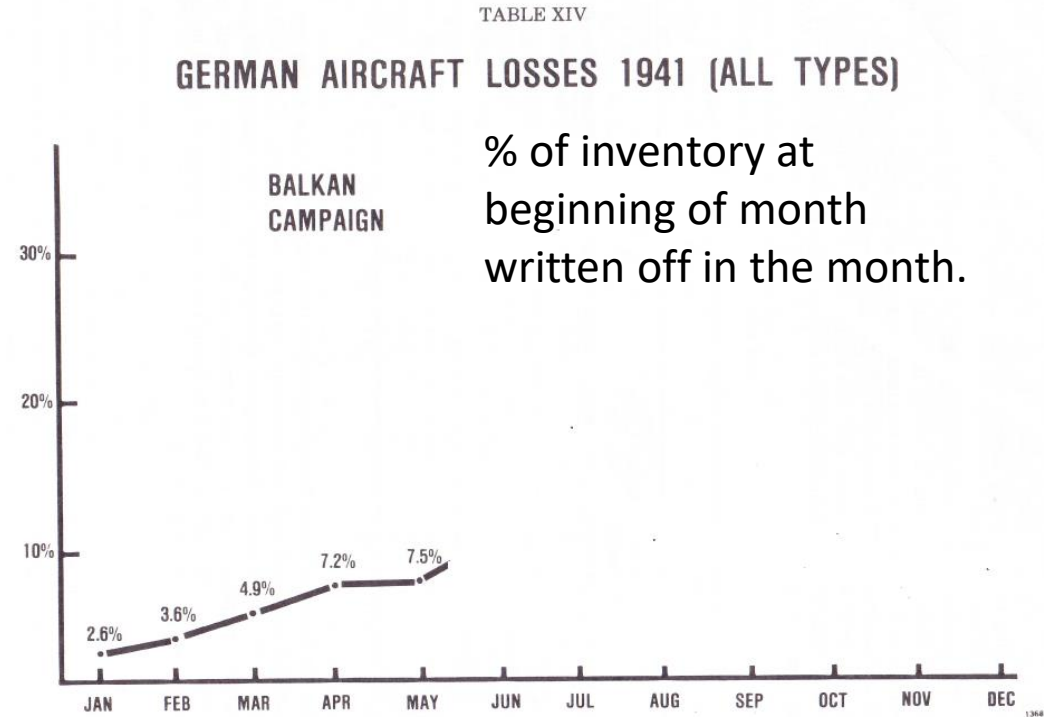
German losses of 6,000 men wouldn't have been significant but their aircraft losses and the effort that they had had to commit to achieve success in Libya, Greece and Crete may have been significant in the future.

TABLE XII
German Aircraft Strength

	May 11, 1940	June 21, 1941
Close Recce	335	440
Long-Range Recce	322	393
Single-Engine Fighters	1,356	1,440
Night Fighters		263
Twin-Engine Fighters	354	188
Bombers	1,711	1,511
Dive Bombers	414	424
Ground Attack	50	
Coastal	240	223
TOTAL	4,782	4,882

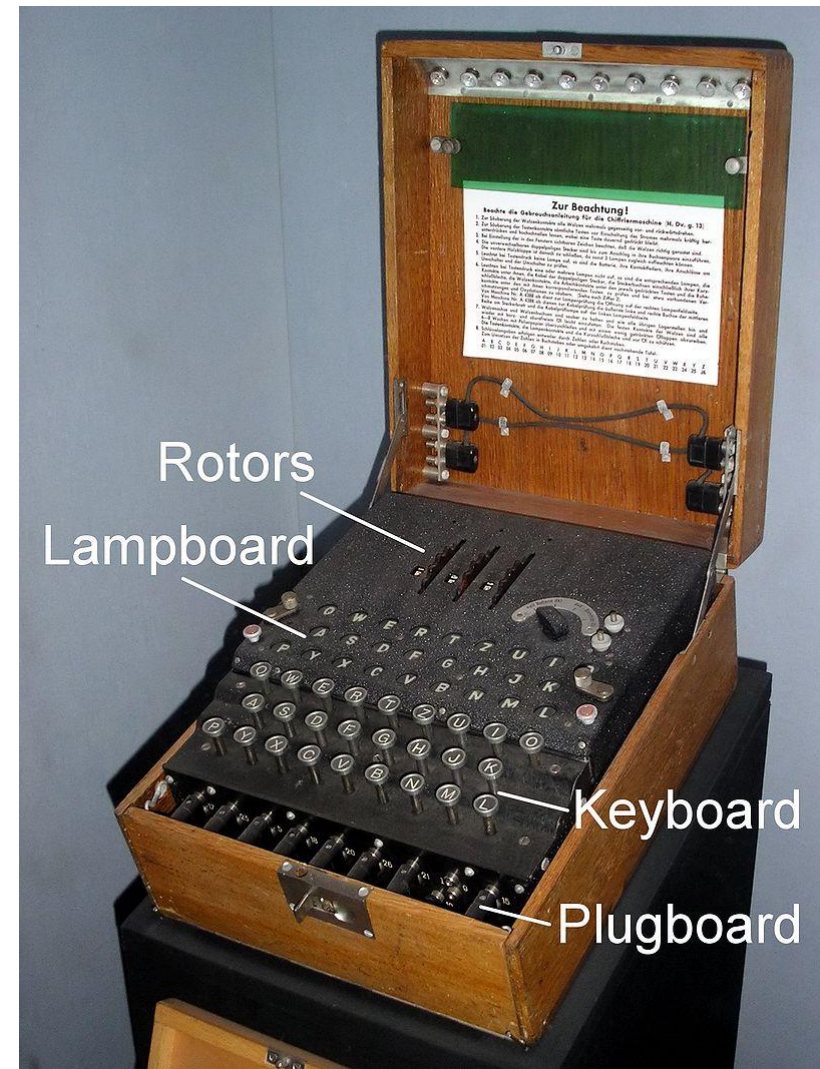
May 1941 – Greece and Crete

- Despite the successful outcome the Germans had received a bloody nose in Crete. Out of the 500 transport aircraft the Luftwaffe had to write off 146 as total losses while a further 150 were damaged.
- Consumption of munitions, fuel and engine hours would also have degraded the Luftwaffe's capacity for future operations.



May 1941 – Crete

- Advance intelligence on the German invasion of Crete was uniquely good.
- Concern to maintain secrecy over the Enigma code breaking operation severely limited the extent to which intelligence was passed on to commanders on the island.
- There must have been good knowledge of the German approach to airborne operations in the invasion of the Netherlands, in London if not in the Middle East.



28 April 1941 - London

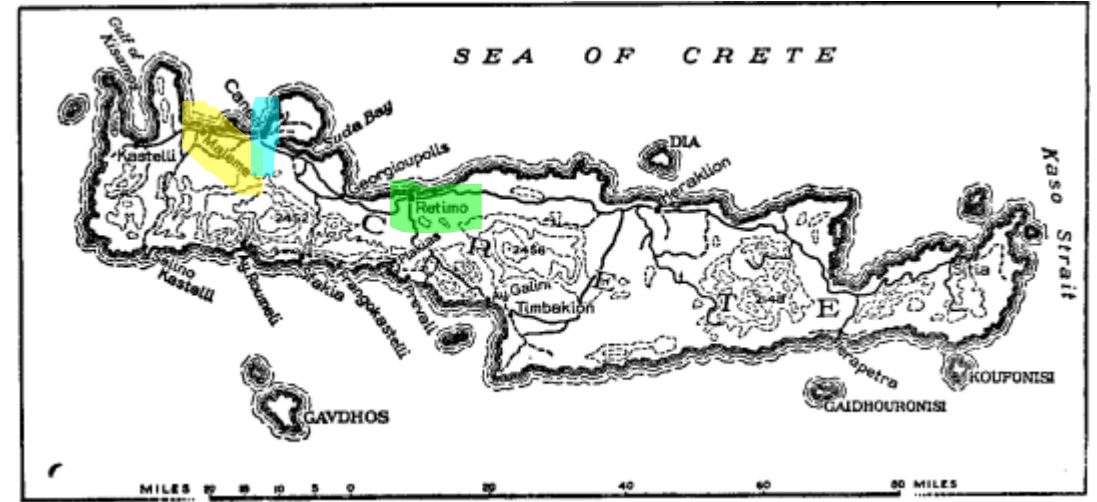
- In London that day the Joint Intelligence Committee had estimated that the Germans had aircraft enough round the eastern Mediterranean to enable them to land from 3,000 to 4,000 paratroops or airborne troops on Crete in a first sortie, and might make from two to three sorties in a day from Greece and 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.

16 May 1941 - Crete

- On the 16th Intelligence reports predicted that Crete would be attacked on the 17th, 18th or 19th by the XI German Corps including the 22nd Airborne Division, 25,000 to 35,000 men coming by air and 10,000 by sea. The objectives would be Maleme, Canea and the valley south-west of it, and Retimo.
- There would be a sharp attack by some 100 bombers and fighters and then 600 troop - carrying aircraft would drop waves of paratroops.



May 1941 – Crete

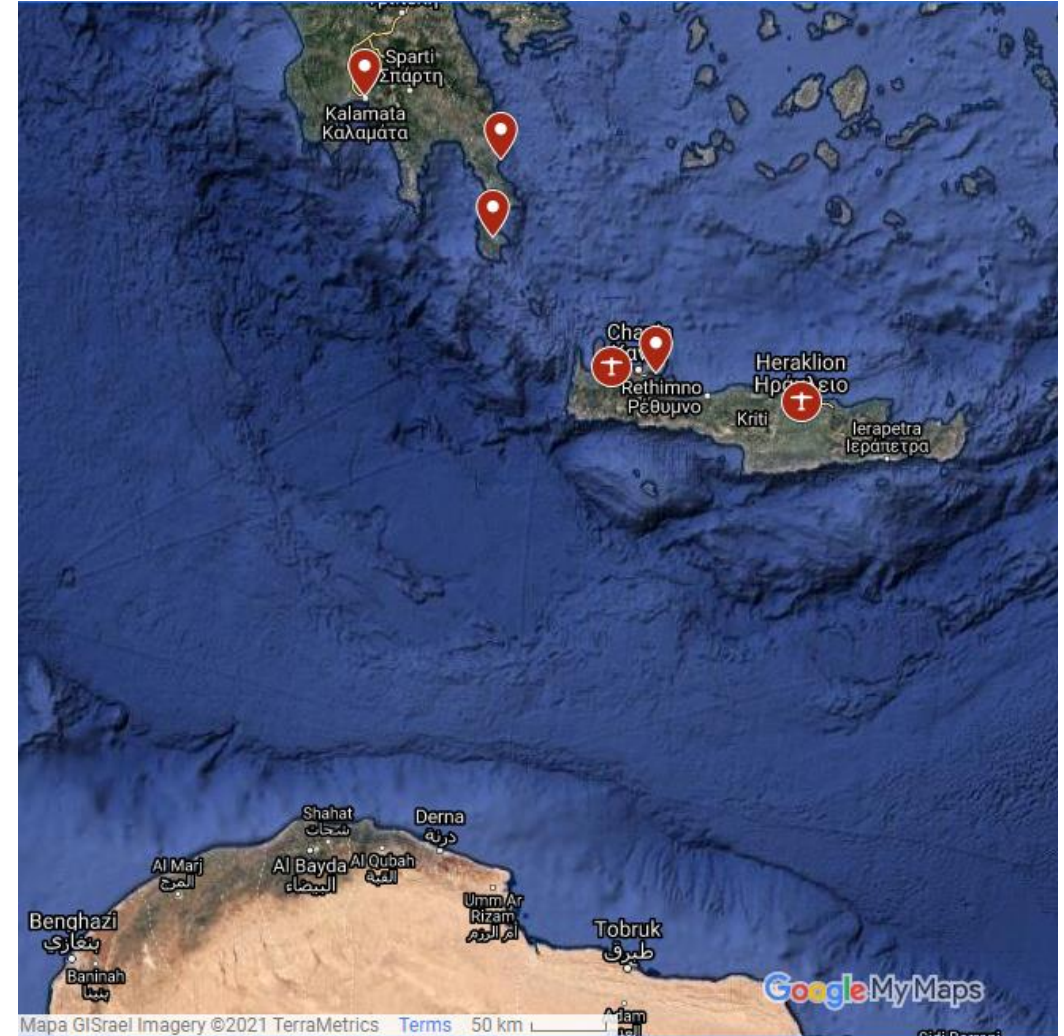
- The command response to the intelligence does not seem sufficient.

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.

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.



16 May 1941 - Crete

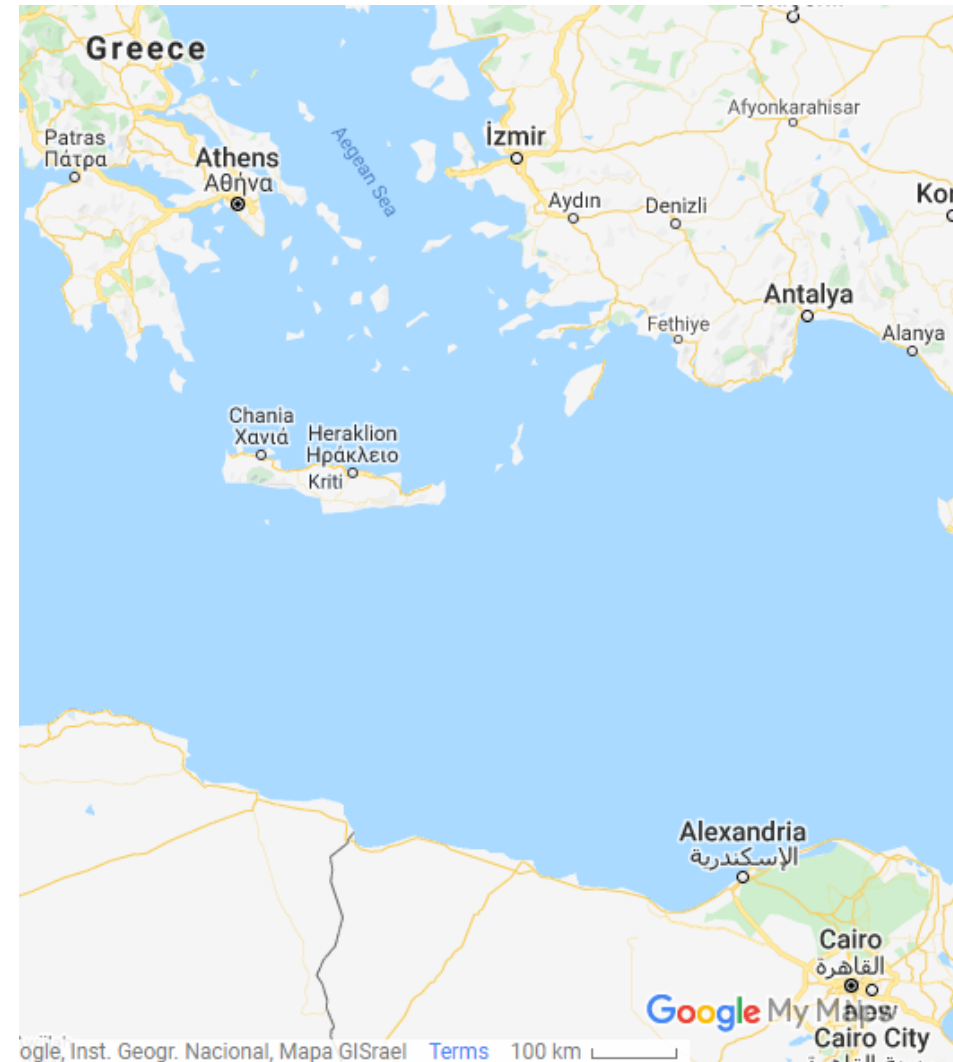
- Late on 16th May Freyberg sent the following cable to Wavell:
- I have completed plans for the defence of Crete and have just returned from a final tour of defences. I feel greatly encouraged by my visits. Everywhere all ranks are fit and morale is now high. All defences have been strengthened and positions wired as much as possible. We have 45 field guns in action with adequate ammunition dumped. Two infantry tanks are at each aerodrome. Carriers and transport still being unloaded and delivered. 2nd Battalion Leicesters have arrived and will make Heraklion stronger.
- I do not wish to seem over-confident but I feel that at least we will give an excellent account of ourselves. With help of Royal Navy I trust Crete will be held.



Freyberg (right) during the Battle of Crete, May 1941.

19 May 1941 – Mediterranean.

- Any interception of a seaborne attack would have to be north of Crete, it being assumed that the most likely places for attempted landings would be Canea, Retimo, and Heraklion.
- It was undesirable unnecessarily to expose ships to air attack in the Aegean by day, but necessary to have them there at the time a seaborne assault was attempted. There was also the fuelling problem.
- Cunningham disposed his forces in five groups:
- a battle squadron west of Crete to provide heavy cover ;
- three groups of cruisers and destroyers to carry out night sweeps north of Crete and retire from the Aegean in the daytime unless circumstances demanded their presence north of the island;
- and a reserve battle squadron at Alexandria.
- These forces were in place by the morning of the 20th.
- Air reconnaissance ("but it was very thin") was arranged to give intelligence of any German moves by sea.



Dispositions, Suda-Maleme Area. 19th May

New Zealand Division
Brigadier Puttick

General Weston

Lt- Col Cremor



May 1941 – Crete

- A commentator has written that:
- “Only faulty leadership and coordination around the Maleme airfield allowed the Germans to seize that air base and fly in reinforcements.”
- It seems to me that the root causes occurred much earlier and at a much higher command level.

May 1941 – Crete

- In his subsequent dispatch on the Battle of Crete, Cunningham wrote:
- It was known that airborne invasion of the island was impending; but it appeared almost inconceivable that airborne invasion alone could succeed against forewarned troops, that seaborne support was inevitable and that the destruction of troop convoys would win the day.
- Cunningham's dispatch, hints at a failure of imagination in which all levels of command failed to visualise and therefore prepare for the full scale of the airborne threat.
- If this was in part because they did not believe the intelligence because of secrecy about its source then the level of command that did know should have provided more detailed and emphatic instructions.



May 1941 – Crete

- General Wilson in his cable from Crete hints at the general weakness in the Command in the Middle East and the Mediterranean
- It was a committee of three services.
- This led to some lack of clarity about who was responsible for repelling a seaborne attack on Crete.
- Looking at the dispositions of the New Zealand Division around Maleme and between Maleme and Canea and at Cunninghams operations, it appears that both Freyberg and Cunningham were defending against seaborne invasions.
- The army's dispersion between airfield and beach reduced the force available to defend the airfields and contributed to the communication difficulties which hamstrung the defence.
- A three service supreme commander could have given clear instructions for the Navy to sink the ships and for the army to defend the airfields.



May 1941 – Crete

- There were technical issues contributing to the Fleet's losses in the Battle for Crete.
- In the words of Captain Stephen Roskill, the distinguished naval historian, gunnery specialist and in 1939 a member of the naval staff:
- "The truth was that as long ago as the late 1920s the Admiralty had gone for the wrong sort of control system - one in which the enemy aircraft movements were in effect guessed instead of being actually measured and the measured results used to provide the required control data. This latter, called a tachymetric system, was the proper answer."
- In 1937 the inefficiency of the chosen High Angle Control System "HACS" now very belatedly getting into quantity production was alarmingly displayed in a trial during which a Queen Bee radio controlled target aircraft circled the home fleet for 2 1/2 hours unscathed by the fleet's fire.
- In 1938 the Admiralty's director of scientific research C.S. Wright described HACS as a menace to the service.
- The Mediterranean fleet is said to have been "cruelly handicapped in its prolonged battles against enemy aircraft in 1940-42 by the shortcomings of HACS - colossal expenditure of ammunition without commensurate protection of the fleet or destruction of enemy aircraft."



Anti-aircraft cruiser HMS Scylla. Her four twin 4.5-inch gun mountings are controlled by the two High Angle Director Towers, one sited behind the bridge and the other abaft the after funnel.

3 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- Parramatta reached Alexandria on the 3rd June from the East Indies Station. On the way she gleaned information of the ordeal through which the Mediterranean Fleet had passed.
- Kipling and Vampire, met at Suez, gave "startling intelligence of actions in the Mediterranean and of damage sustained by the fleet".
- The damaged Barham was passed in the Canal, and Dido with "a great crater in her near the bridge. Her crew however went past singing lustily".
- Walker was concerned about dive bombing, of which his crew knew nothing "except the evidence of its effects. It was some days before we regained a balanced perspective and I am glad we were not dive-bombed until this was attained."



HMAS PARRAMATTA (II). NOTE THE 4 INCH MARK XVI GUNS IN A TWIN MARK XIX MOUNTING FORWARD AND A SINGLE MARK XX AFT. A QUADRUPLE .5 INCH AA MACHINE GUN IS MOUNTED IN B POSITION. FIRE CONTROL WAS PROVIDED THE HIGH ANGLE CONTROL SYSTEM SITED BEHIND THE BRIDGE. NOTE THE KITE/OTTERS AND FLOATS OF THE OROPESA MINESWEEPING GEAR ON THE QUARTERDECK."

3 June 1941 - Palestine

- No. 3 Squadron R.A.A.F. had suffered a plethora of accidents and setbacks during its conversion to Tomahawks.
- Air Marshal Tedder, the new AOCinC, wrote pessimistically to the Air Ministry on 3 Jun:
- "I am afraid that No . 3 with their Tomahawks will not be ready for operations. The Australians are very unexpectedly making very heavy weather over the Tomahawks, but I have applied a little ginger which, I hope, will have the necessary effect."
- Apart from this delay in mastering the new type, six experienced pilots of No. 3 were detached to Cyprus between 25 May and 3 Jun to fly interception patrols in Hurricanes of No. 80 Squadron until that unit received replacement pilots.



No. 3 Squadron ground crew in front of a P-40

3 June 1941 - Palestine



Pilots of No . 3 Squadron at Rosh Pinna airfield in northern Palestine during the Syrian campaign . A Tomahawk aircraft is in the background . Left to right : Sgts R. K. Wilson, T. D. Parker, D. Scott, G. E. Hiller ; F-O's W. G. Kloster, P. St G. B. Turnbull ; F-U J . R. Perrin ; Sqn Ldr P. Jeffrey; Sgt A. C. Cameron ; F-Lt A. C. Rawlinson ; Sqn Ldr J . C. Laver (medical officer) ; F-Os J. H. W. Saunders, W. E. Jewell; F-Lt L. E. S. Knowles; F-O T. H. Trimble .

3 June 1941 - Palestine

- The general R.A.F. plan was to give maximum support to these advances, while providing air protection for the ports of Haifa and Cyprus. The particular tasks soon became defined as:
 - 1. Provision of close and direct support for the army.
 - 2. Fighter cover for 15th Cruiser Squadron operating off the Syrian coast.
 - 3. Attack on strategical objectives: ports, shipping and oil installations.
 - 4. Attack on French airfields to limit enemy air opposition.
- All of these tasks were to be achieved with a force of seventy aircraft so that at first it was impossible to decentralise or attach any units to military forces as was requested. However, air liaison officers were appointed to each of the two army headquarters to forward requests for specific air action to Brown who was anxious to provide air support where practicable and when resources permitted.
- Base facilities and flying conditions were infinitely better than those encountered in Greece and there was some confidence that all of the main tasks could be done by judicious juggling.

4 June 1941 - Melbourne

- On the 4th June 1941 the Australian War Cabinet considered a proposal by Admiral Colvin (photo, with Menzies) that if the permanent repairs needed in Perth could be effected in Australia, she should return from the Mediterranean but be replaced there by Hobart "in view of the losses of cruisers sustained by the Royal Navy".
- This was agreed to. The offer of Hobart was "most gratefully" accepted by the Admiralty.
- Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin R.N. was appointed Chief of Naval Staff to the Royal Australian Navy in 1937.



4 June 1941 - Palestine

- At a conference on 4th June the time of the attack was fixed—2 a.m. on the 8th. At earlier conferences the main outlines of the plan had already been made known to the formation commanders.
- Wilson wrote afterwards:
- "The main objective was Beirut ; the shortest approach was along the coast but the road could be easily blocked. I decided, therefore, to advance three-headed on a wide front."
- The first phase of the attack was to be the capture of **Damascus, Rayak and Beirut** —the two capital cities and the main air base on the road linking them;
- the second phase an advance to **Palmyra, Homs and Tripoli**.
- On the left would be one reinforced brigade of the 7th Australian Division; in the centre another reinforced brigade of that division; on the right the 5th Indian Brigade Group and the Free French contingent.
- The Australian column on the left was to advance along the coast road to Beirut, the column in the centre through Metulla and Merdjayoun to Rayak; the Indian brigade was to advance into the Hauran, the high wheat lands east of Lake Tiberias and the upper Jordan, and with one column occupy Deraa, Sheikh Meskine, and Ezraa, with a detachment Fiq and El Aal, and with a left column Kuneitra. This would form a bridgehead through which General Legentilhomme's French brigade would advance through Kiswe to Damascus, while Colonel Collet 's cavalry (300 strong) rode north through Fiq to Kuneitra.



4 June 1941 - Syria

- The Vichy French army was believed to include six regiments of regulars, including one of the Foreign Legion, one of mixed colonial and metropolitan troops, and four of African natives. There were also about 9,000 cavalry, some units being horsed and others equipped with tanks or armoured cars, ninety field and medium guns, and some 10,000 Levantine infantry of doubtful value. The majority of the horsed cavalry were Spahis, light cavalry units raised in Morocco and Algeria.
- The opposing armies were approximately equal in numbers and weapons except that the French possessed a strong force of good tanks.
- The French commander was moving troops towards the frontier. It was believed that he had five battalions and four squadrons of cavalry forward in the coastal sector, perhaps three battalions and some tanks in the centre, and two battalions with several cavalry and motorised squadrons in the desert zone.

4 June 1941 - Syria

- This is a view of the Foreign Legion expressed by General Brooke, the British CIGS, who is frequently regarded as a hard marker. He had just travelled half way across France by train with Churchill and De Gaulle, both of whom frequently tried his patience:
- Of all the sights that we had seen that day the one that remained most rooted in my mind was the march past of the foreign legion battalion in the falling light and amongst fast falling snowflakes. We had just been inspecting units of Maquis personnel, good tough looking boys that promised well, when De Lattre said he would like to march past us a battalion of the legion which he had in reserve. They had their own band and out of the darkness came the wildest strains of a march played on some wind sort of pipes which transported one to North Africa. Then out of the fast falling light in the falling snowflakes came a sight I shall never forget, the grandest assembly of real fighting men that I have ever seen, marching with their heads up as if they owned the world, lean hard looking men carrying their arms admirably and marching with perfect precision. They disappeared into the darkness leaving me with a thrill and the desire for a division of such men.

4 June 1941 - Syria

- La Legion Etrangere continues in business.



A Legion honour guard of the 6th Foreign Engineer Regiment stands at attention as they await the arrival of Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr. and Lt. Gen. Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, commander of Joint Forces in Saudi Arabia, during Operation Desert Shield.

4 June 1941 - Syria

- Just a reminder that the French do military pomp and ceremony quite well and that France has quite a lot of interesting history.



Commemoration of the Battle of Camarón by the 1st Foreign Cavalry Regiment at the Roman Amphitheatre in Orange in 2010.

4 June 1941 - Syria



Spahis withdrawing from the Sidi Bou Zid area, February 1943.



Journée d'immersion au sein du 1er régiment de spahis de Valence. Modern Spahi in traditional uniform.

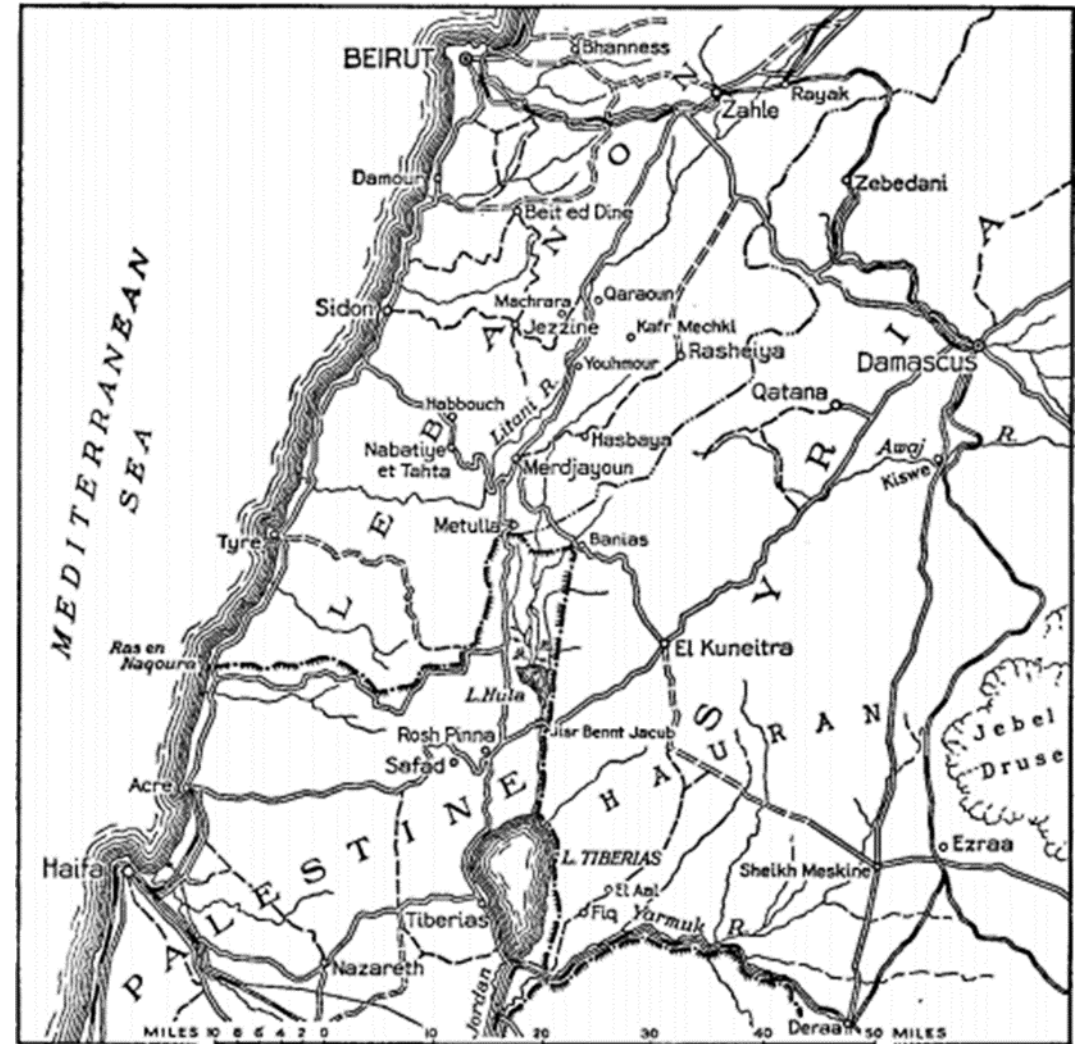
5 June 1941 - Melbourne

- on the 5th June, Curtin (photo), the leader of the opposition, in the Advisory War Council, questioned whether "it would not be better to scrap the African Empire, close the Suez Canal and endeavour to hold Palestine."
- The effect of air power on naval power had greatly modified the effectiveness of our fleet in the Mediterranean."



5 June 1941 - Palestine

- **On 5th June** Lavarack was given definite instructions (of which the Corps staff already had warning) that when the first stage of the advance had been completed, that is, when the line Damascus-Rayak-Beirut had been reached, he would take command of I Australian Corps and control the whole operation, Brigadier Allen of the 16th Brigade succeeding him in command of the 7th Division.
- At that time General Blamey, being Deputy Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, had his headquarters in Cairo, and the senior officer at I Corps headquarters at Deir Suneid was Brigadier Rowell.
- Before 5th June, Rowell, fearing lest, as in Greece, the Corps would be called upon to take command in the field not at the outset but in the midst of operations, pointed out to General Wilson's senior staff officer that the Australian Corps should be given command from the beginning, contending that command could not be exerted efficiently from a headquarters in Jerusalem, but the proposal was not accepted.



5 June 1941 - Mediterranean

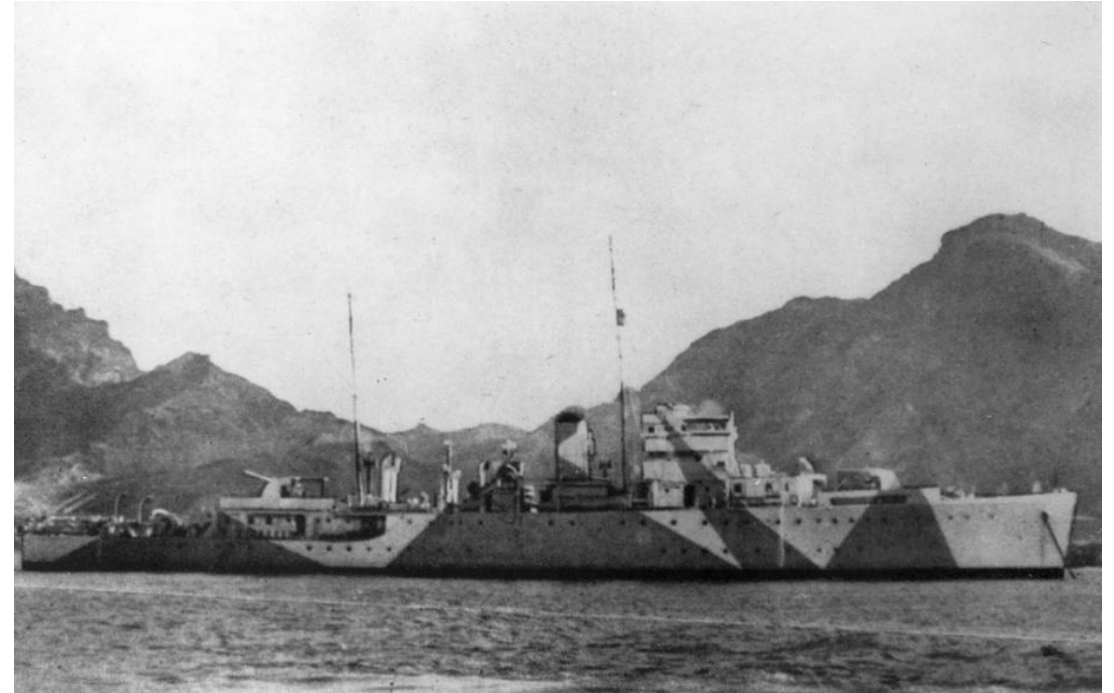
- On the African coast the supply of Tobruk was largely maintained by a shuttle service of destroyers from Alexandria and Mersa Matruh. It was instituted in May 1941, and for a considerable time was carried on by ships of the 10th Flotilla, becoming the main occupation of the old Australian destroyers for the remainder of their stay in the Mediterranean.
- On Vampire's return to Alexandria from her second run, on the 21st May, her defects had become so numerous and vibration at speeds over 18 knots so excessive that she was withdrawn from the station for a thorough refit. First of the original Australian destroyers to leave the Mediterranean, she sailed from Alexandria on the 28th May for Singapore.
- Waterhen began her unbroken series of runs on the 20th May; Vendetta on the 29th; Voyager on the 5th June and Stuart on the 16th.
- The ships of the "Tobruk Ferry Service " ran to a regular routine. Stuart's diarist briefly described it:
- The following fits any or all of the runs. Morning of first day, sailed from Alexandria for Tobruk with troops, ammunition and stores. Air attacks at so and so and so and so during the day. Arrived Tobruk in dark, unloaded and took on so many wounded, 200 troops, and ammunition empties, and proceeded to Mersa Matruh. Air raid at Matruh. Next day embarked ammunition and stores and sailed for Tobruk.



HMAS Waterhen

5 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- There were other, and even less attractive, methods of supplying Tobruk by sea; by small schooners which crept along the coast; by "A" lighters; and by slow, escorted convoys.
- For these convoys there was no night dash through the danger area. Their passage from Alexandria to Tobruk took some forty-eight hours with, on the round voyage, at least two full days of daylight within enemy bombing range, and lacking air cover.
- Among the Australian ships Parramatta and Yarra engaged on this work.



HMAS Parramatta wearing her wartime disruptive camouflage pattern paint.

6 June 1941 - Egypt

- On 6th June General Blamey reported to the Australian Government that the estimated scale of attack on Cyprus was by 450 German transport aircraft, which could land 7,000 to 8,000 troops in 48 hours; and that the force required to ensure the safety of the island should include four infantry brigades, two regiments of light tanks and one squadron of heavy tanks, and supporting units. "Position is one of acute anxiety to Middle East Commanders," he added, "but no prospect increasing garrison for next two to three months."

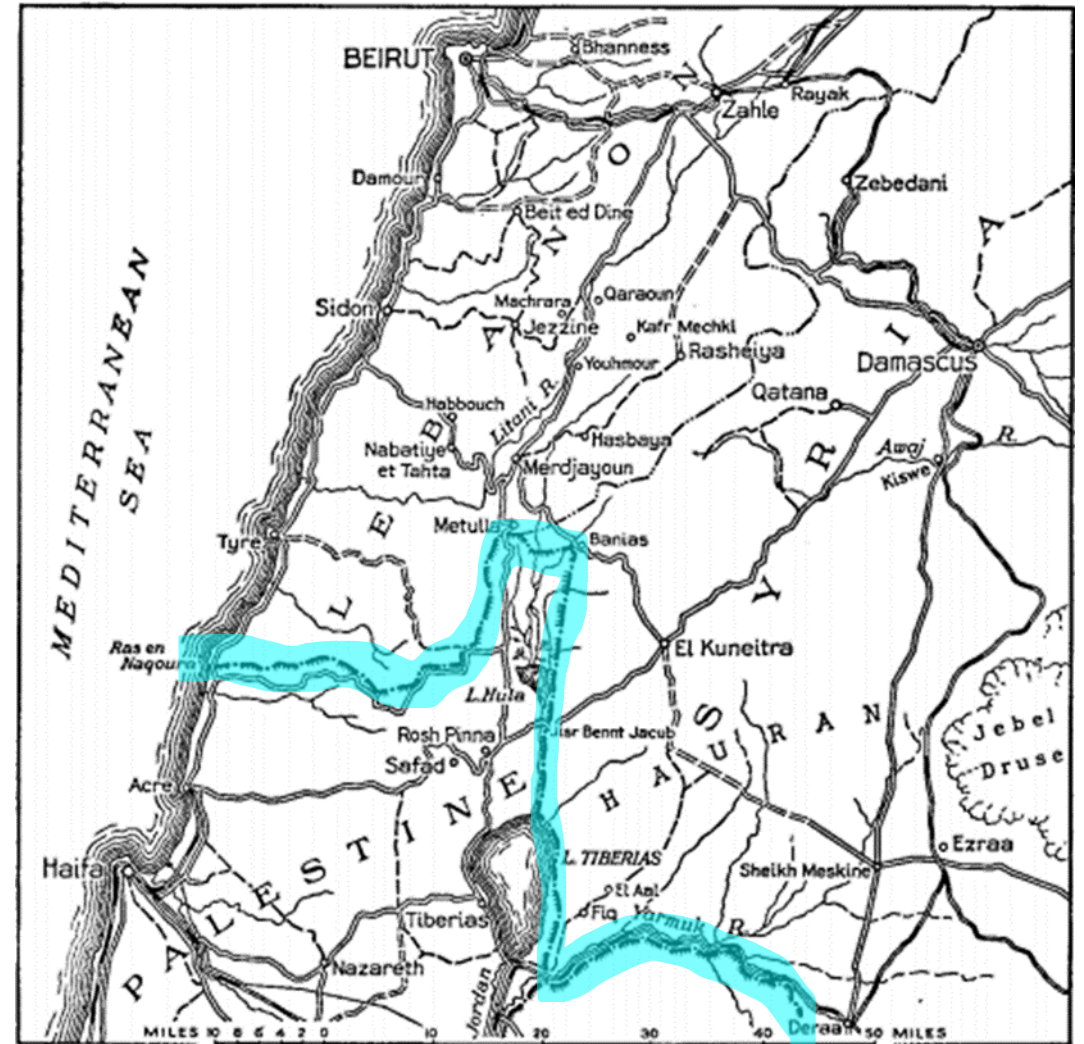


AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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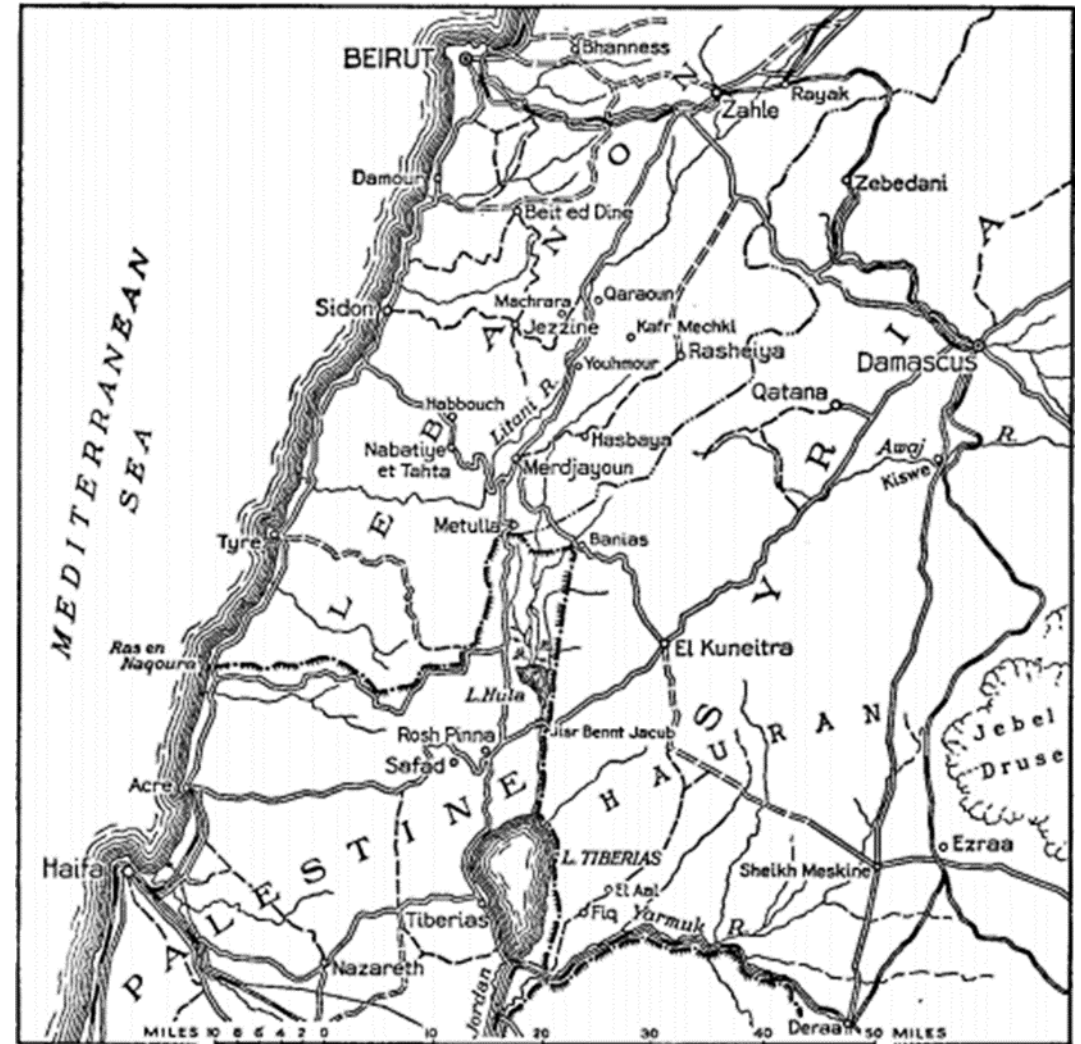
7 June 1941 - Palestine

- The assaulting troops, with their vehicles, moved into position close to the Syrian frontier on the nights of the 5th-6th and 6th-7th June.
- Since April the 7th Division had been improving and manning the Matruh fortress, where it had gained in experience and physical fitness, and had been under fairly frequent air bombardment.
- Throughout the 7th they lay under cover. It was the first time in this war, or the one before, that British troops had hidden, like Germans, near a peaceful frontier ready to make a surprise invasion.
- Our particular selection (wrote one soldier) was bounded on one side by the outskirts of an infantry battalion, on another by an anti-tank company, and at the rear by a low stone wall used by the local vendors to display their wares, where one could buy anything from a boiled egg to a bottle of cheap wine.
- The olive trees were dispersed widely enough to allow vehicles to move in almost any direction through the grove. The trees were low but capable of concealing the bonnets of vehicles, and were a useful shelter from the sun and reconnaissance planes during the day. Generally the practice upon arrival in the area was to run the bonnets of the non-essential vehicles beneath the olive trees, sweep away the wheel marks, and thenceforward restrict movement of vehicles to the roads through the area.
- Near Er Rama the men camped on the red brown soil (it had occasional rocky outcrops) beneath the trees or in the shelter of the trucks, singly or in twos and threes according to their inclinations, provided they were within the company area. The night was mild, a covering blanket ample.
- One ill-conceived method of concealing the presence of Australians in the olive groves at Er Rama was an instruction to distort the familiar shape of our slouch hats so to render them unrecognisable; but while it provided opportunities for the company humorists, as a measure of deception it was a dismal failure from the start. To the Wogs we were "Ostralees" when we arrived and "Ostralees" when we left.



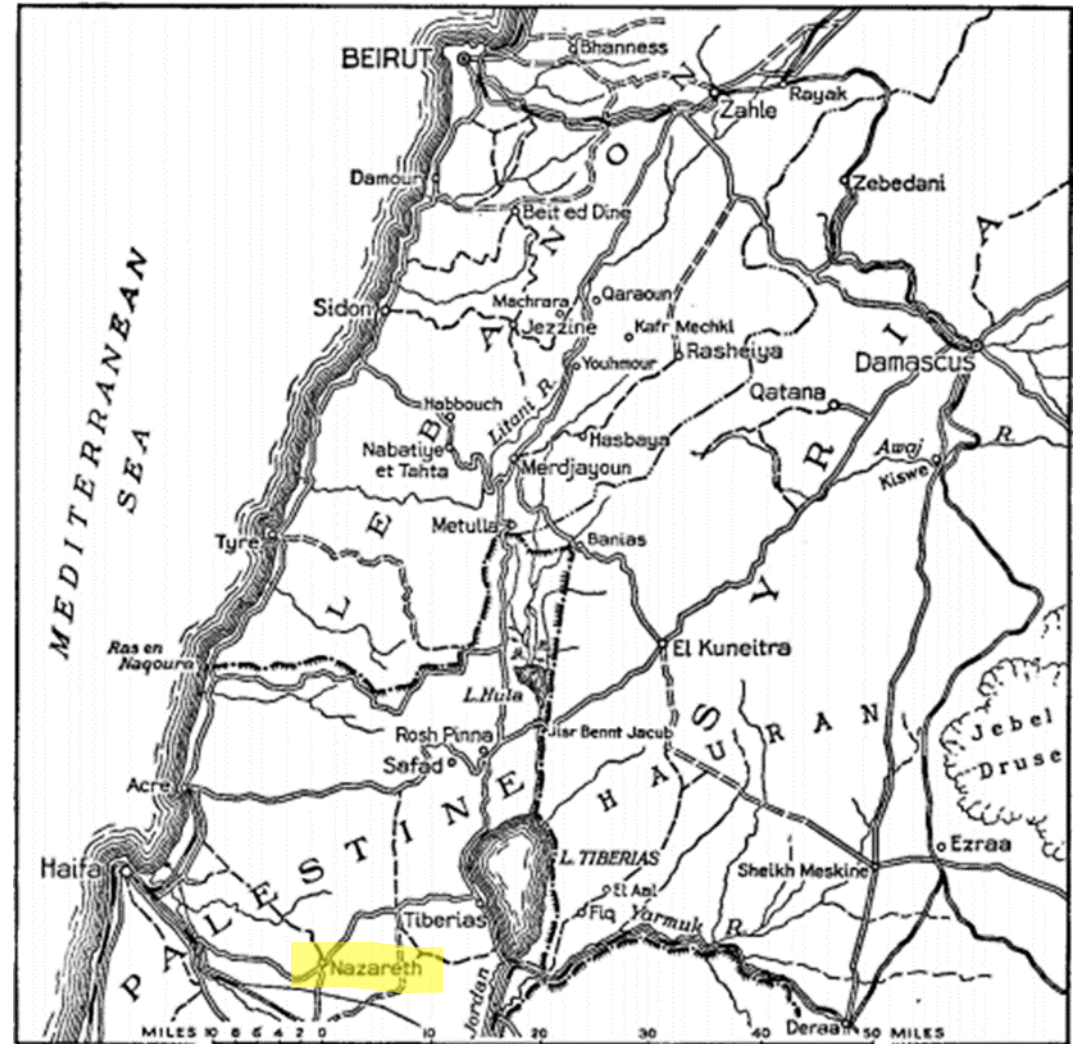
7 June 1941 - Syria

- At 9.30 that night (7/8th), four hours and a half before zero, the first troops had crossed the frontier.
- They were two small parties of rubber-shod men of the 2/14th Battalion and 2/6th Field Company, one of which was to cut the telephone wire leading from Ras en Naqoura to the post at the point in the road near Iskandaroun where the French had placed demolition charges, while the other overcame the guards at that point and removed the charges.
- Australian and Palestinian guides led the men to a Jewish farm colony at Hanita, where they were well fed in the communal dining room, and thence across the Syrian frontier where it was unguarded and over the thorny hills.
- One group, under Captain Gowling, branched off towards the road just north of the Ras; the other (Lieutenants Kyffin, Allan and Cowdery and fifteen men, including three Jewish guides and one Arab) went on until, about 3.30 a.m., after fifteen miles, they reached the road just north of the point near Ras el Bayada where they had been told the charges were.



7 June 1941 - Palestine

- the I Australian Corps staff was moved forward to **Nazareth**—partly in vehicles lent by the Palestine Police—on the eve of the campaign and was complete, except for a corps commander.
- From the beginning it sent out its liaison officers and heads of services, particularly among the 7th Division, so as to be ready to take over when the time came.



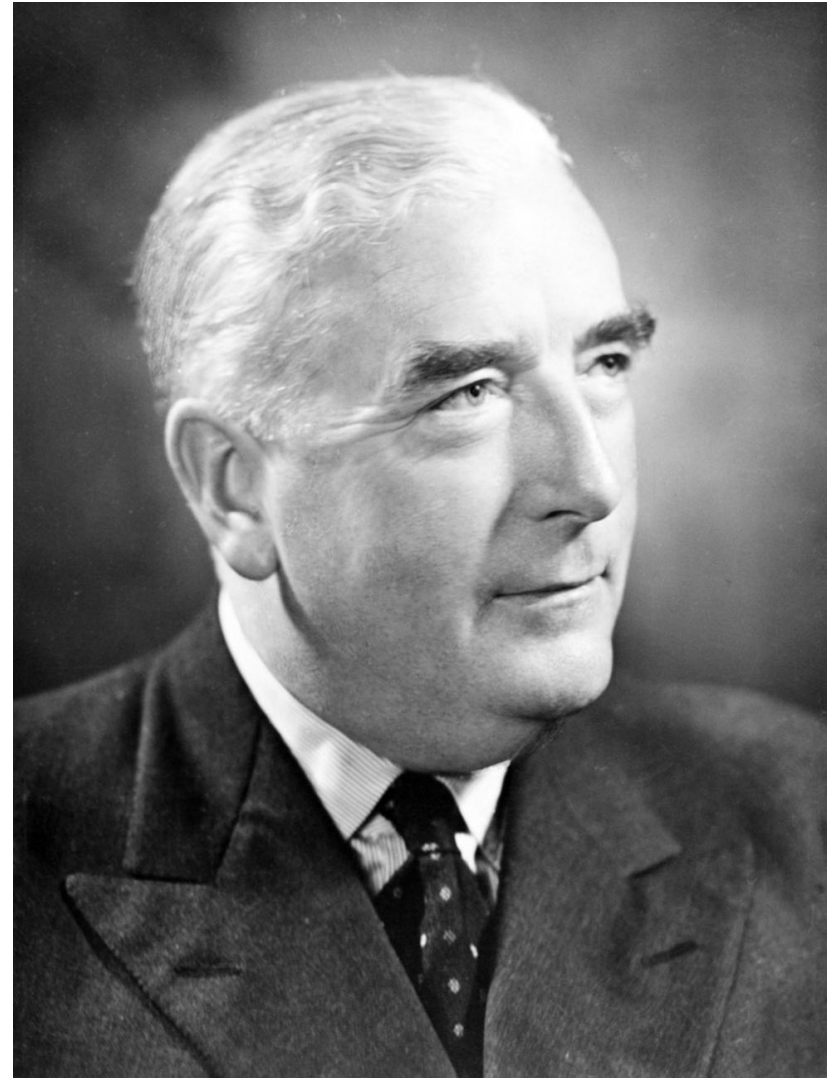
7 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- Naval operations were under the command of Vice-Admiral King (15th Cruiser Squadron) who left Alexandria on the 7th June in Phoebe, with Ajax, Kandahar, Kimberley, Janus and Jackal.
- The day previously Glengyle, escorted by Isis and Hotspur, had left Port Said with commando troops to land at the Litani River, just north of Tyre, and capture Khan bridge.



8 June 1941 - Melbourne

- When he received the cable from Blamey about Cyprus, Menzies sent a message to the High Commissioner in London, Mr Bruce, on the 8th June that "another forced evacuation, particularly if accompanied with great losses, will have serious effect on public opinion in America and elsewhere, whilst in Australia there are certain to be serious reactions which may well involve the Government".



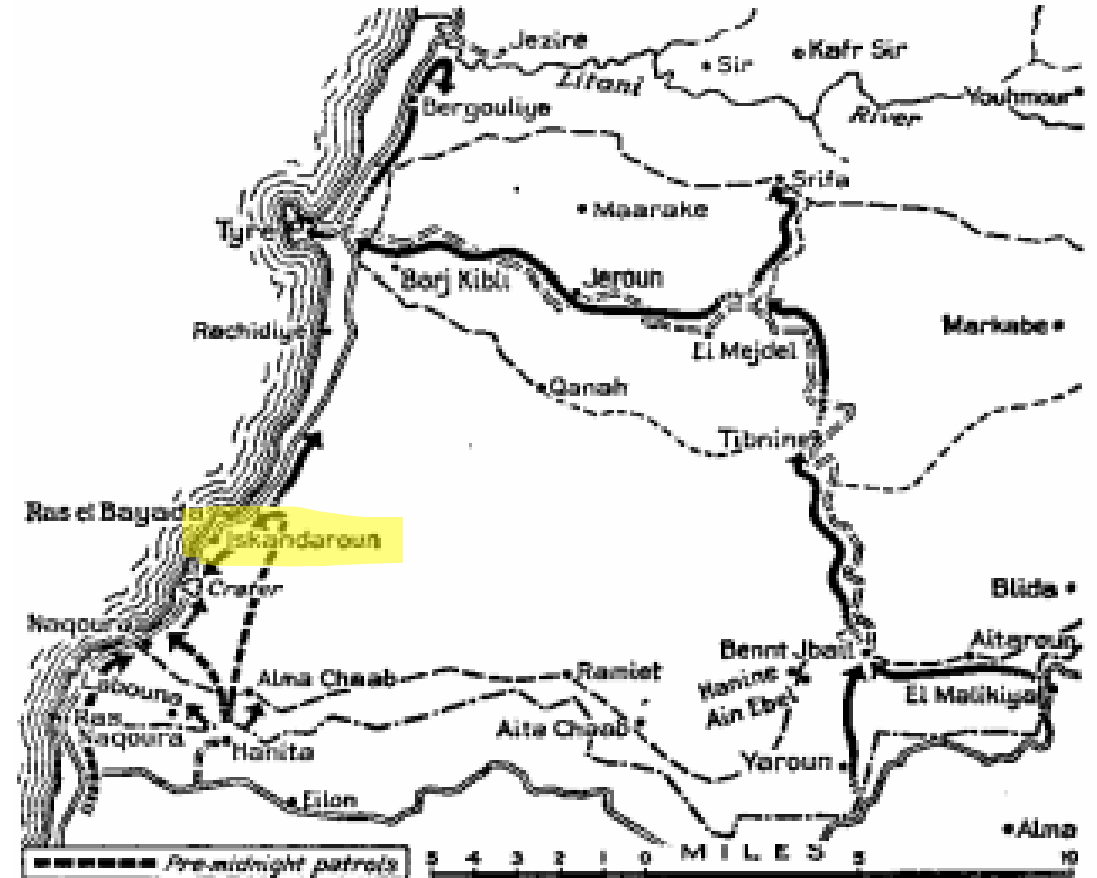
8 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- Glengyle, escorted by Isis and Hotspur, had brought commando troops to land at the Litani River, just north of Tyre, and capture Khan bridge.
- The initial attempt, made on the night of 7th-8th June, was abandoned owing to heavy surf on the beaches. Glengyle returned to Port Said.
- On the 8th King's force closed the coast south of Tyre and tried to gain touch with the head of the army column, but the situation ashore was not clear to King until 3.30 p.m., when it appeared that Tyre had been captured.
- Kimberley carried out the initial naval bombardment of the campaign on some French positions near Khan bridge between 8 and 9 p.m.



8 June 1941 - Syria

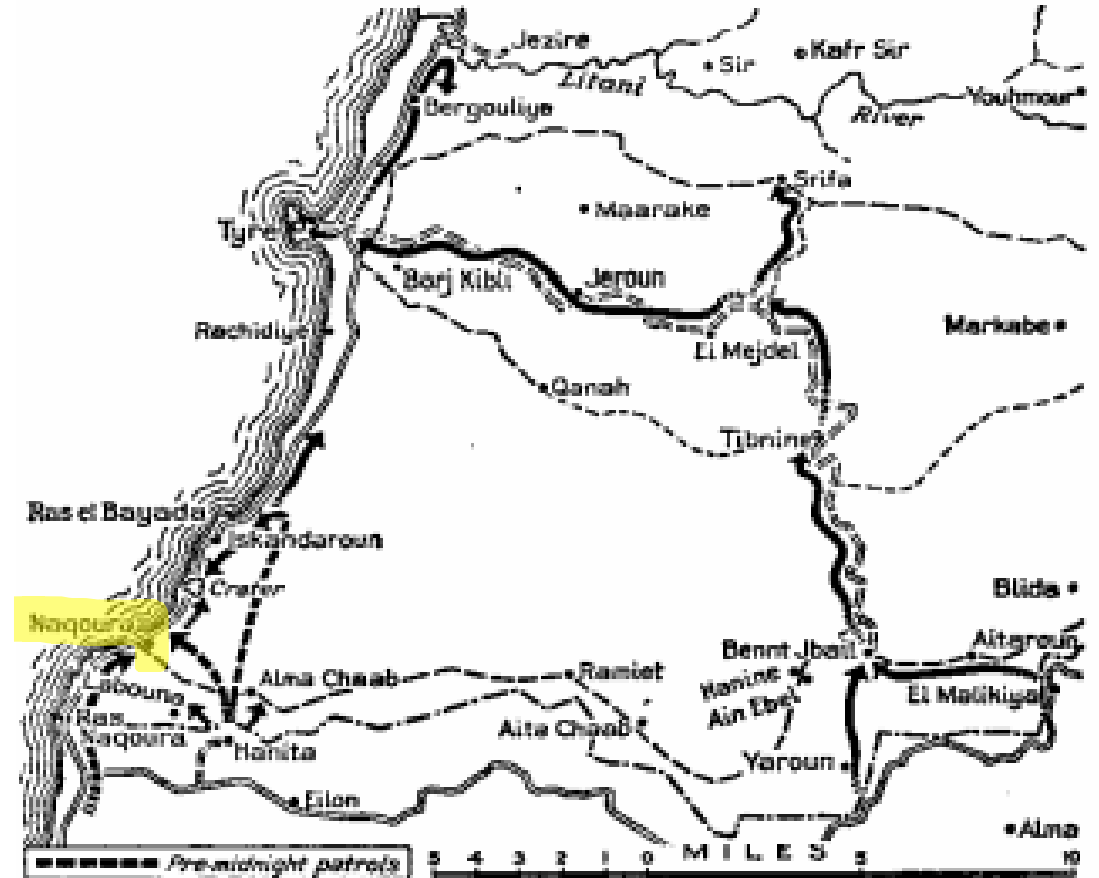
- Kyffin left Lance-Corporal Wardley and three men to halt any vehicles coming from the north and led the remainder of the party southwards. Stealthily, and in the darkness, they examined various bridges and culverts and found that they were not mined. At one of these Allan was left with three men to block the road while Kyffin went on with the remainder to search still farther south.
- About 5 a.m., north of Iskandaroun, they were fired on from a strong-post built of stone. The Australians rushed the post and took it, and were rounding up prisoners when Allan, who had heard the firing, arrived with his men.
- A long, grim fight began which attracted one group after another of French reinforcements. A party of Kyffin's men attacked some French troops in a near-by orchard where a machine-gun was silenced by Private Henderson who attacked it with grenades; and a mortar was captured. Kyffin's men, still under fire from the orchard, mounted the mortar and a captured Hotchkiss gun on the roof of the post, and soon were exchanging brisk fire with a French column moving along the road from the north to meet the invader. Some trucks in this column were halted and their crews taken prisoner. Next appeared two armoured cars. A shot from the captured mortar stopped the leading car, the driver was killed and the crews of both cars surrendered. Twelve horsemen then arrived and, when fired on, scattered into the hills.
- Half the men manned the blockhouse while the remainder continued to engage the Frenchmen holding machine-gun posts in the orchard.



Advance of 21st Brigade, 8th June

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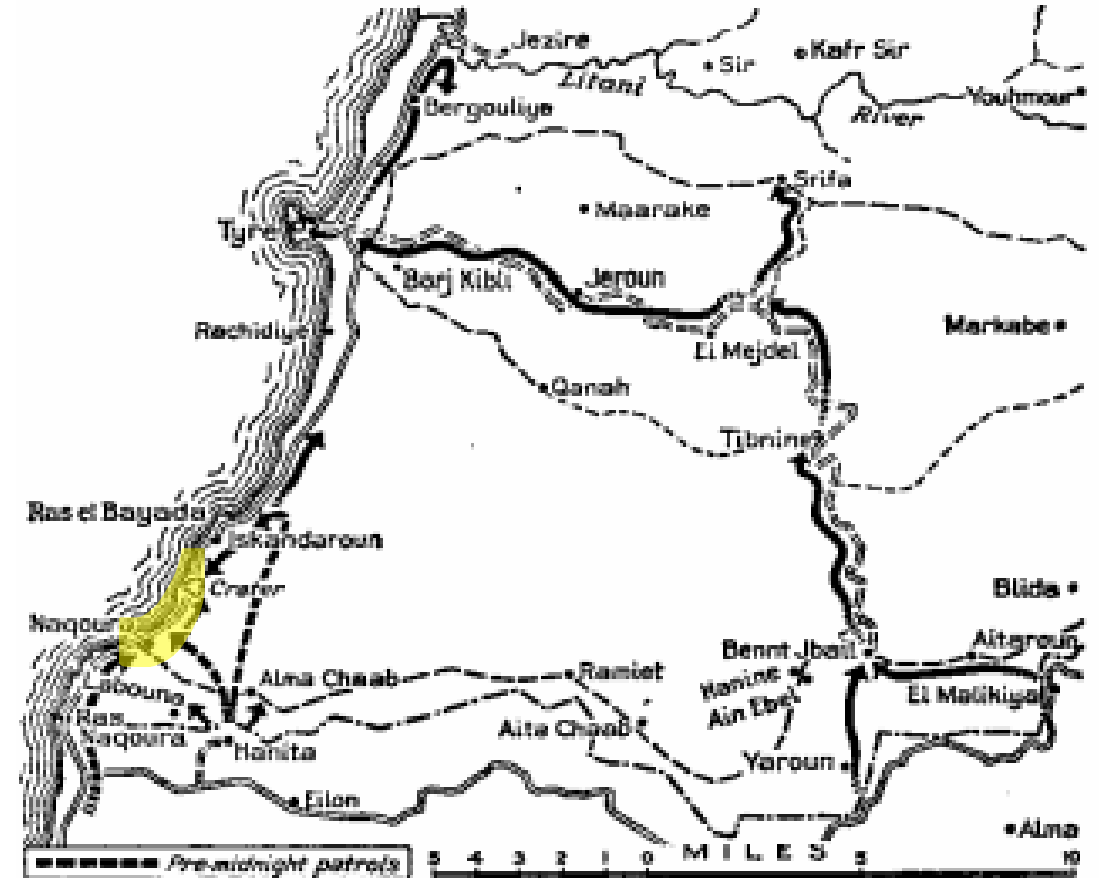
- At 2 a.m. the main advance began. The task of taking the three westernmost French posts and forming a bridgehead through which Colonel Moten's column could advance along the coast road was given to the 2/14th.
- On the extreme left a platoon of that battalion advanced from the British Customs post south of Naqoura at 3 a.m. After moving forward in the darkness astride the road for about one mile the leading scouts, Privates Wilson and Curson, encountered two French sentries whom they shot.
- It was 5 o'clock before they reached the wired post at **Naqoura** another two miles ahead, where the French opened fire. Lieutenant Ayton sent one of his sections to each flank and kept one on the road. For about five minutes the Australians exchanged fire with the garrison, which appeared to be using two machine-guns and about twenty rifles.
- Then, after firing a few mortar bombs, the centre section charged and drove the Frenchmen from the post and the village beyond, killing five men and capturing about twelve. Later a troop of Spahis opened fire from the village, but were driven off.



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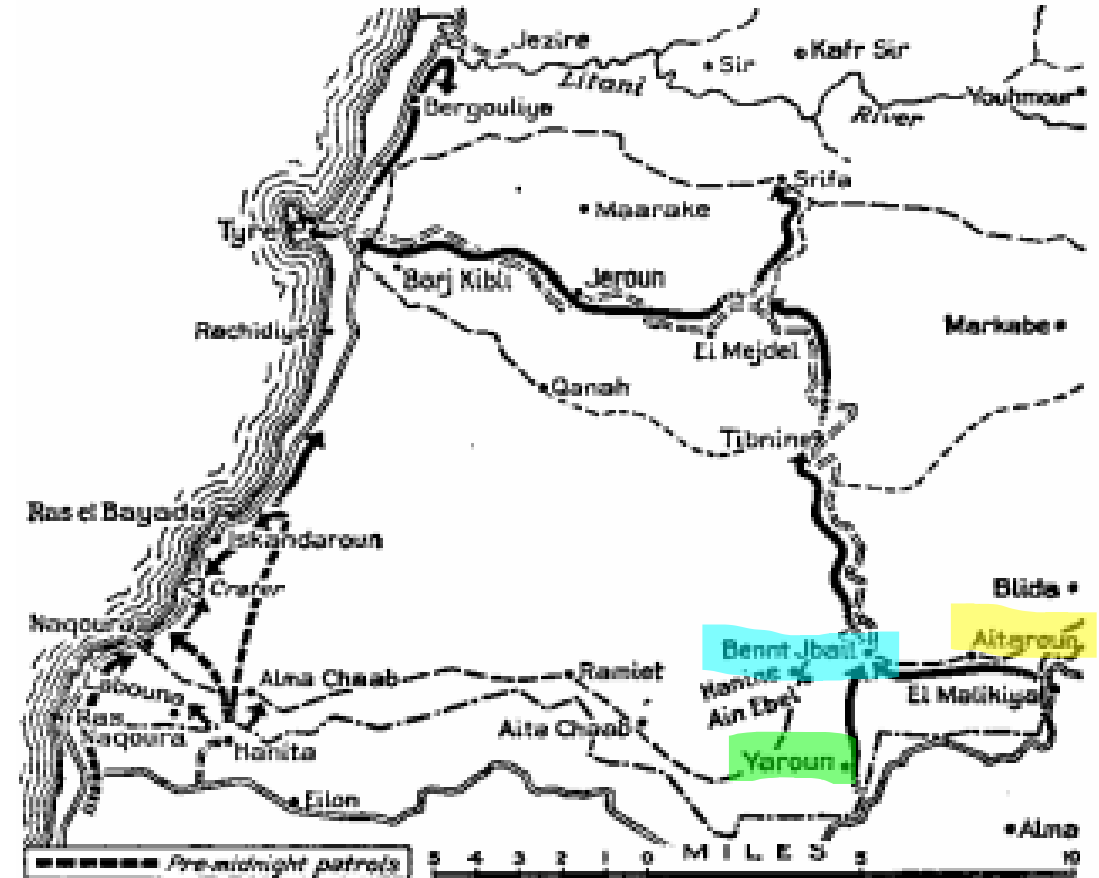
- It was about 7 a.m. when a loud explosion was heard south along the road; and both parties, Kyffin's to the north and Gowling's to the south, guessed that the road had been blown somewhere on the cliff face north of Naqoura. The demolition they had tried to prevent had been carried out.
- As the hours passed and no news came back, Stevens decided to order the companies of the 2/14th which had overcome the frontier posts to continue the advance and, for the present, not to send on Colonel Moten's fully-motorised column. It might be held up at a demolition and have to halt and return across the frontier again, with the confusion such an about-turn on a narrow road would cause.
- Therefore, early in the morning, the 2/14th advanced to the demolition with the tank troops of the squadron of the 6th Cavalry and a section of anti-tank guns.
- When the leading troops reached the French crater they found that the face of the cliff had been blown off, making a gap in the road 100 feet long and 30 feet deep.
- About ten Spahis under a white sergeant-major were fired on here and surrendered. The sergeant major asked why the Australians had used force first instead of sending forward a party to ask for surrender. He had been in the French Rugby team which had played the AIF at Beirut in 1940.
- About noon an anti-tank gun was man-handled across and then towed forward by a captured truck.
- A section of the 2/6th Field Company, under Lieutenant Harper, began to repair the road by blowing spoil down from the cliff above the crater, but Moten's vehicles were not able to cross that day.
- Meanwhile a company of the 2/14th marched along the cratered road on foot.



Advance of 21st Brigade, 8th June

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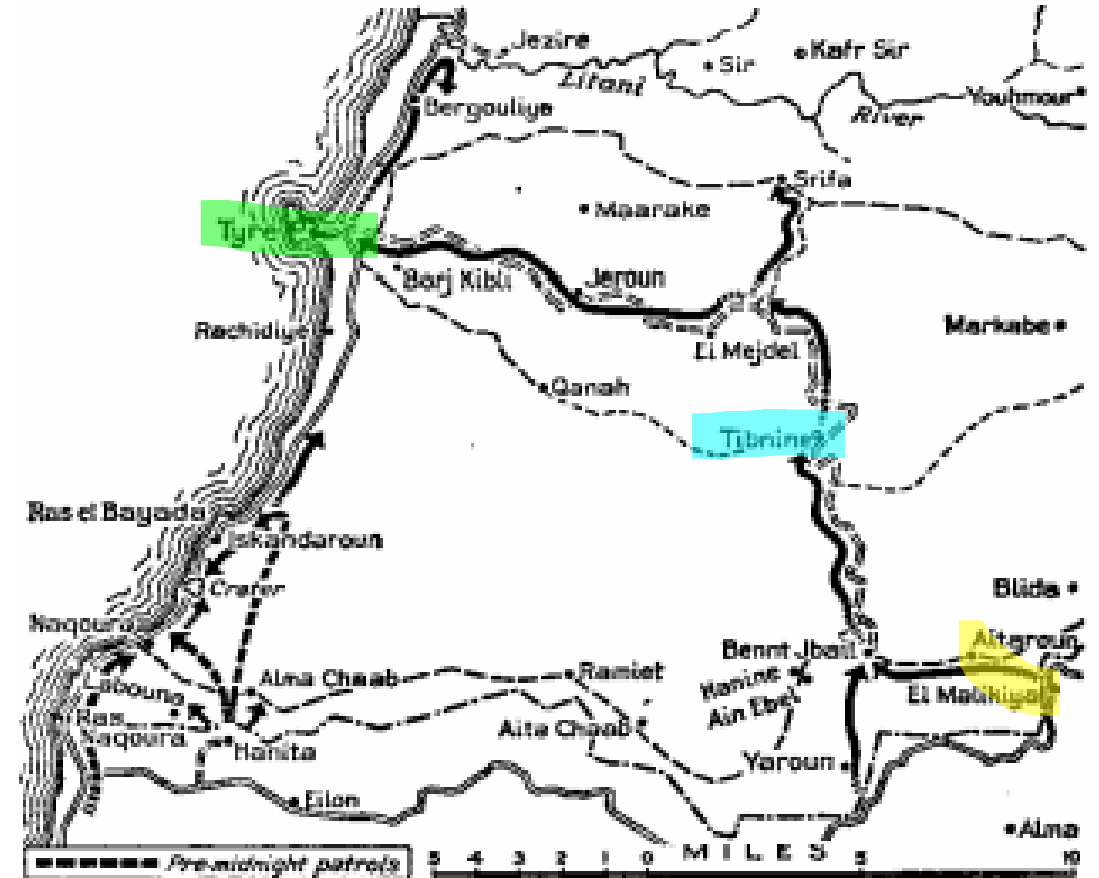
- In the tangled country 20 miles to the east, Lieut-Colonel MacDonald of the 2/16th, to secure his bridgehead, sent in two companies of infantrymen, one, Major Caro's, to Aitaroun and another, Captain Horley's, to Yaroun; both were to converge on the village of Bennt Jbail.
- Meanwhile an advance-guard under Major Potts, including a squadron of the 6th Australian Cavalry, two armoured car troops of the Royals, a company of the 2/16th and detachments of artillery and engineers, would wait at El Malikiya while a company of the 2/2nd Pioneers made a road able to carry vehicles thence to Aitaroun. When this road had been made Potts' force was to move along it to Tyre and on, by the coast road, to Beirut—if possible.
- Horley's company took the sentries at Yaroun unawares marched on to Bennt Jbail where there was a sharp fight in which the West Australians dispersed about seventy Spahis, killing several of them.
- Caro's company took Aitaroun without opposition, capturing four unwary men in a police post there, and, moving through the hills towards Bennt Jbail, encountered a French post equipped with machine-guns. Lieutenant O'Neill led his platoon forward and captured the posts, losing one man killed and one wounded—Corporal Holmes who continued to lead his men until the fight was won. Caro arrived at Bennt Jbail to find Horley in possession.



Advance of 21st Brigade, 8th June

8 June 1941 - Syria

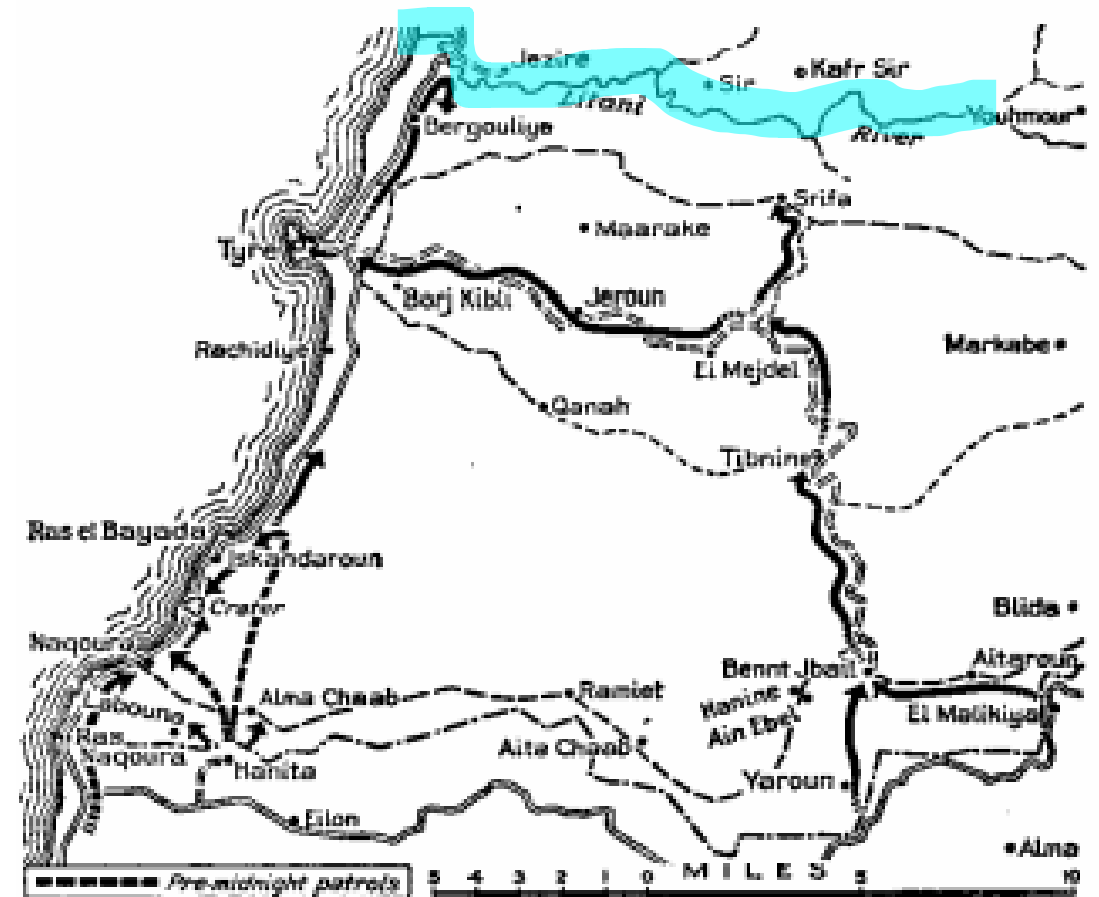
- Working furiously, a company of the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion quickly made a track linking the Palestine road at El Malikiya with the Syrian at Aitaroun and, about 4 a.m., Potts' advance-guard crossed the frontier.
- About 6.30 Lieutenant Mills of the 6th Australian Cavalry with thirteen carriers followed by a platoon of Captain Johnson's company of the 2/16th in trucks, led the spearhead of Potts' force through Bennt Jbail to Tibnine. There they caught up and drove off what were left of the Spahis whom Horley's company had expelled from Bennt Jbail. There was a pause in Tibnine while the friendly mayor of the town telephoned his colleague in Tyre and, after talking with him, informed the advancing troops that they would be welcome there. After waiting for two troops of the armoured cars of the Royals to join the vanguard, Mills moved on. Between Tibnine and the coast Mills' vanguard had a series of skirmishes, but the enemy were too dispersed to resist effectively and, just before 2 o'clock, his leading cars and carriers drove up to the cross-roads outside Tyre.



Advance of 21st Brigade, 8th June

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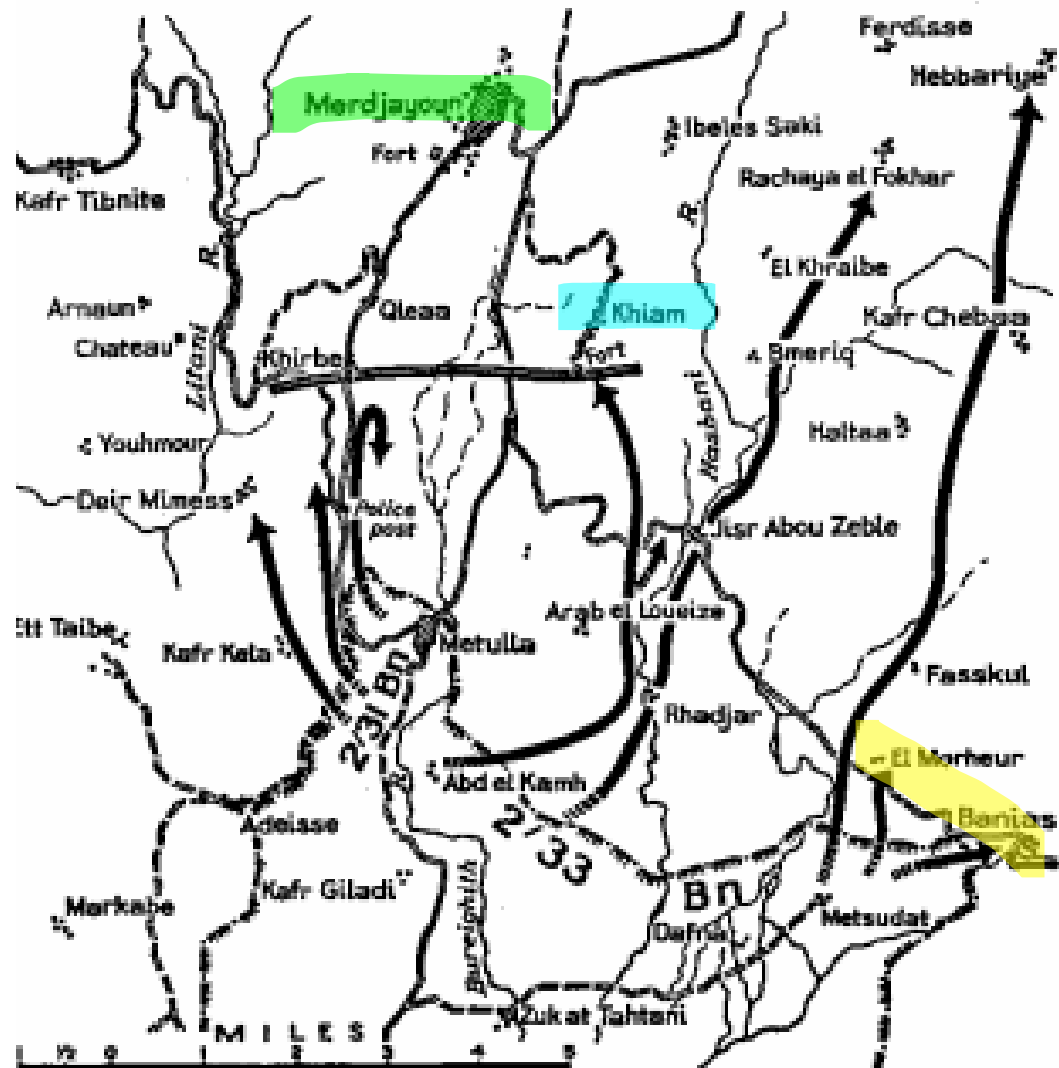
- The armoured cars of the Royals, now in the lead, moved north along the road and met no enemy troops, except some Spahis, some of whom they captured while others rode off into the hills.
- They were halted by a road-block just south of the Litani. Some men dismounted from the cars and were dismantling the road-block when the French opened fire from the north bank of the river with field and anti-tank guns and mortars, whereupon the Royals briskly withdrew.
- That evening patrols of the leading company of the 2/16th moved to within 800 yards of the river and reached the conclusion that no French troops were south of it.



Advance of 21st Brigade, 8th June

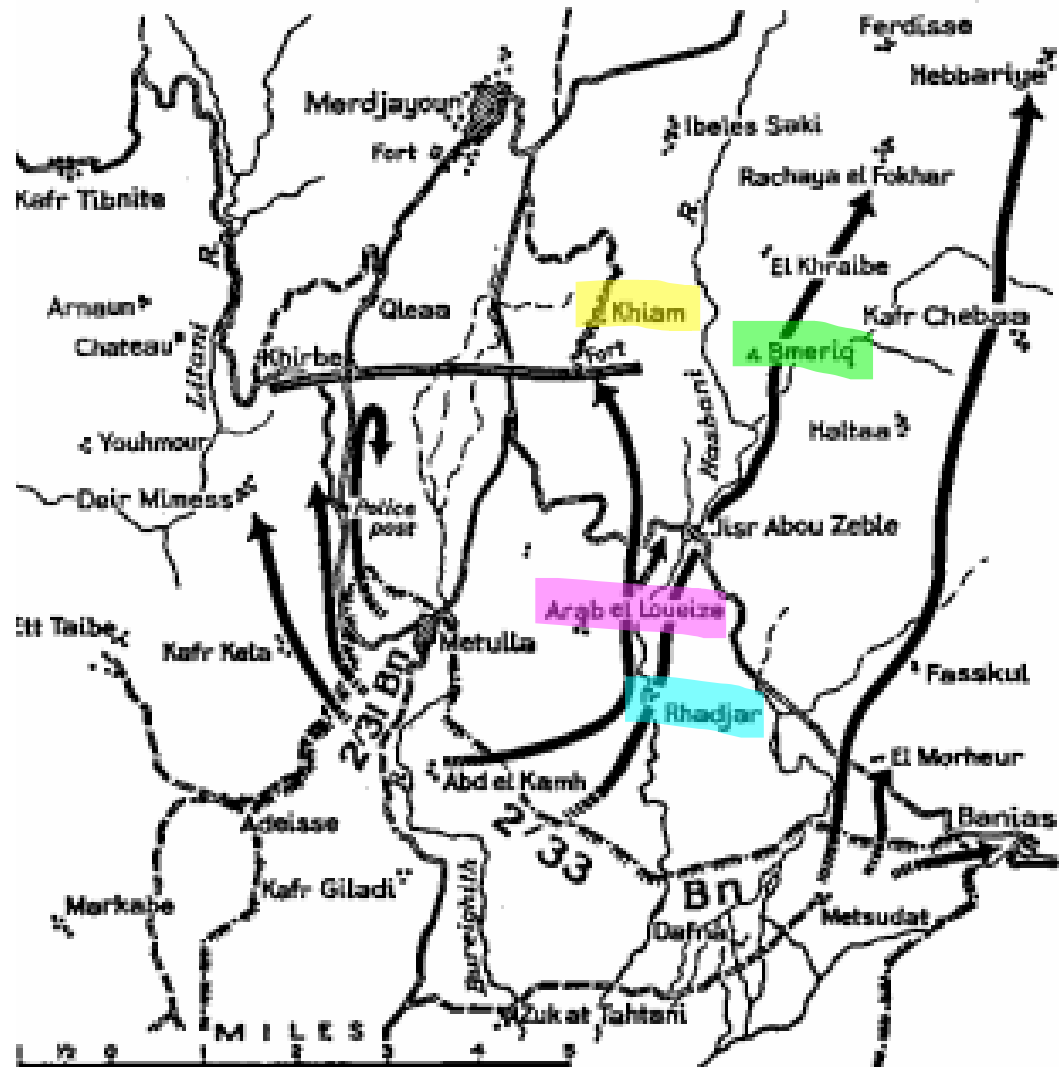
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- Brigadier Cox's brigade was divided into two columns for the first phase of its advance to Rayak.
- On the right was Moncolumn, under Lieut-Colonel Monaghan and including chiefly his 2/33rd Battalion. Its task was to cut the road from Kuneitra to prevent an enemy advance from that direction, advance into the Hasbaya area on the right and through **Khiam** on the left.
- On Cox's left was Portcolumn, under Lieut-Colonel Porter of the 2/31st Battalion, including "C" Squadron of the 6th Cavalry, a six-gun troop of the 2/6th Field Regiment, and six anti-tank guns. The task of this column was to capture a line from **Merdjayoun** to Nabatiye et Tahta. This line was to form the base for a subsequent advance along one of two roads leading north to the vital Damascus-Beirut highway.
- Major Wright's' company of the 2/33rd, was given the task of capturing frontier posts from **Banias to El Morheur** and blowing up the bridge south-east of Banias as a precaution against a possible French flanking attack from Kuneitra. They took Banias late in the morning and early in the afternoon reported to Monaghan that the bridge had been demolished and all was quiet.



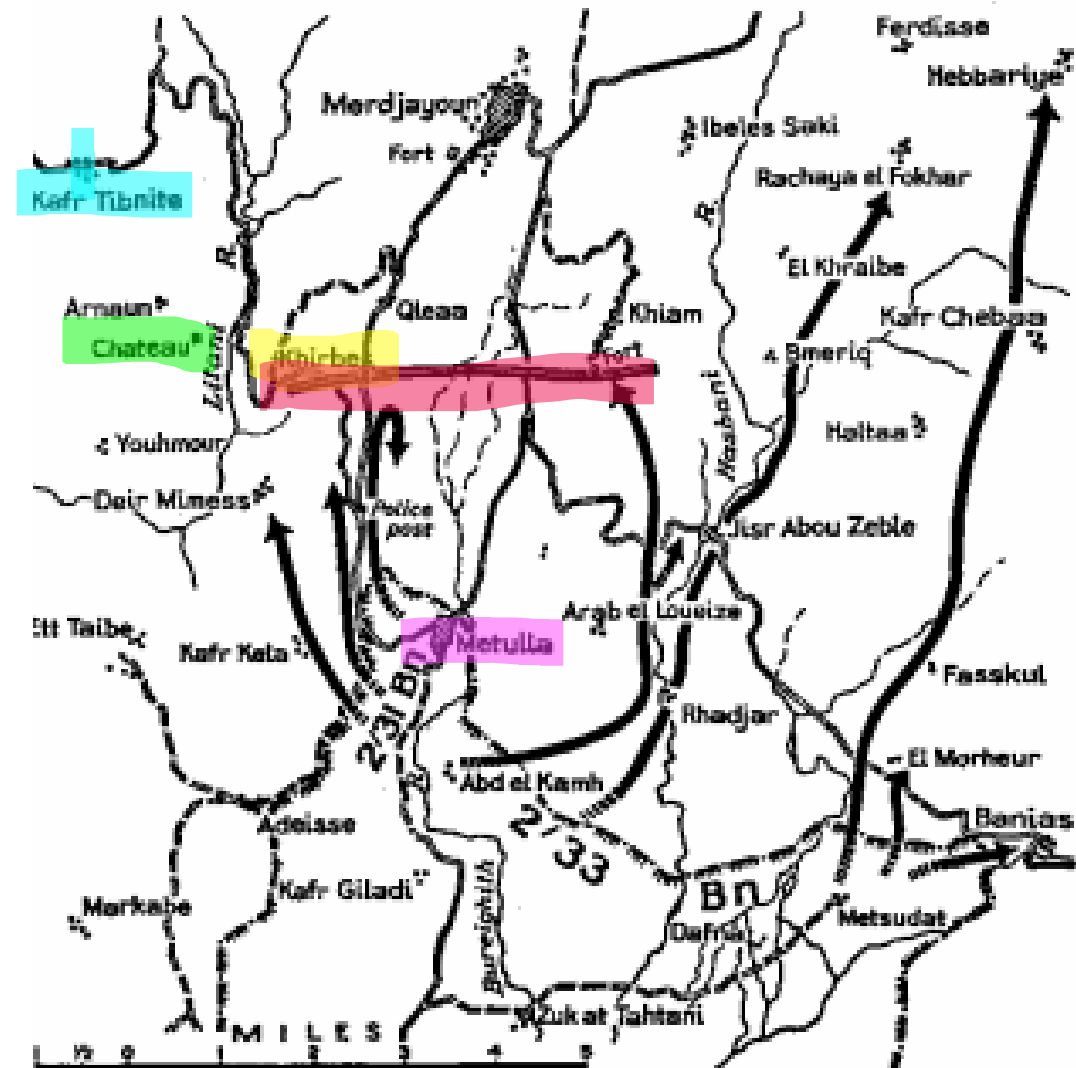
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- Captain Ferguson's company moved forward under fire along the valley leading past Khiam on the south-east but was held by heavy fire from Khiam and Bmeriq.
- The task of taking the frontier posts farther to the left, in the area of Rhadjar and Arab el Loueize, was given to Captain Cotton's company.
- At 11.30 a.m. Monaghan ordered Cotton's company to capture Fort Khiam, which resembled the forts they had seen in films about the French Foreign Legion. About midday it attacked. The French held their fire and it was not until the Australians were about 300 yards away that they opened with field guns, mortars and small arms. Cotton's men were well dispersed and moved on, suffering only one casualty, until they were only 50 yards from the square building. They managed to get into the fort but could not clear the French out.
- Cotton decided to postpone the attack until next morning.



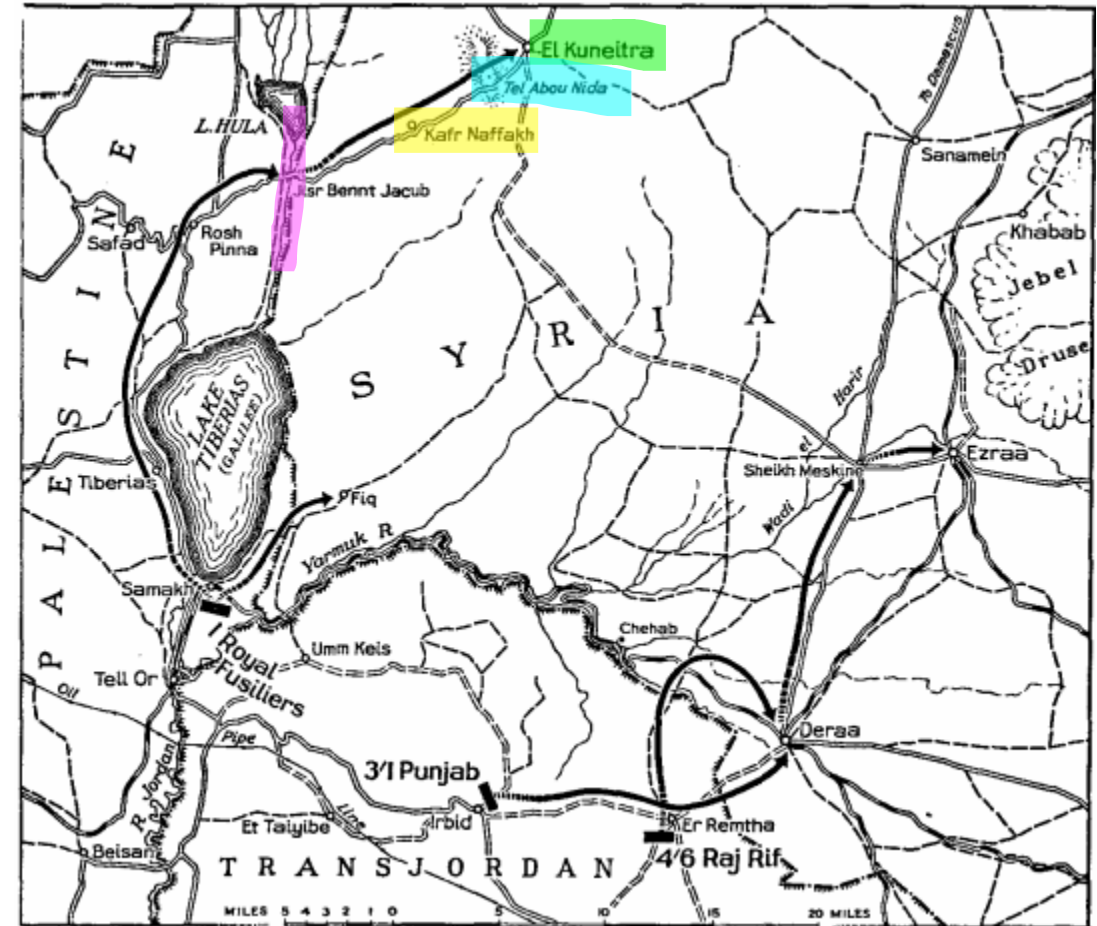
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- The 2/31st Battalion was to advance with three companies forward, through **Khirbe** and **Kafr Tibnite**. The main French positions covering Khirbe and the **Chateau de Beaufort**, a Crusader's castle, were superbly situated from the defenders' point of view; the Australian attack on the left was made up steep bare slopes, and on the right too there was little cover.
- The leading Australian companies moved off from a taped start-line just north of **Metulla** a few minutes after 2 a.m.
- The French defence was a well-prepared position so far north of the frontier that the advancing Australians had not come in sight until light was breaking. Heavy fire from field guns, mortars and machine-guns was brought down on the leading Australians, who were halted on open ground and suffered heavy casualties.
- Parts of the Australian line were withdrawn to better cover but were still under searching fire.
- At the end of the day little had been gained beyond finding the enemy's defences, sampling his strength, and learning that hard fighting lay ahead. **The battalion's line** ran east and west through the police post about two miles south of Khirbe.



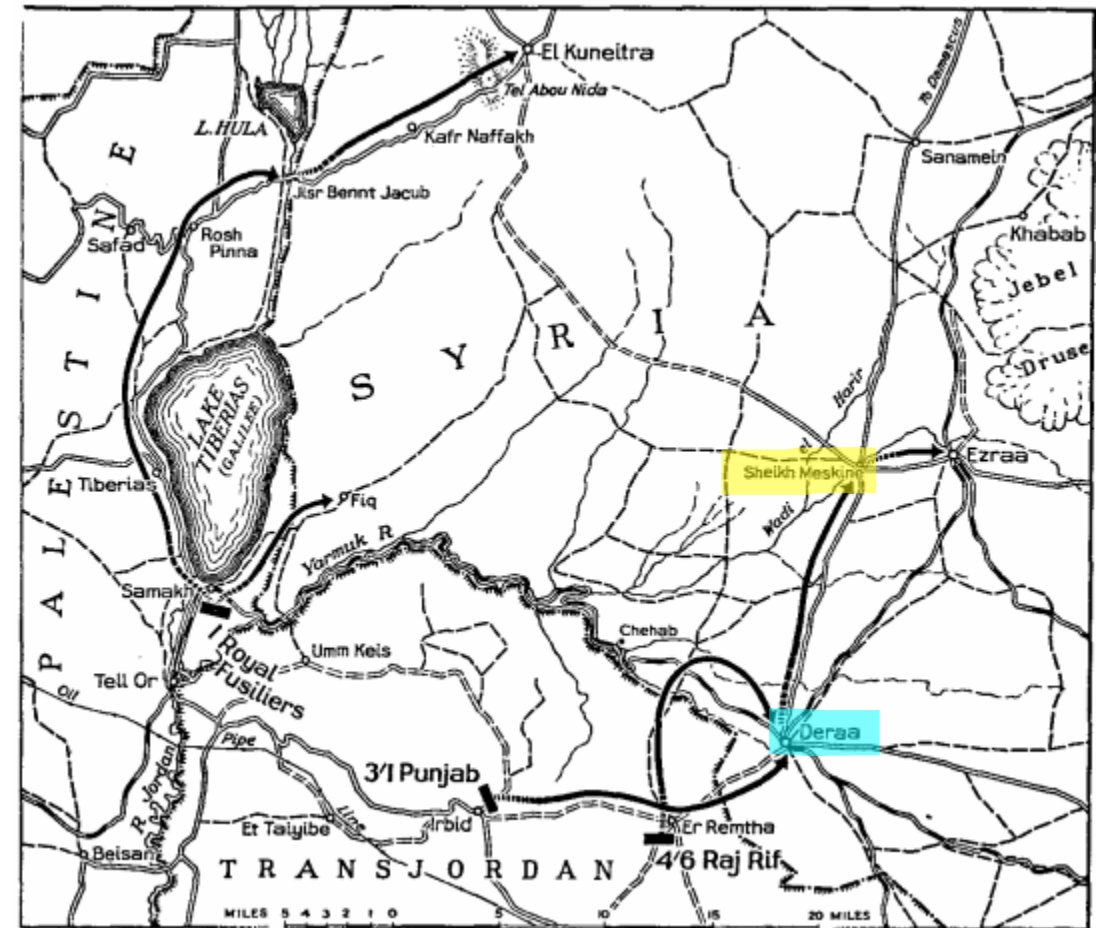
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- On the extreme right flank, Brigadier Lloyd's 5th Indian Brigade Group had moved across the frontier at 2 a.m. in four motorised columns.
- The left column, comprising the 1/Royal Fusiliers, some field artillery (including the 9th Australian Battery) and other troops, passed the frontier just east of the Jordan at 4.15 a.m. and at 5 o'clock was at Kafr Naffakh where the infantry left their vehicles and advanced on foot towards Kuneitra.
- An hour later the advance-guard came under fire from Tel Abou Nida, a hill about two miles south-west of the town, and two emissaries—a British and a French officer—went forward to demand surrender and fire ceased.
- A truce was agreed upon to enable the civilians to leave the town. It was evident that the French were trying to gain time; the invaders for their part took advantage of the delay to move their artillery observers forward, and the envoys discovered that the garrison consisted of a battalion of Senegalese and six armoured cars carrying light guns.
- At length a French officer came out and, like a herald in a mediaeval war, announced that hostilities would begin again at midday; and at that hour the guns opened fire.
- After a sharp concentration of artillery fire the infantry attacked and occupied Tel Abou Nida, with little opposition.



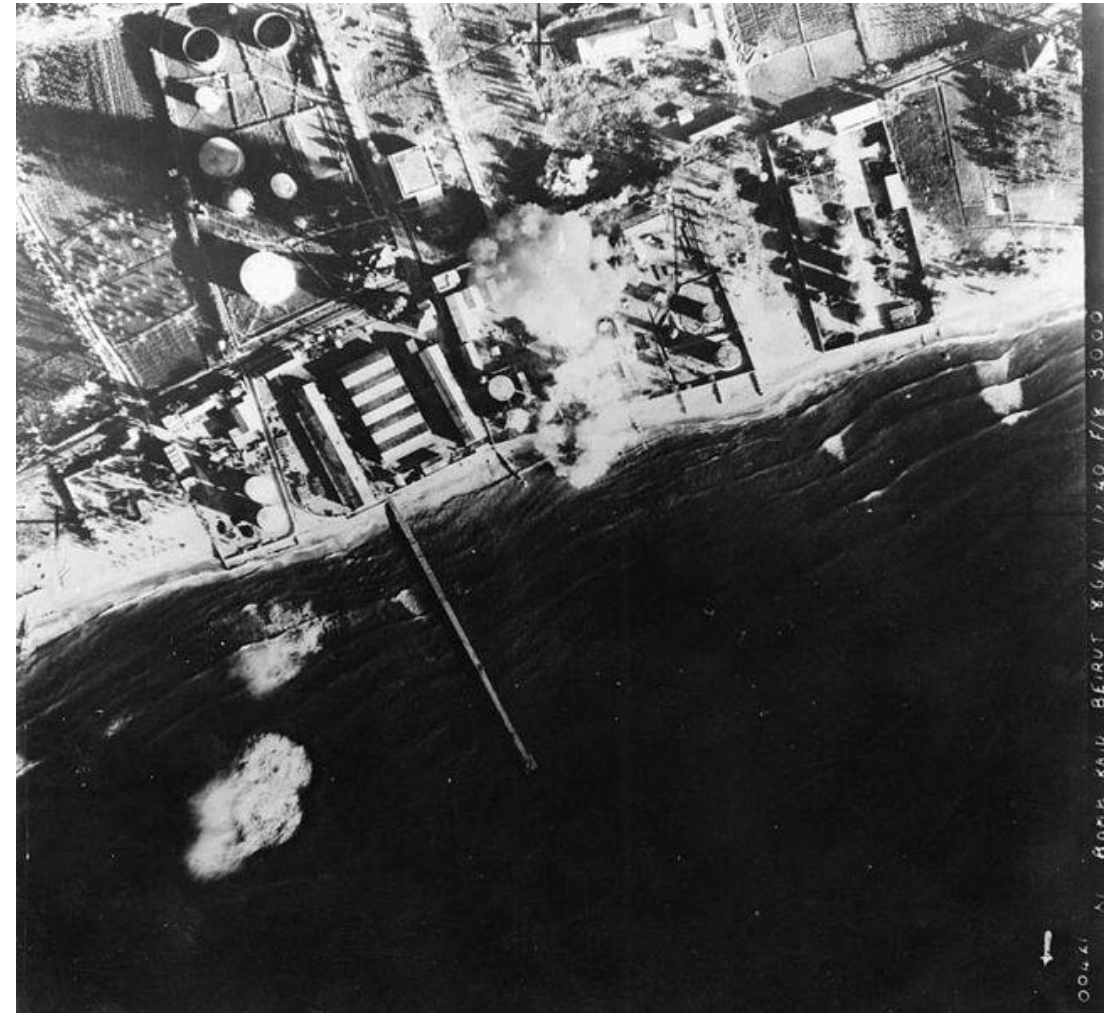
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- The third and fourth columns, one commanded by Lloyd himself and including the 3/1st Punjab and the other by Colonel Jones of the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles, had surrounded **Deraa** by 6 a.m. after having met little opposition.
- A flag of truce was sent into the town with a demand for surrender. When the car carrying the party was fired on and hit by a shell which did not explode the envoys bravely continued on foot, but their demand for surrender was rejected.
- Thereupon at 7.30 the artillery opened fire. After a brief bombardment the two Indian battalions attacked and by 8.30 a.m. had occupied the town, with few casualties.
- The Rajputana with a battery of artillery then drove on towards **Sheikh Meskine** where they arrived late in the afternoon after having met some opposition from armoured cars and having been bombed by aircraft on the way.
- An attack on the town failed in the face of machine-gun and artillery fire but late in the afternoon, after a hard fight, high ground dominating the town from the west was occupied .



8 June 1941 - Syria

- For No. 3 Squadron the Syrian campaign opened with an attack by five Tomahawks on Rayak satellite airfield at 6.15 a.m. on 8th June. The pilots found no French aircraft in the air, but shot up six Morane fighters on the ground.
- That evening three Bristol Blenheim bombers of No. 11 Squadron RAF, flying from Aqir, Palestine attack the Royal Dutch Shell oil depot near Beirut. They were escorted by 4 No. 3 Squadron Tomahawks.



- Thanks for your attention