

# Australia's War: 80 years ago this week

9 June 1941





# Dublin's Dead Dug Out Of Raid Debris

*Australian Associated Press*

LONDON, June 1.—Dublin's mysterious air raid on Friday night caused widespread damage. A.R.P. workers were still digging for trapped victims to-day. Twenty-four bodies have been recovered so far.

The raid was comparable with some attacks that have been made on British towns in the front line. More than 100 killed or injured were taken to one hospital.

Damage and casualties were caused at Liverpool by German bombers on Saturday night. Three raiders were shot down.

Planes droned over Dublin for a considerable time on Friday night. Shuddering bursts of bombs followed in quick succession. Flames from fires mounted high, painting the sky red.

Anti-aircraft fire added to the din. Fire-engines and ambulances raced through wreckage-strewn streets. Streams of injured people and bombed-out families were carried from the affected areas.

A bomb fell in Phoenix Park, blowing out the windows of the residence of the President (Dr. Douglas Hyde).



**To-morrow is another day --**  
 The Optical Illusion of  
**CHAS. SANKEY FRASER,**  
 111 Queen Street, Brisbane, and at all Opticians in Queensland.

FORECAST: Improving during day. Map, Page 12.



No. 2422

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# The Courier-Mail

**LATE CITY**

BRISBANE, MONDAY, JUNE 9, 1941.

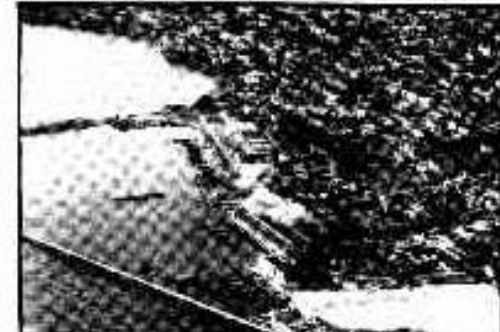
14 PAGES—2d

**WALLACE BISHOP'S**  
 Foremost for Diamonds  
 KING GEORGE SQ., BRISBANE

## 20,000 ALLIED TROOPS IN SYRIA INVASION



MAP of Syria, the new theatre of war in which Imperial and Free French forces have taken the initiative. Below: Official aerial picture of Beirut taken during a bombing raid in the last hour. Beirut, which was then the headquarters of the Turkish Army in Syria, is now occupied by German and French forces. This photograph shows the town extending on the eastern, sea-facing side of the city. The photograph was taken by a German plane, and was taken by German W. H. Knappe, one of the German forces. He was an observer and official photographer with the East Indian and Egyptian branches of the Royal Naval Air Service. The squadron leader is seen from the cockpit of his bomber, supported by the crew.



### Imperial and Free French Advance; Offer of Liberty

**LATE CITY: WAR NEWS**

**BRITAIN** dramatically seized the initiative in the Middle East yesterday. According to Vichy, about 20,000 Free French and British Imperial troops began to advance into Syria at 2 a.m.

The invasion, led by the British Commander-in-Chief in Palestine and Transjordan (Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson), began after planes had dropped leaflets urging the French Army and Syrian authorities to collaborate in driving out the Germans.

"The operation is proceeding according to plan," it was announced in Cairo last night. "It is primarily intended to prevent the Germans from using Syria as a base of operations."

As the Allied troops crossed the frontier, the Commander-in-Chief of the Free French Forces in the Middle East (General Georges Catroux), on behalf of General de Gaulle and in association with the British Government, offered Syria and Lebanon their independence.

The Vichy correspondent of the British United Press says that General Dentz (French High Commissioner for Syria), who is personally commanding the French troops, reports that heavy fighting has occurred in the Jabal Druze mountains, along the frontier south of Es-Suwayda, between loyal French troops and dissident forces, but Vichy officials say that the clash was with French native troops.

The Vichy correspondent at Parliament never notified the British United Press of this point with the natives.

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### LEADERS IN SYRIA



Ali al-Ghazali—Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Free Forces.



General Georges Catroux—Commander-in-Chief of the Free French Forces in the Middle East.

### JAPAN'S RELATIONS WITH E. INDIES SAID TO BE CRITICAL

**NEW YORK, June 8.**—The "critical situation" which has arisen between Japan and the Dutch East Indies will form the subject of a conference between the Japanese Foreign Minister (Mr. Matsuo) and army and navy officials to-morrow, says the Tokyo correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune.

The Japanese Government is expected to decide on the "defence attitude" early this week, according to Tokyo sources.

The Tokyo correspondent of the New York Times declares that despite the Japanese Government's recent Japanese Government's attitude, it is expected that the Japanese Government will not declare war on the Dutch East Indies.

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### FEDERAL PLAN FOR TAX UNITY

**CANBERRA, Sunday.**—Recommending proposals for uniform taxation in Australia will be presented to a conference of State Government representatives to be convened before the end of this month by the Federal Treasurer, Mr. Fadden.

When he announced tonight the decision to call the conference Mr. Fadden said that the Federal Government was determined to co-operate in such an endeavour.

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# 9 June 1941

## **Indies Firm Stand**

A Batavia message says that the reply sent by the Netherlands East Indies to Japan was based on three main points as follows:—

1. There must be no political interference and overtures, direct and otherwise, to include the East Indies in a new order in East Asia were firmly rejected.
2. The East Indies will not submit to economic vassalage.
3. No supplies from the East Indies must be allowed to reach the enemy under any guise.

The first reaction of the Japanese delegates was necessarily one of disappointment, continues the message. The Dutch have not completely closed the door to negotiations, because they have declared themselves willing to continue the talks on a reasonable basis with the object of developing the economic relations between the two countries.

The leader of the Japanese economic delegation (M. Yoshizawa) said to-day: "The Dutch reply is unsatisfactory on certain major points and in view of my instructions from Tokio it appears improbable that an agreement will be reached. The only chance of reaching an agreement is for Tokio to revise my instructions. I expect advice from Tokio within a few days, and meanwhile we are further studying the reply."

Colonel Collet, one of the most recent and most distinguished recruits from Syria to the Free French cause, is reported to be with Lieut.-General Wilson's forces.

German Radio announced yesterday that Colonel Collet had committed suicide. Soon afterwards, an American newspaperman interviewed the "dead" colonel at Haifa.

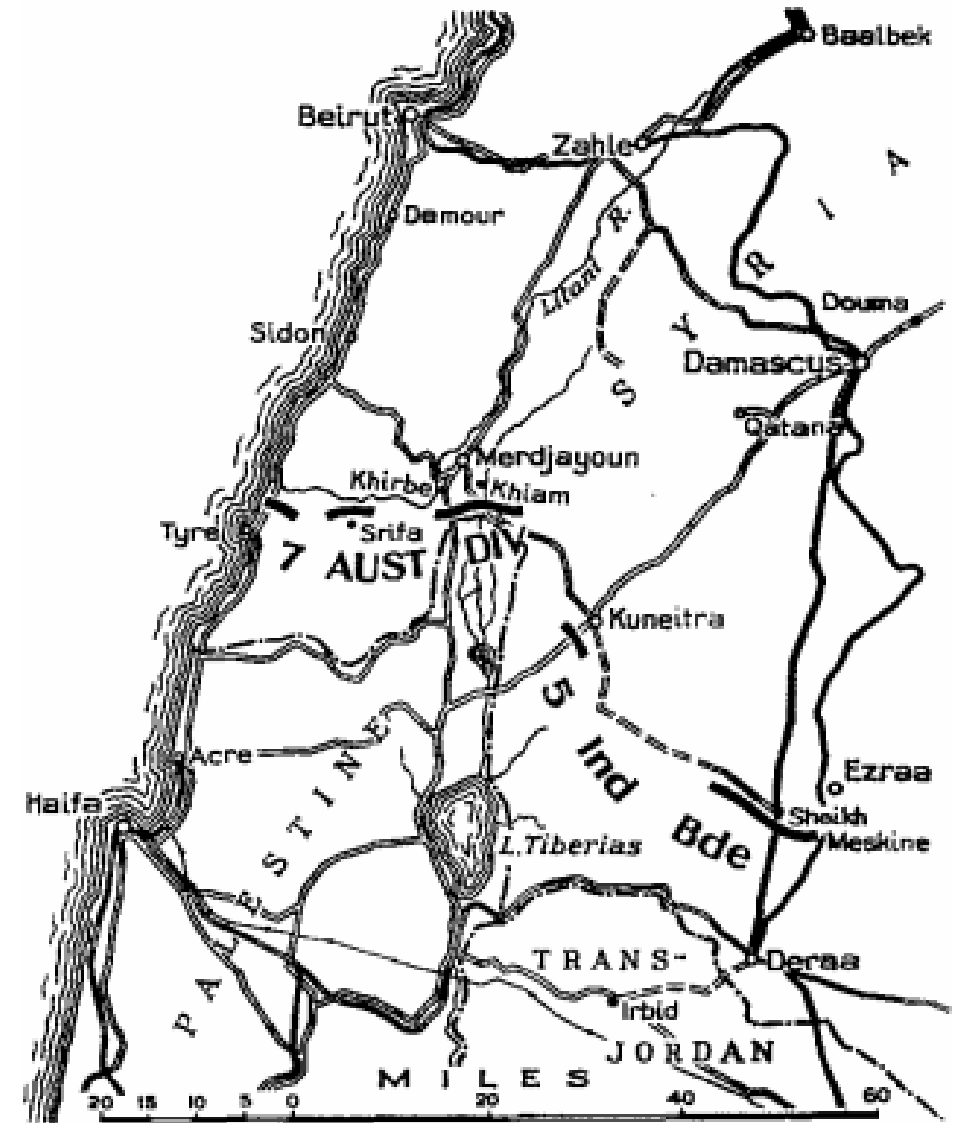
Colonel Collet told the journalist, a New York Times correspondent, that the French troops in Syria had received orders to be helpful to German fliers if they descended in French territory.

The Germans, he said, were refused permission to land at the large ports, but were given permission to land men at smaller ports and isolated beaches.

Many French officers, said Col Collet, remained faithful to Marshal Petain because they were held in ignorance. The Germans had convinced many officers that France's sole salvation lay in collaboration with Germany. The French were not aware of the extent of American aid to Britain.

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

- As soon as the invasion began General Catroux and the British Ambassador in Egypt (Sir Miles Lampson) each broadcast a declaration to the Syrian people.
- Catroux, speaking for de Gaulle, declared that the Free French intended to put an end to the mandate, to proclaim the people of Syria and the Lebanon free and independent, and to negotiate a treaty to ensure this independence.
- Lampson said that the British Government associated itself with this assurance of independence, and that, if the people of Syria and Lebanon joined the Allies, the blockade would be lifted, and they would enter into immediate relations with the sterling bloc, and thus gain "enormous and immediate advantages from the point of view of . . . exports and imports".
- At the end of the first day, however, it seemed evident that the "armed political inroad" which Churchill had advocated was likely to develop into a hard-fought campaign.

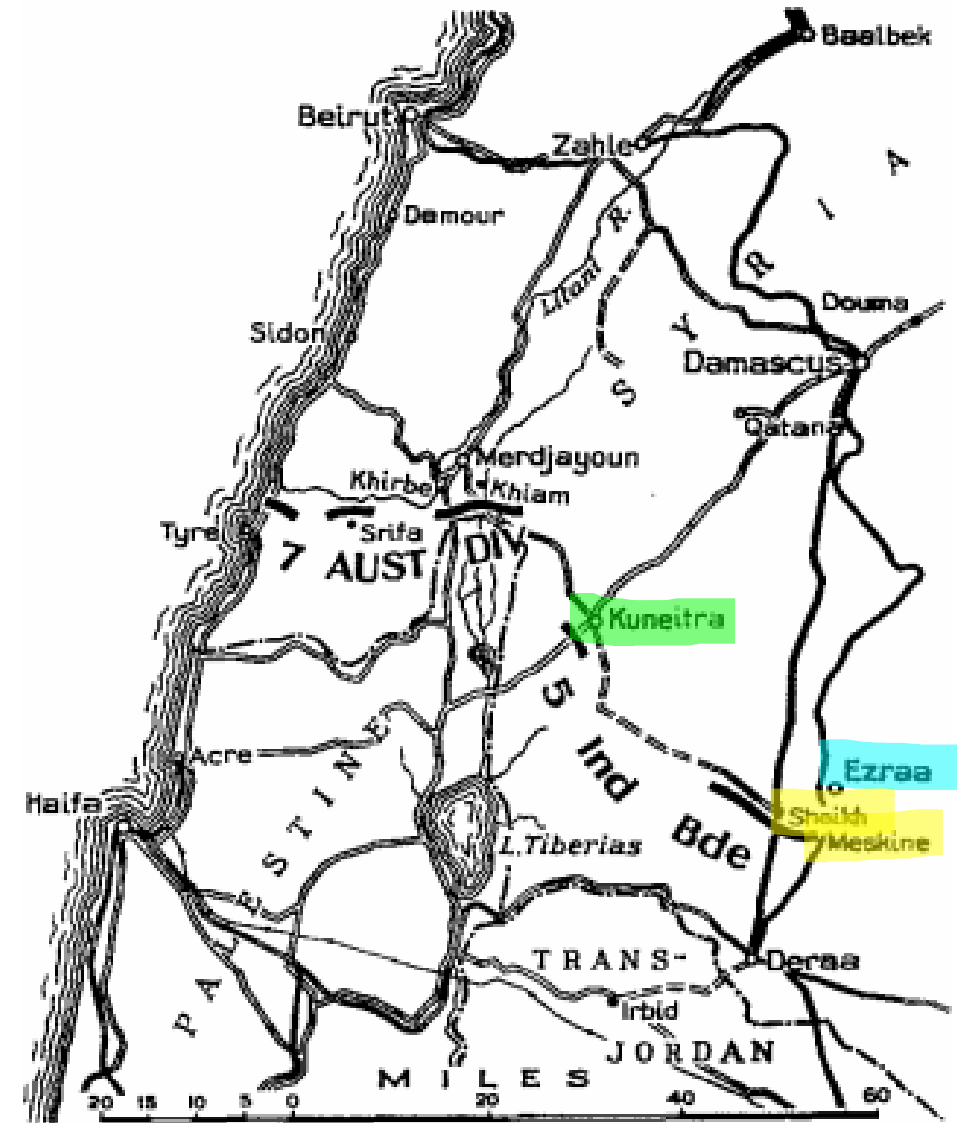


Dusk, 8th June



# 9 June 1941 - Syria

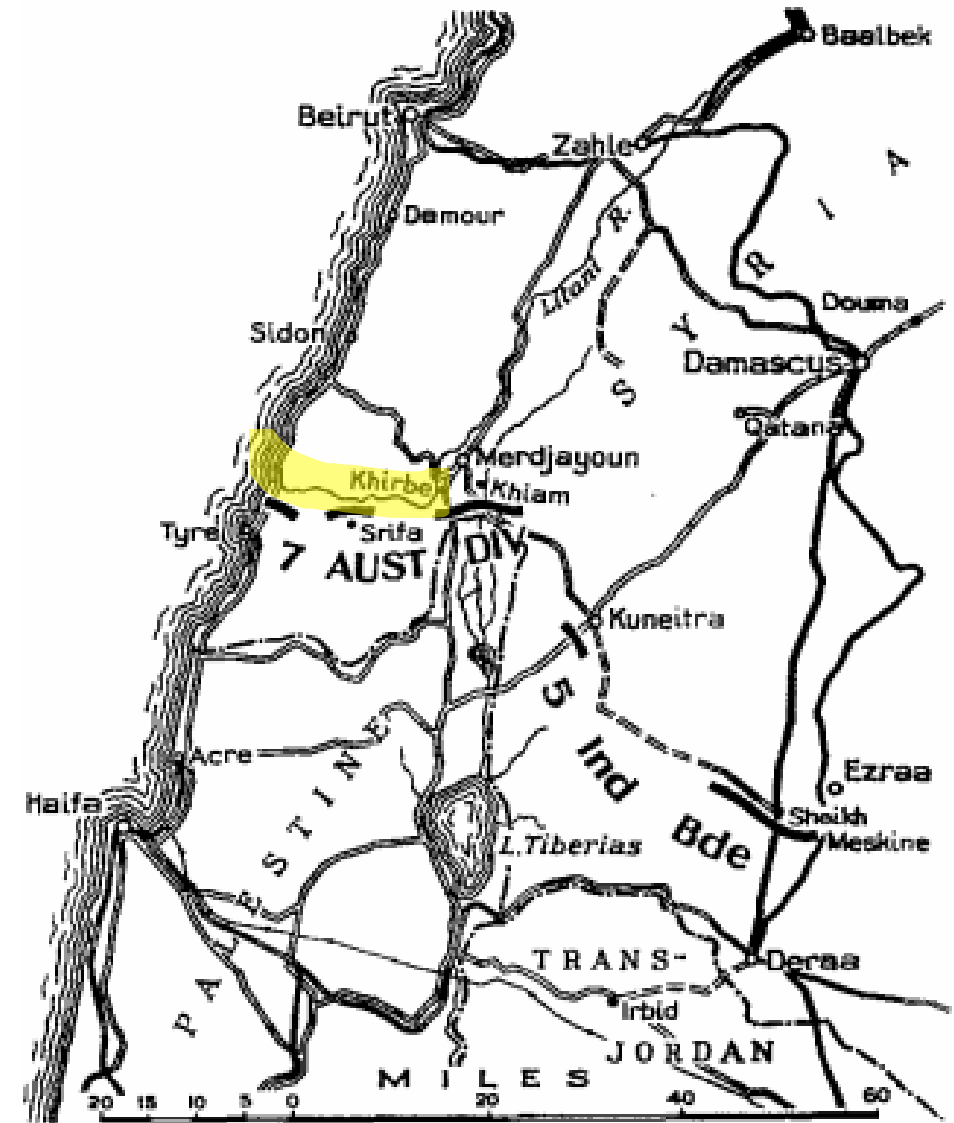
- Early on the morning of 9th June, the Rajputana occupied **Sheikh Meskine** and **Ezraa**, which the enemy had abandoned during the night, and at 10 a.m. the Free French contingent passed through on its way to Damascus, leaving the Indian brigade to guard the desert flank, at **Kuneitra**, Sheikh Meskine and Ezraa, while they took up the pursuit. The Indian brigade had captured thirty officers and some 300 men.



Dusk, 8th June

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

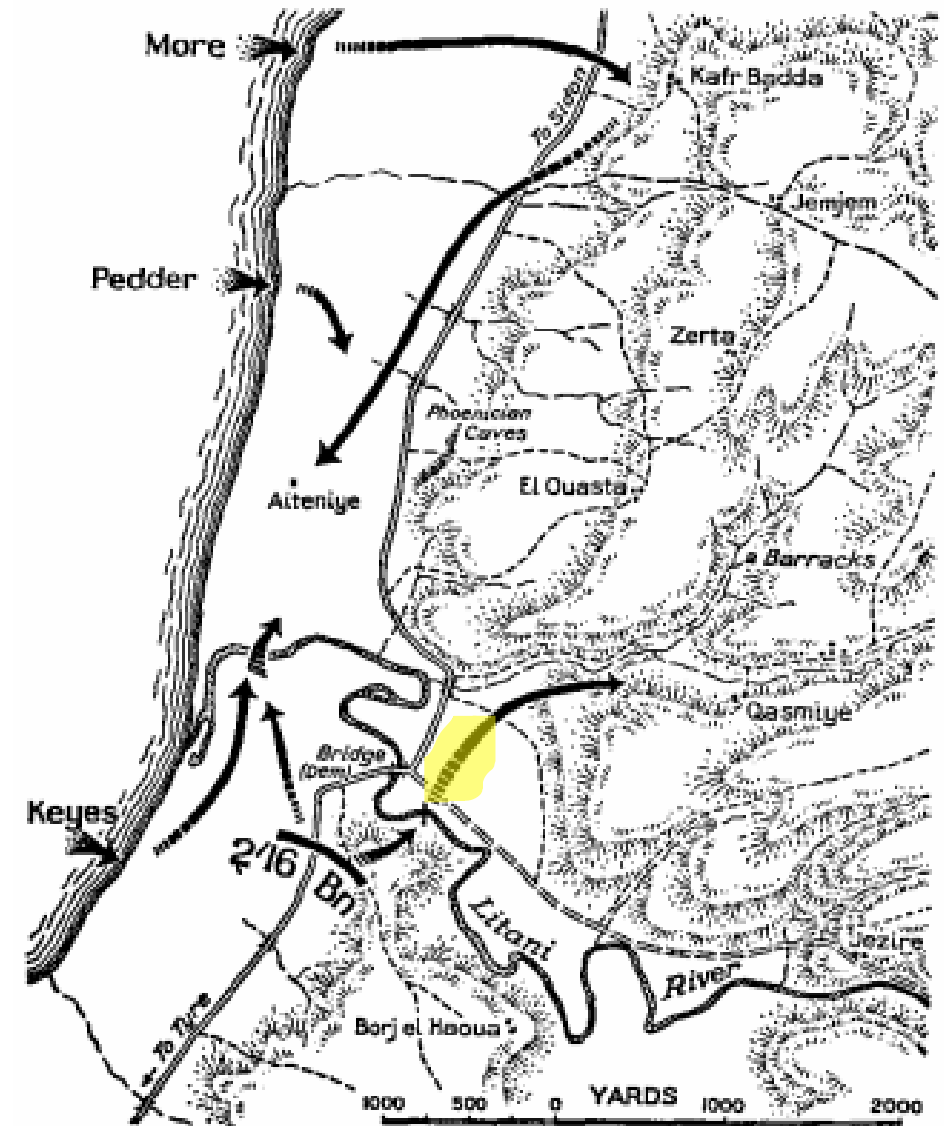
- At 3.15 a.m. on the 9th Glengyle was again off the Litani escorted by a cruiser and two destroyers. For the landing the commando unit was divided into three groups: one under Major Keyes was to lead the attack on the position north of the river; a second was to cut off this area from the north; the third formed a reserve.
- Unhappily a sandbank obscured the mouth of the river and, at 4.50 a.m., Keyes' group landed half a mile south instead of north of the river and south of the flanking company of the 2/16th. Nevertheless they advanced to catch up with the 2/16th.
- The river was from 30 to 40 yards wide and flowed fast between steep banks lined with poplars. The road travelled round the foot of the hills about 1,000 yards from the coast and crossed the river on an arched stonebridge.
- North of the river the road travelled through flat land planted with fruit trees and corn for about 500 yards. This flat land was dominated, north of the river, by a steep hill about 500 feet in height into which the main French defences were dug.
- A few seconds before the attack by the 2/16th Battalion towards the bridge was to begin, a scout, who had been sent out to reconnoitre, shouted the news that the bridge had just been blown up. The plan, whereby one platoon would rush the bridge covered by the fire of another, had to be scrapped. The only course was to cross in the boats.



Dusk, 8th June

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

- The men of the leading company took what shelter they could from heavy enemy fire which opened as soon as the bridge was blown chiefly among the headstones of a graveyard near the river bank.
- In a few minutes the boat-carrying parties arrived. Johnson decided that the river was flowing too fast—about five knots—to paddle the boats over, and Captain Hearman, his second-in-command who was in charge of the boats, a man of uncommon physical strength and great confidence, ordered the men to cut the painters from the boats and to cut telephone wires from the poles along the road and knot them into a long rope.
- With this rope Corporal Haddy, who declared that he was the strongest swimmer, waded into the Litani, and, though hit by a fragment of a mortar bomb, swam on and struggled to attach the rope to a tree on the opposite bank.
- Seeing that Haddy was becoming weak Lance-Corporal Dusting swam across to help him, while Hearman collected volunteers to take the first boat over.
- Corporal Walsh and eight men of Lieutenant Sublet's platoon manned the boat. All of them, like the remainder of the platoon except the commander and his sergeant had come from Kalgoorlie, and had been to school together. They had never been in a boat before and each was laden with all his gear and 300 rounds of ammunition.
- With difficulty the men persuaded Hearman not to enter the boat; there was very little freeboard, and the addition of so heavy a man, they thought, might have sunk it.
- Once they were out in the stream the machine-gun fire went over their heads, although mortar bombs were bursting on the water. They were hauled across without casualties. They landed on the north bank, spread out and advanced, bombing French posts concealed in bamboo thickets.

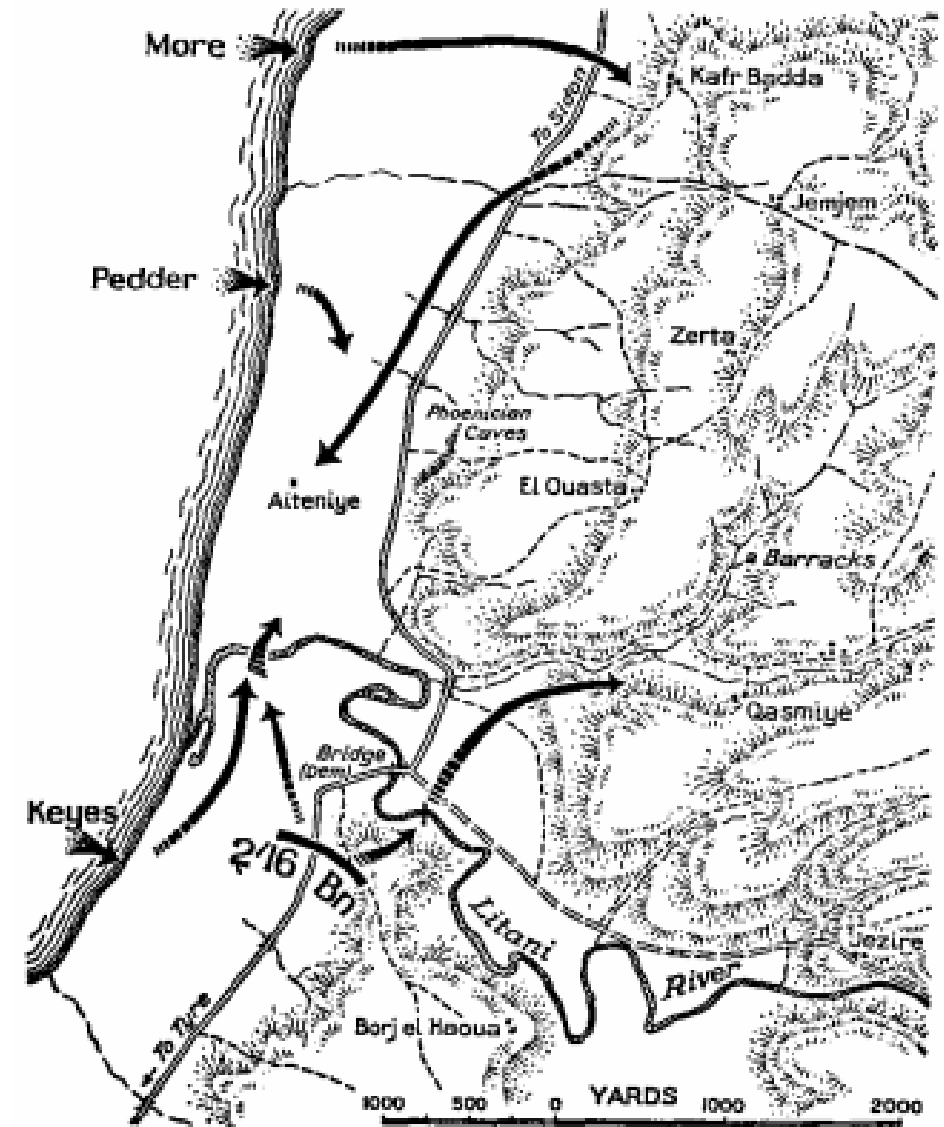


The crossing of the Litani river



# 9 June 1941 - Syria

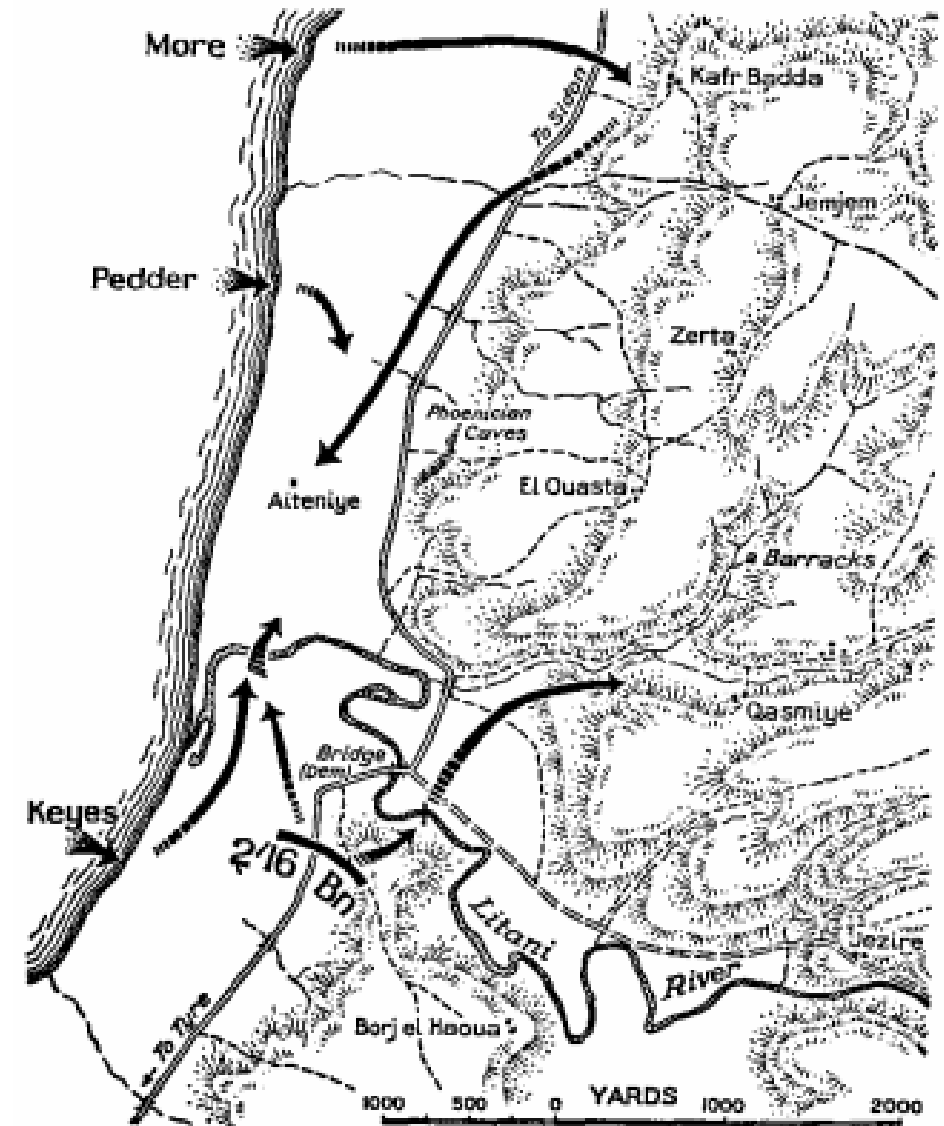
- As the remainder of Sublet's men crossed, mortar bombs were falling among the men on the south bank. One bomb killed Johnson and wounded Hearman and the two remaining platoon commanders.
- Sublet, the only surviving officer in the company, then—about 6.30—had his whole platoon plus a few other men of the boat-carrying party on the north bank, whence they moved briskly through the bamboo and into orchards beyond, driving the defenders before them until they held a bridge-head about 400 yards in depth.
- Because the French fire on the crossing place now became intense, there was a long delay before more men crossed to join Sublet. A second platoon of this company under Sergeant Phillips crossed first increasing the number of men on the north side to about fifty.
- MacDonald had now ordered Horley's company forward, and the men charged down to the river at the double through the mortar and machine - gun fire. Using Sublet's boat Horley led the way until seventy were across.
- Two French destroyers then came close inshore and shelled the Australians north and south of the river until guns of the 2/4th Regiment began to reply, whereupon they made smoke and hurriedly departed.



The crossing of the Litani river

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

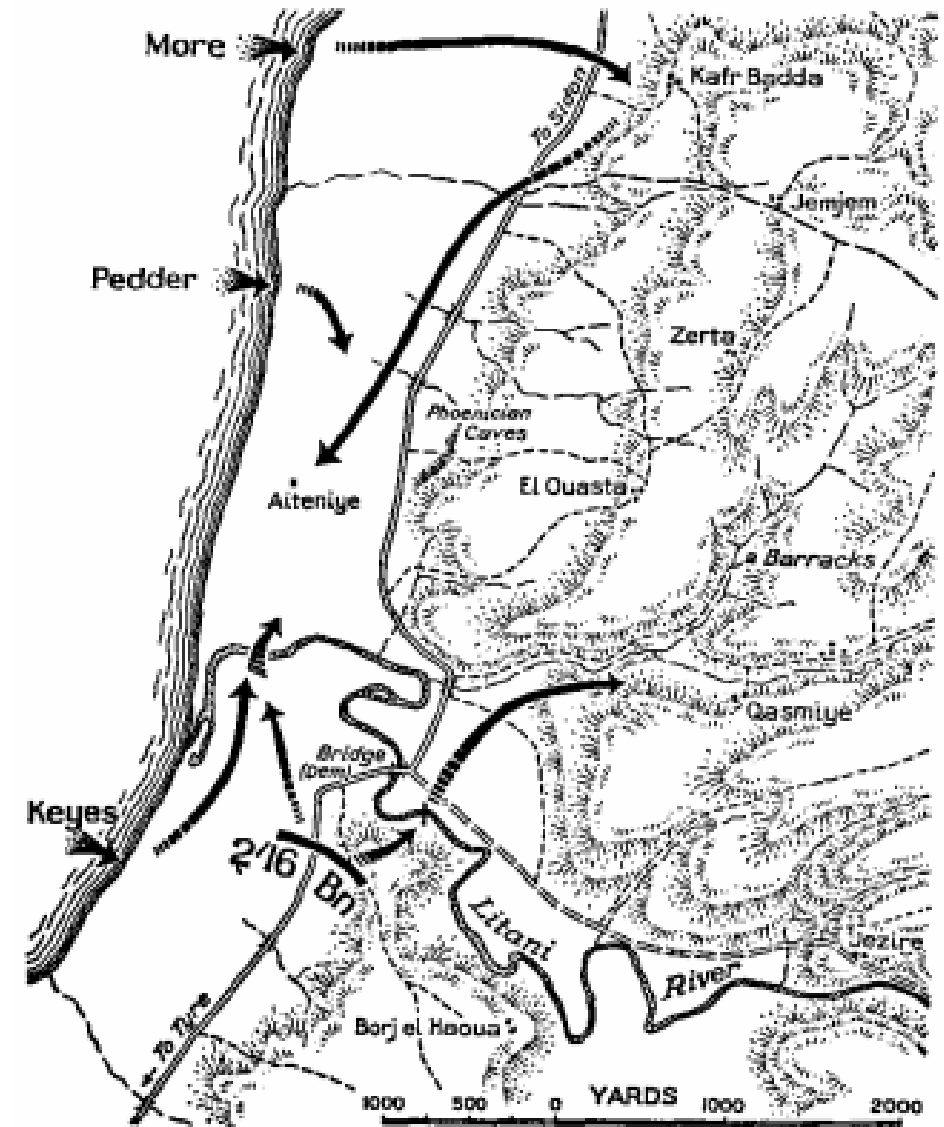
- By this time Signaller Bright, working under fire, had got telephone lines across the river. Captain Gaunt, with Lance-Bombardier Murphy and three other men of the 2/4th Field Regiment, had established an observation post overlooking the river, and effective fire was directed against enemy positions.
- Early in the afternoon, after an artillery concentration lasting ten minutes, Horley's two platoons across the river—Lieutenant Atkinson's and Lieutenant Elphick's—attacked. The supporting artillery fire, by six 25-pounders, was very accurate, and in spite of the fact that the advance was over ploughed land offering no cover and against well-wired enemy posts, there were few casualties.
- One of those who were hit was Private Colless, who was severely wounded while cutting the wire in front of the French positions but finished his job.
- Corporal Wieck and Corporal Duncan went forward and cut the wire blocking their sections.
- In twenty-five minutes the West Australians had overrun the enemy positions (manned by Algerians) on the ridge dominating the river, killed about 30, taken 38 prisoners and captured 11 machine-guns at a cost of 3 men wounded.



The crossing of the Litani river

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

- Horley decided to work left along the ridge against the French posts with which Sublet's men were exchanging fire. After a brief artillery bombardment his men again advanced and captured these posts, taking twelve more prisoners, a 75-mm field gun, and two machine-guns.
- One of the prisoners declared that a fresh company of his battalion of the 22nd Algerian Regiment was on the next ridge, whereupon Horley and Sublet (whose platoons were now led by sergeants or corporals) placed their men ready for a possible counter-attack. It was then 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

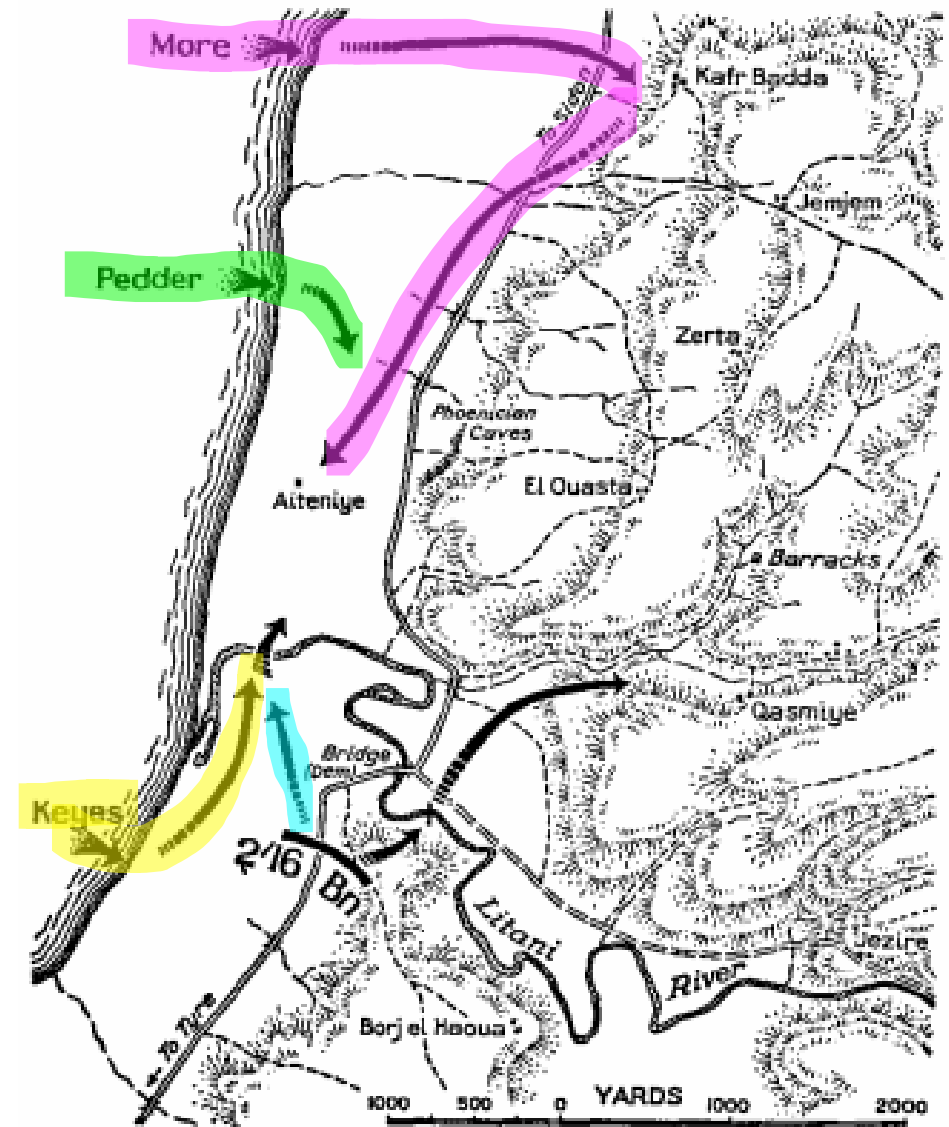


The crossing of the Litani river



# 9 June 1941 - Syria

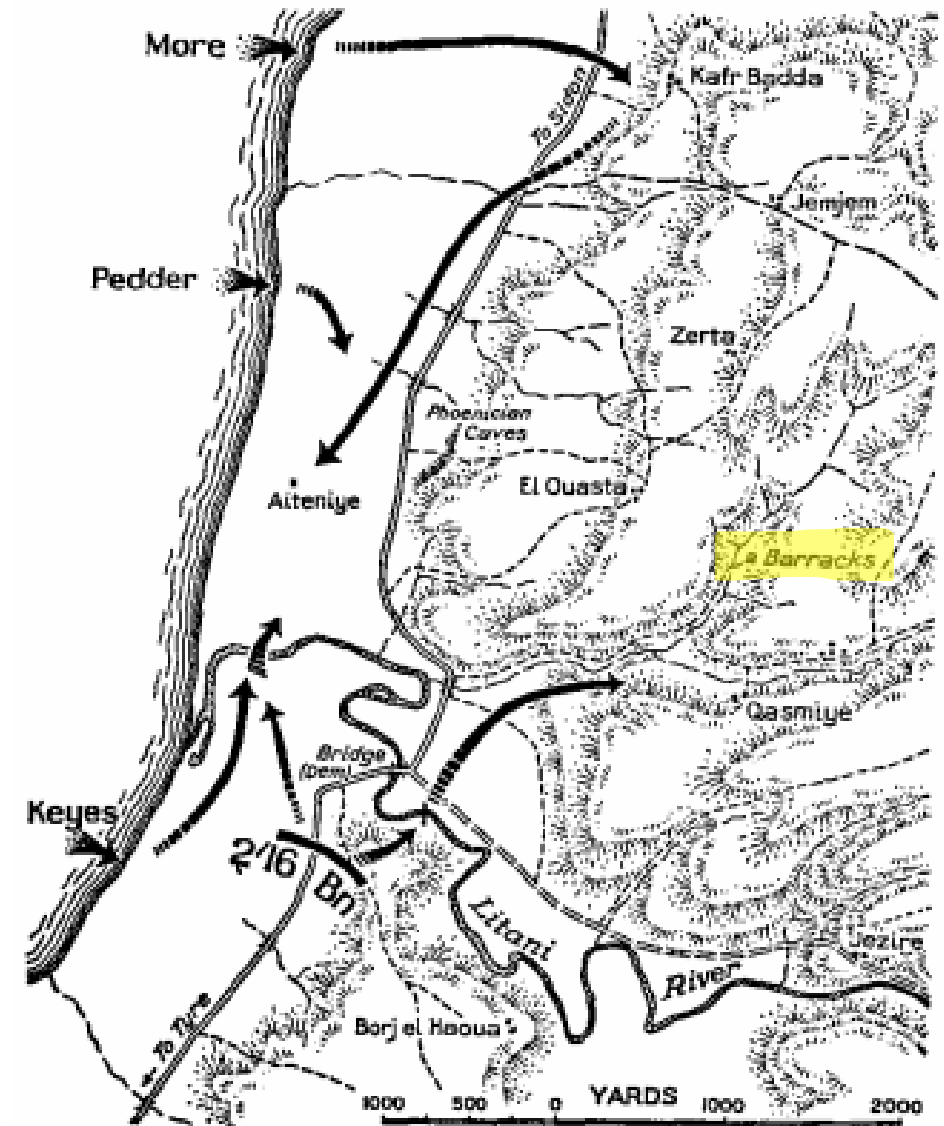
- On the flat coastal strip on the left, Keyes' group of commandos had advanced to the river where they came under intense fire. Men of Caro's company of the 2/16th set out to carry boats forward to them. In the heavy fire, which had caused severe losses—about 25 per cent—among the commandos and the boat parties, only one boat reached the bank, and with it lance-corporal, Dilworth and Private Archibald ferried two boat loads of commandos and Australians across.
- There, about noon, they captured a strong redoubt commanding the river and took thirty-five prisoners. By the middle of the afternoon Keyes and his men and one of Caro's platoons were across.
- Colonel Pedder's commando group had landed about a mile and a half north of the river in the midst of well sited French positions. After confused fighting in which Pedder and two other officers were killed, one party surrendered; another, having captured prisoners, worked its way back to the Litani to join the Australians. More's group, after landing two and a half miles north of the river, was engaged in confused fighting round Kafr Badda and finally surrendered at Aiteniye early on the 10th.



The crossing of the Litani river

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

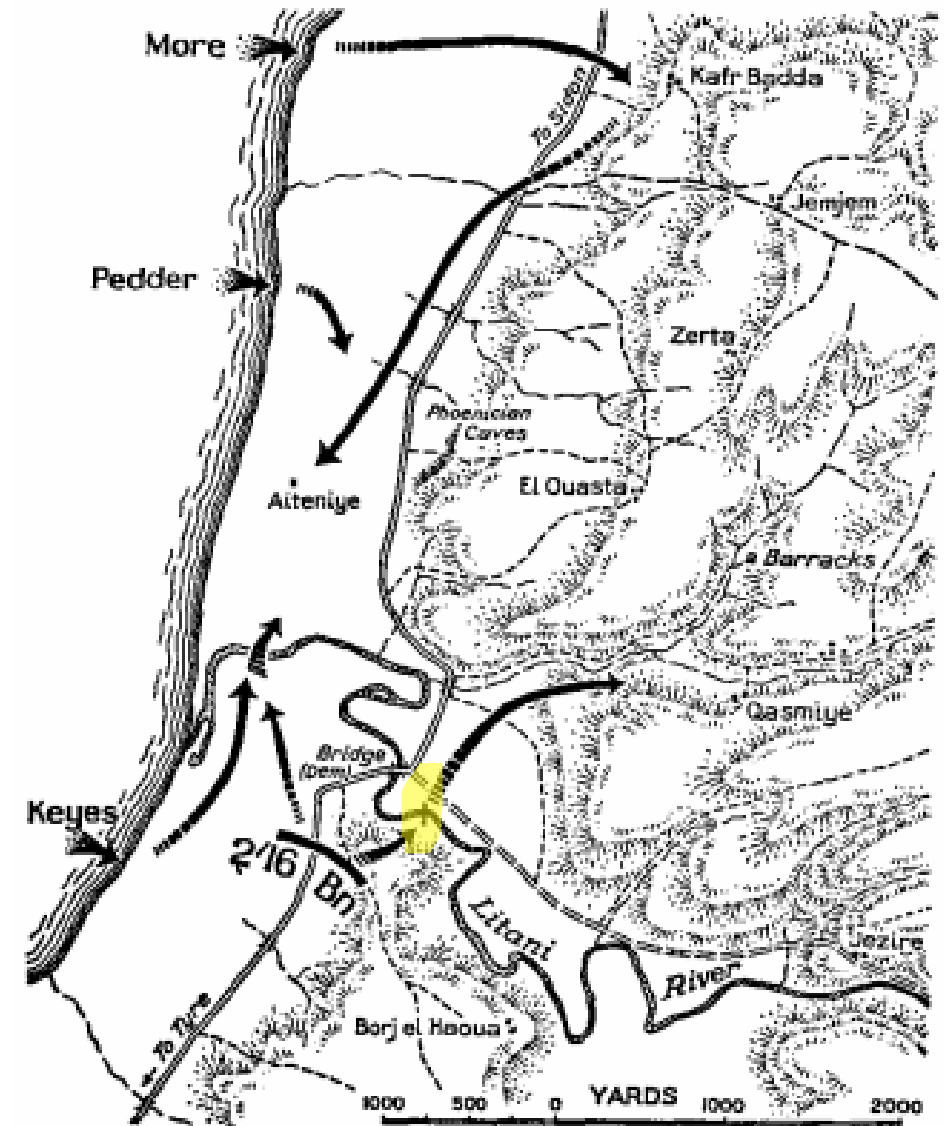
- About 6 p.m. a third company of the 2/16<sup>th</sup>, now commanded by Captain Mackenzie, began to cross. When it reached the north bank Horley sent it into a new advance to overcome the French posts on the western side of the ridge.
- The men moved off at 7.30, but were soon stopped by heavy machine-gun fire which killed one man and wounded a platoon commander, Lieutenant Langridge; but Horley himself and Corporal Sadleir stalked to the rear of the French machine-gun post and captured the six men manning it.
- By dark the attackers had reached the top of the ridge at a point about 500 yards south of "the Barracks", a large building right of the road, having taken seventy prisoners including five officers.
- At this stage the telephone failed with the result that Horley could not inform MacDonald where he had got to. He knew that, at 9.30, the artillery would fire on the heights in preparation for an attack on a position he already partly occupied, and yet he had no means of stopping that fire.



The crossing of the Litani river

# 9 June 1941 - Syria

- Consequently Horley withdrew his leading men to the foot of the hill, intending to reoccupy the slopes next morning. He then hastened back to the headquarters of his battalion, where he was told that the planned attack must go on. Soon afterwards British ships mistakenly bombarded the ridge, necessitating a further withdrawal of Horley's force.
- At 9.30 the planned artillery fire descended on the high ground beyond the river; in half an hour the guns fired 960 rounds. On the right Horley's force reoccupied the positions it had gained early in the day.
- On the left Major Isaachsen's company of the 2/27th had been brought forward. When two platoons were across they attacked into sharp mortar and machine-gun fire. After a prolonged fight a whole company of Algerians surrendered to the South Australians.
- **The river was bridged** during the night by the 2/6th Field Company under Lieutenant Watts helped by eighty infantrymen working as labourers.

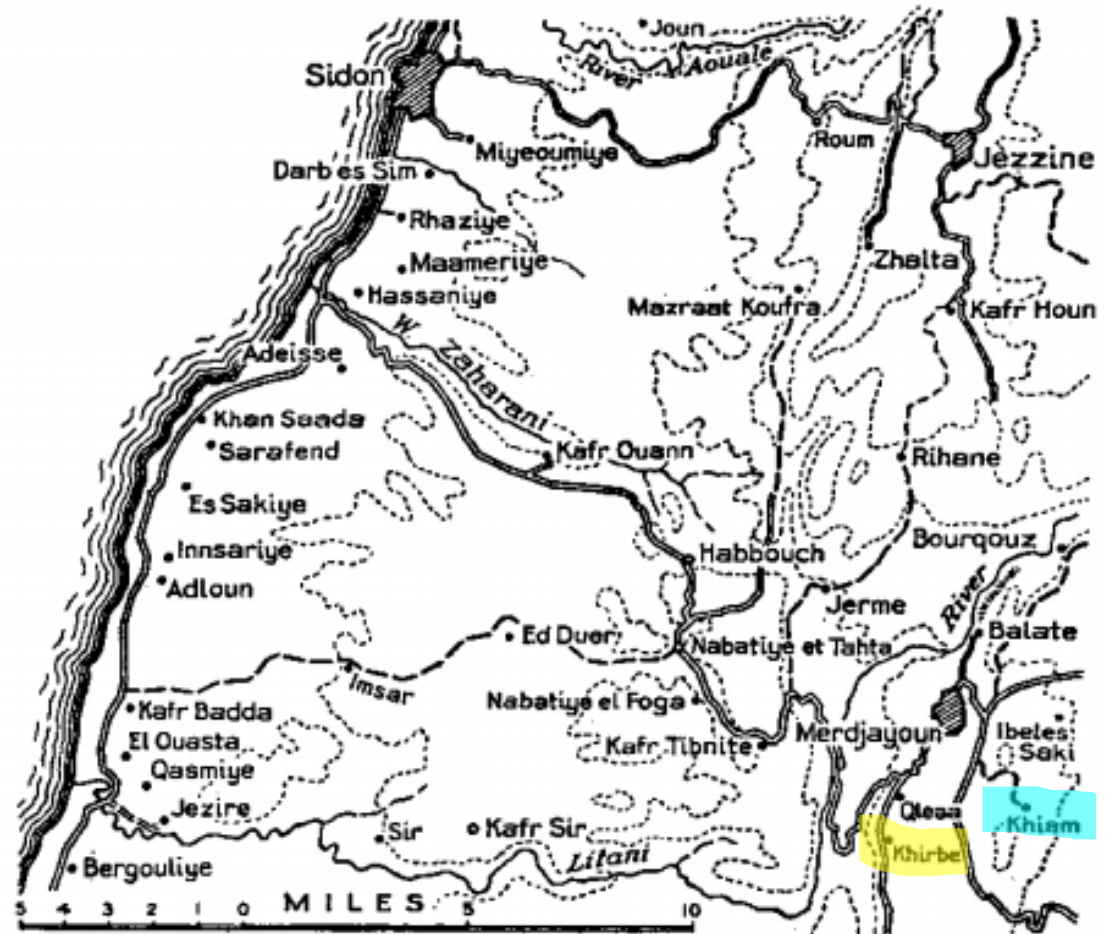


The crossing of the Litani river



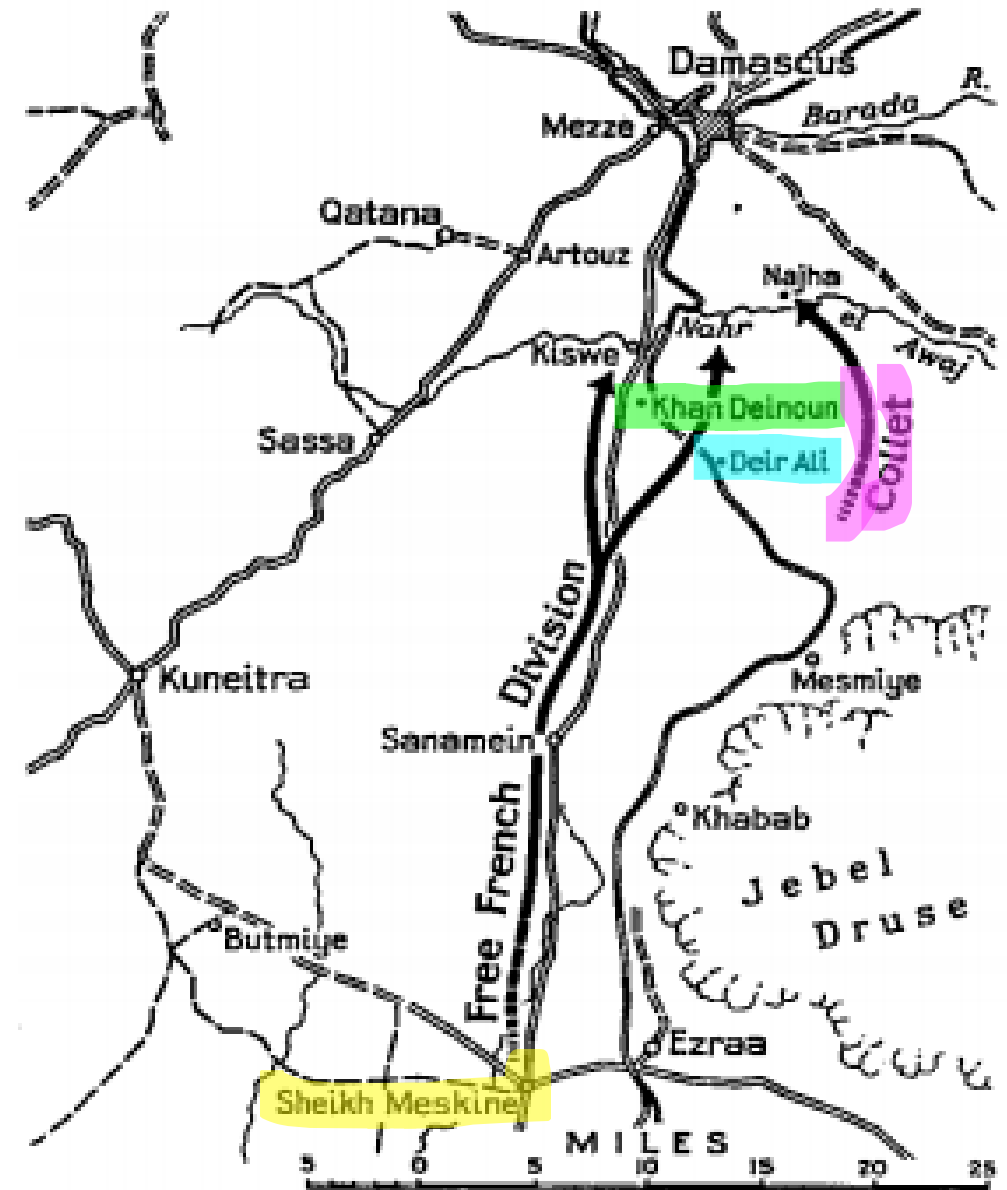
# 9 June 1941 - Syria

- Meanwhile early on the 9th Cotton's company had advanced against Fort Khiam, after a sharp artillery concentration, and found it abandoned.
- Cotton moved past the fort into the village, but was held at the northern end until about 5 p.m. when French shells set fire to haystacks, causing such heat and smoke that they withdrew to the southern end of the village.
- Throughout the day the 2/31st was still held by enemy fire from Khirbe and west of it



# 9 June 1941 - Syria

- The leading troops of the main Free French column went through **Sheikh Meskine** on the morning of the 9th, the vanguard consisting of marines and Senegalese; Lloyd lent them a battery of the 1st Field Regiment and a troop of light anti-aircraft guns to compensate for their shortage of artillery.
- By nightfall General Legentilhomme had occupied **Khan Deinoun** and **Deir Ali** and was in touch with the Vichy outposts.
- On the desert flank Colonel Collet's cavalymen, having followed the 5th Indian Brigade to Sheikh Meskine, advanced into the volcanic boulder country to the east where horses were more useful than vehicles.



# 9 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- Early in the morning of the 9th the force closed the coast to support Glengyle in the second landing attempt which was successful at the Litani River; after which King stood off to the westward.
- The French flotilla leaders, Guepard and Valmy, apparently well served by air reconnaissance, seized the chance to sneak in and bombard Australian troops on both banks of the river.
- King heard of this just after 10 a.m. and closed the coast at full speed but the French ships had gone, driven off by artillery fire of the 2/4th Regiment.
- In the early afternoon they were encountered off Sidon by four of King's destroyers, Janus (Senior Officer), Hotspur, Jackal and Isis.
- The Frenchmen had the advantage in speed and range, and Janus, some way ahead of her consorts, at the outset bore the brunt of the enemy fire. She received five hits, which killed or wounded all on the bridge except the captain, and disabled and stopped the ship. She was quickly supported by the others, whereupon the French ships retired at high speed to Beirut, easily outdistancing the pursuing British.
- Later that evening Phoebe, at the request of the Naval Liaison Officer ashore, bombarded supposed enemy positions on the northern side of Khan bridge, but the ridge fired on was in fact then occupied by Australian troops.





# 10 June 1941 - Melbourne

- Mr Menzies returned to Australia from his visit to England, bringing with him comprehensive British reports on the military situation. Even though the review he had obtained of the defence position in the Pacific from the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff might not be very encouraging in certain respects (he said to the War Cabinet on 10th June) Australia now certainly knew where she stood, the degree to which she must rely on her own efforts, and the necessity for expanding them to the utmost extent.
- He continued that Mr Churchill had no conception of the British Dominions as separate entities, and the more distant the problem from the heart of the Empire the less he thought of it. (Menzies added, however, that if Churchill were driven from office it would be a calamity.)
- Certain remarks in the course of the United Kingdom review about the land and air forces in Malaya and their equipment indicated a degree of complacency about the defence of the Pacific region, he said, and "it is now evident that, for too long, we readily accepted the general assurances about the defence of this area".



# 10 June 1941 - Melbourne

- Mr Menzies on his return from London reported to the War Cabinet (on 10th June) that the British Chiefs of Staff held out small hope that the aircraft strength proposed for Malaya would be achieved by the end of 1941. This had been disclosed in a paper prepared in reply to a memorandum from Menzies himself.
- The British Chiefs of Staff stated that; “The majority of the 450 shore-based aircraft which the Japanese can marshal against us are of obsolete types . . . and we have no reason to believe that Japanese standards are even comparable with those of the Italians . . . .We fully realise that our air strength in the Far East is below that necessary for reasonable security in the absence of a fleet, but we do not consider that, in the present situation, we are running more serious risks there than elsewhere.... The Buffalo appears to be eminently satisfactory and would probably prove more than a match for any Japanese aircraft.”
  - As for the provision of aircraft for Australian local defence, the best that could be done for Menzies was to discuss the problem with him and to tell him about the difficulties and shortages of aircraft and the prospects of delivery.
  - The best prospect that could be offered to him was that,
  - provided British production suffered no unexpected setbacks—and at that time bombs were still falling on Britain nightly—the fifty-four Beaufighters required could be provided by March 1942, and
  - Australia could be allocated one-third of the Brewster Bermudas when deliveries started from the United States about June 1941. Further,
  - the United Kingdom would try to supply the total Australian requirement of 146 Hudsons by December 1941. It will be recalled that part of the Australian order had previously been diverted by Australia to the United Kingdom order.

# 10 June 1941 - Melbourne

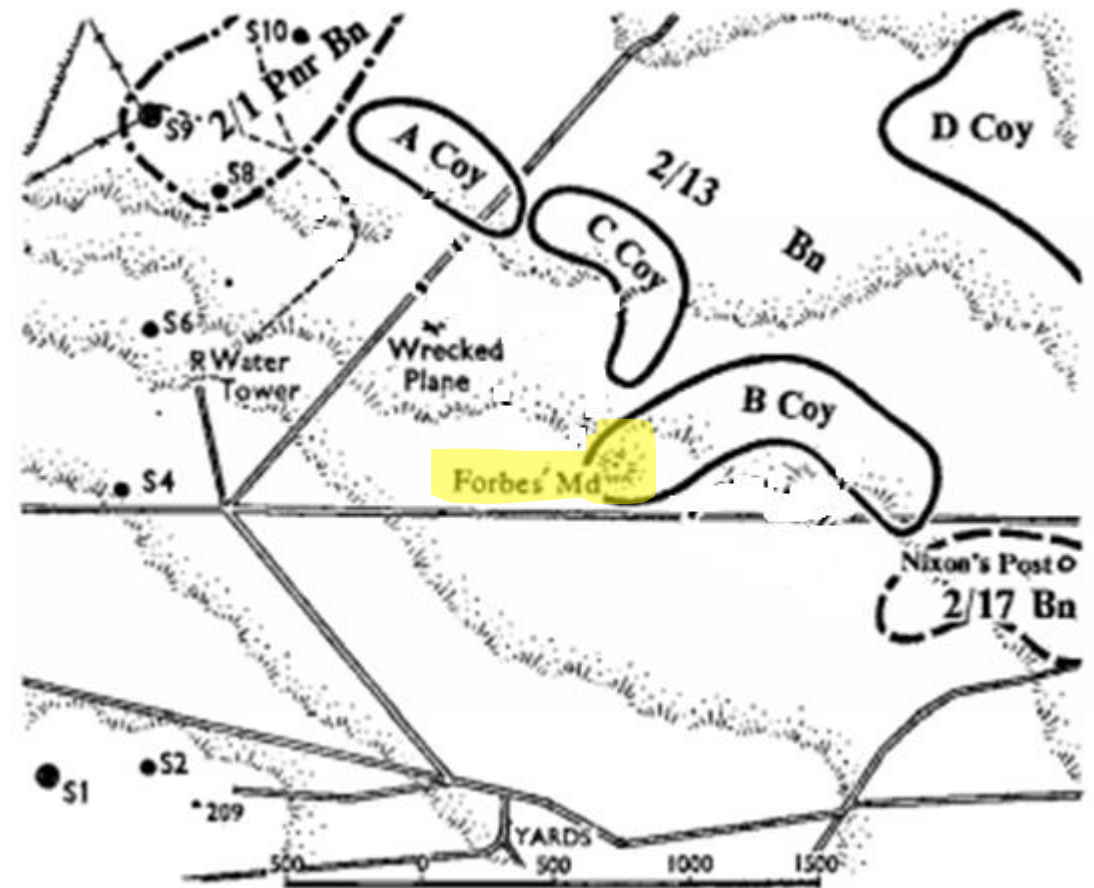
- An annexe to this paper contained a note by the British Air Staff on the proposed organisation of the R.A.A.F. which expressed general agreement with the Air Board's proposals.
  - Choice of the same type of aircraft for general purpose and general reconnaissance squadrons was regarded as sound policy—a good bomber would be suitable for a striking force or for general reconnaissance work in which it could carry additional fuel in place of the bomb-load.
  - A heavy bomber would be valuable but even medium bombers were difficult to acquire and provision of heavy bombers would be still more impracticable for at least two years unless unforeseen development brought the Far East theatre up to first priority.
  - In view of the kind of attack Australia might expect, no strong case could be made on purely military grounds for the provision of fighter squadrons, though there might be psychological and other reasons for forming some squadrons of this type and, in any event, they would be valuable as reinforcements in the Far East where shore based attack might have to be met.

# 10 June 1941 - Melbourne

- The Australian War Cabinet decided on 10<sup>th</sup> June that a United Kingdom suggestion that two additional infantry brigades be sent to Malaya could not be considered apart from a complete review of the manpower situation.

# 9/10 June 1941 - Libya

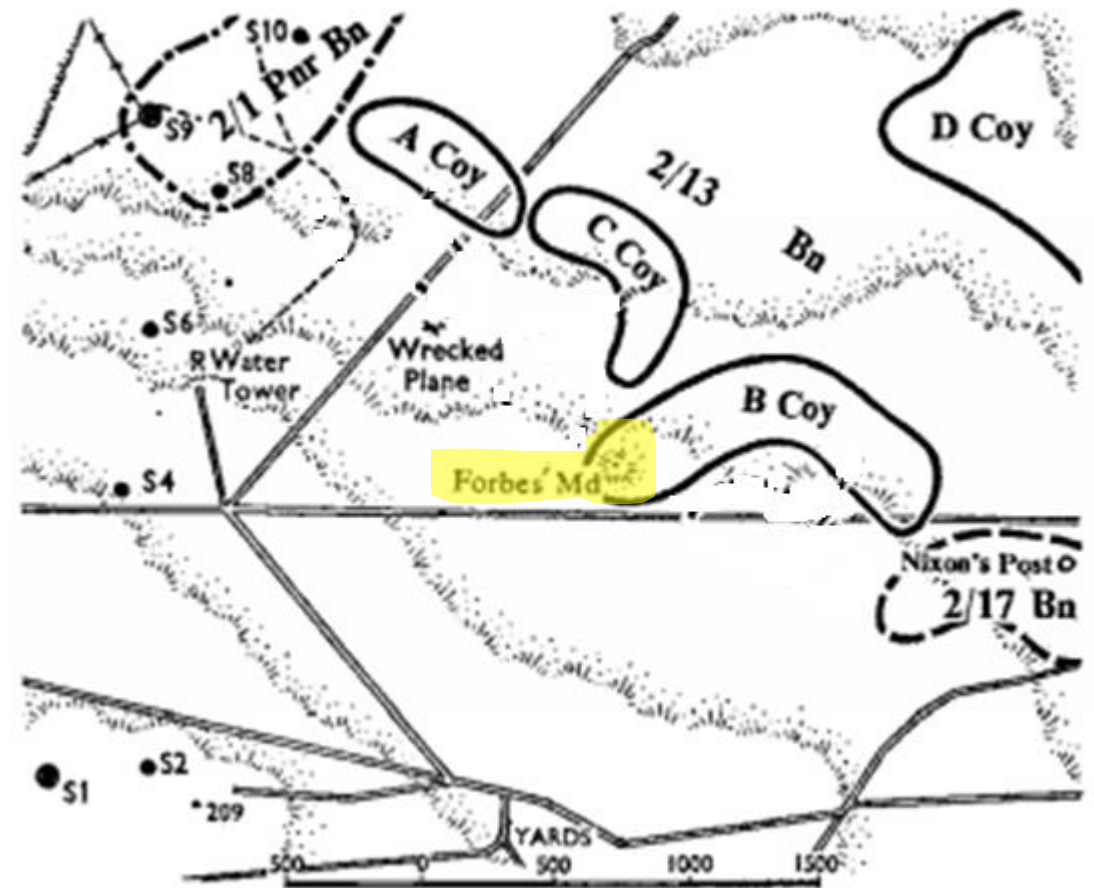
- In the Salient the 2/13th Battalion had taken over on the right after 6<sup>th</sup> June.
- Colonel Burrows quickly reached the conclusion that the right of the Salient offered even greater opportunities for advancing the line than he had previously exploited on the left.
- **Forbes' Mound**, in the centre of his front, ran out into no-man's land like a promontory from which, on either side, the line swept back in semi-circular bays. On the right of Forbes' Mound his line was as crooked as a dog's leg.
- Burrows planned to advance the front to a straight line from S8 to the front of Nixon's Post and beyond.
- (This project was facilitated by the fact that the enemy during the previous month had similarly straightened out his opposing line on an almost parallel alignment, not, like Burrows, by pushing it out, but by constructing a straightened line just behind his forward troops, which were then drawn back on to it.)





# 9/10 June 1941 - Libya

- On the third night after his battalion's arrival each of Burrows' forward companies sent out observers to lie up during the day in no-man's land well forward of the front line on either side of Forbes' Mound.
- Engineers cleared routes through the heavily booby-trapped minefields the Germans had put down, and the positions to be dug were carefully sited and laid out.
- The engineers lifted 60 booby-traps on one night.
- Booby-traps took many forms. MT pits, and vacated weapon-pits contained quantities of Italian hand grenades, either loosely scattered or attached to pieces of flat board. These grenades were prepared to explode when disturbed. Explosives were attached to trip wires which when cut caused explosion, attached to or concealed in everyday articles, such as ration tins, loaves of bread, articles of clothing and so prepared that they exploded when stepped on.



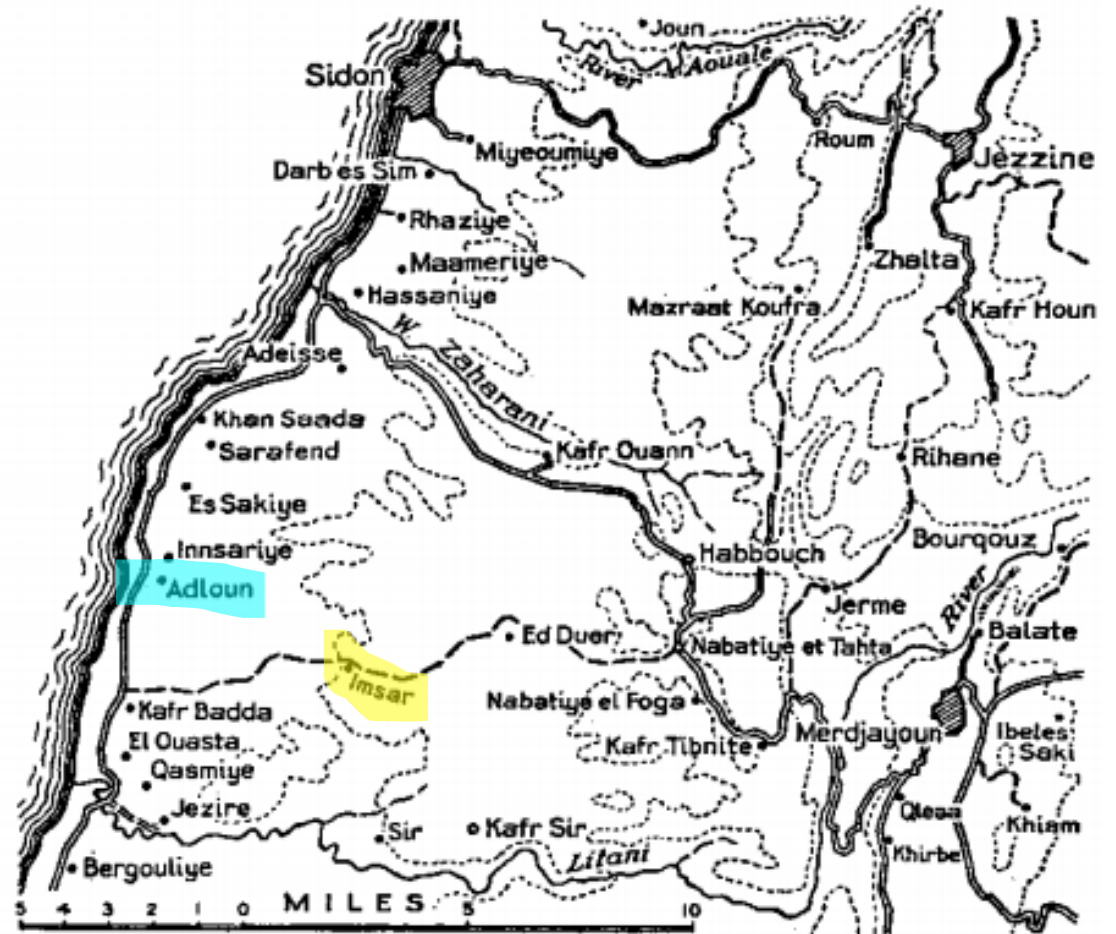
# 10 June 1941 - Libya

- The opening phase of the air operations for Battleaxe took place as planned. Benghazi was attacked nightly, and as 15th June drew closer the enemy's airfields and supply convoys were attacked by day and night.
- Fighter aircraft covered the long approach march, and the concentration of the British force was not molested.



# 10 June 1941 - Syria

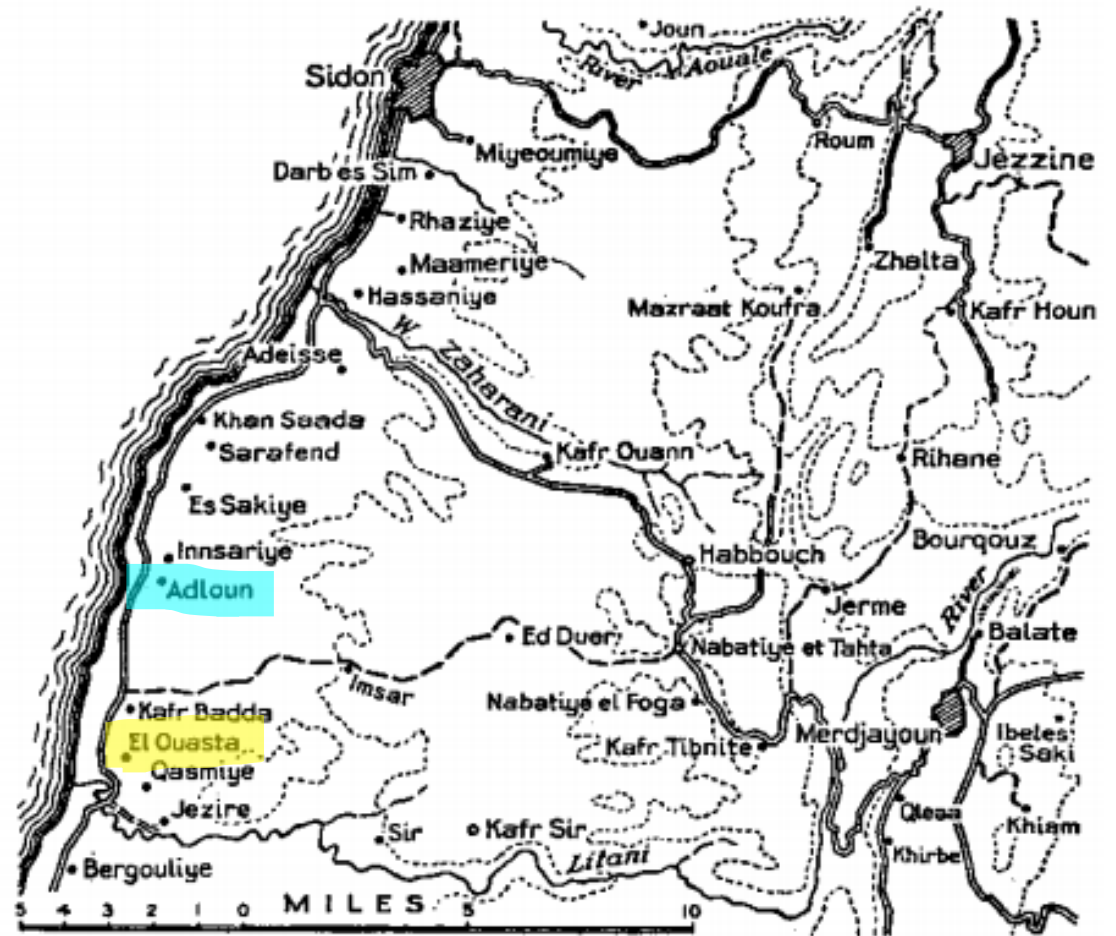
- At 5 a.m. on the 10th, men and vehicles of the 2/27th began to cross this pontoon bridge, 400 yards east of the demolished stone bridge.
- Stevens' orders for 10th June were that the 2/27th should advance along the main road with Lieutenant Mills' squadron of the 6th Cavalry probing ahead, while the 2/16th cleared the hills on the right.
- Mills' carriers crossed the pontoon bridge at 6 a.m. and headed north. One troop was sent inland along the road to **Imsar**, while another led the advance along the main road.
- This troop after a couple of skirmishes were among the buildings south-west of **Adloun** by 10.00 a.m.
- When a troop drove forward to locate a gun which had fired from a position between the road and the sea, the leading carrier unwittingly ran to within a few yards of an anti-tank gun and a machine-gun and two members of the crew were killed and the third wounded and captured. The surviving carriers withdrew.
- Lieutenant Glasgow's troop of three carriers which had turned of towards Imsar met fifty white French troops with two idle field guns at Kafr Badda, only half a mile from the main road. After the cavalymen had fired a few bursts the enemy gave up the fight, half of them making off and half surrendering. Thence the carriers continued to Imsar, where the head man of the village said that the French had departed the evening before.





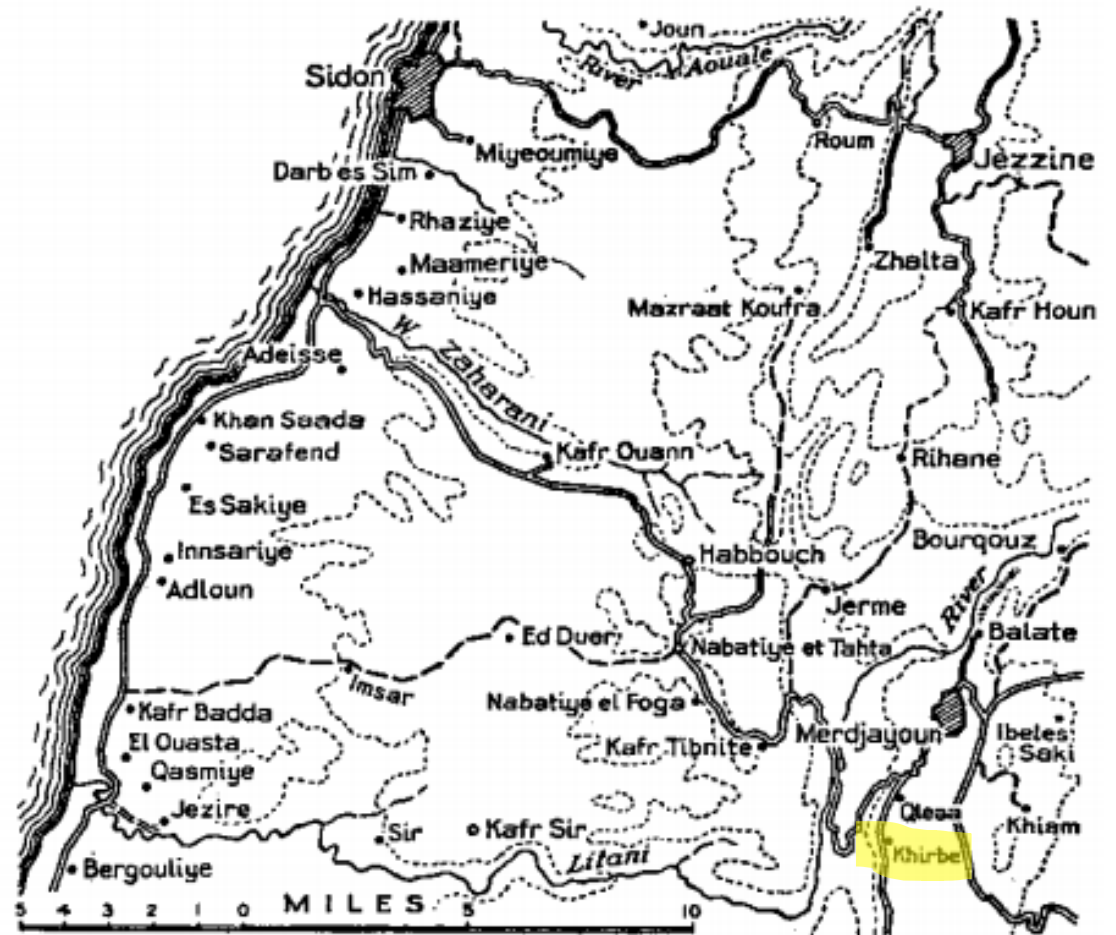
# 10 June 1941 - Syria

- Both the 2/16th and 2/27th were meeting opposition and suffering casualties. (Sublet was wounded here.) The enemy was still in strength particularly at **El Ouasta**, where a patrol reported that the enemy had thirteen machine-guns emplaced.
- However, this area was heavily shelled both by the field artillery and by the ships off shore and at length the enemy abandoned it.
- At the end of the day the enemy had been cleared from the coastal plain as far as a line astride the road south-west of **Adloun**.



# 10 June 1941 - Syria

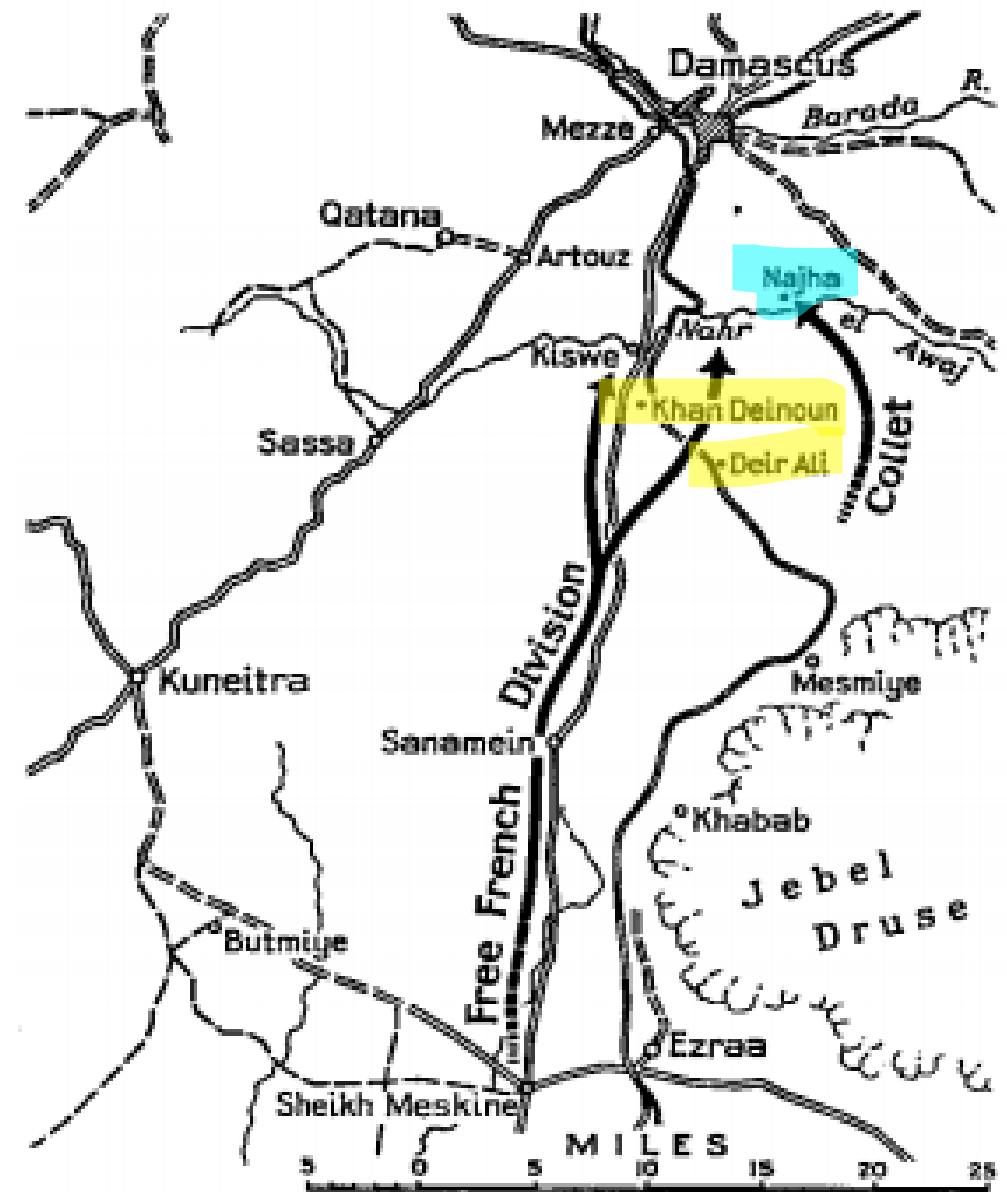
- On the 10th one attempt seriously to test the enemy's strength was made, and that on Porter's front. Early in the afternoon, at Berryman's suggestion, a detachment of the 6th Cavalry consisting of one light tank and six carriers under Lieutenant Millard was ordered to advance towards **Khirbe** to draw their opponents' fire.
- All but two of Millard's six carriers were hit and six men out of the eighteen in the carrier crews were wounded.
- At 9 p.m. Cox informed Millard that he wished him to adhere to an earlier order to support the infantry attack planned to begin at 2 o'clock next morning. Millard pointed out that he now had only one tank and one carrier fit for action, and eventually was released from the task.





# 10 June 1941 - Syria

- General Legentilhomme awaited reinforcements at **Khan Deinoun and Deir Ali** during the 10<sup>th</sup>.
- On the 10<sup>th</sup> Colonel Collet's cavalrymen, reached **Najha** on the Nahr el Awaj where he captured some prisoners. He then encountered a force of Senegalese infantry with armoured cars and tanks, and fell back about six miles to a good defensive position.



# 10 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- The following morning (10<sup>th</sup>), however, Kandahar and Kimberley carried out a most useful bombardment of French motor-transport, tanks, and ammunition dumps north of Khan bridge;



Winston Churchill with members of Kimberley's crew.  
WINSTON CHURCHILL WATCHES THE INVASION OF  
THE SOUTH OF FRANCE ABOARD HMS KIMBERLEY, 14  
- 16 AUGUST 1944.

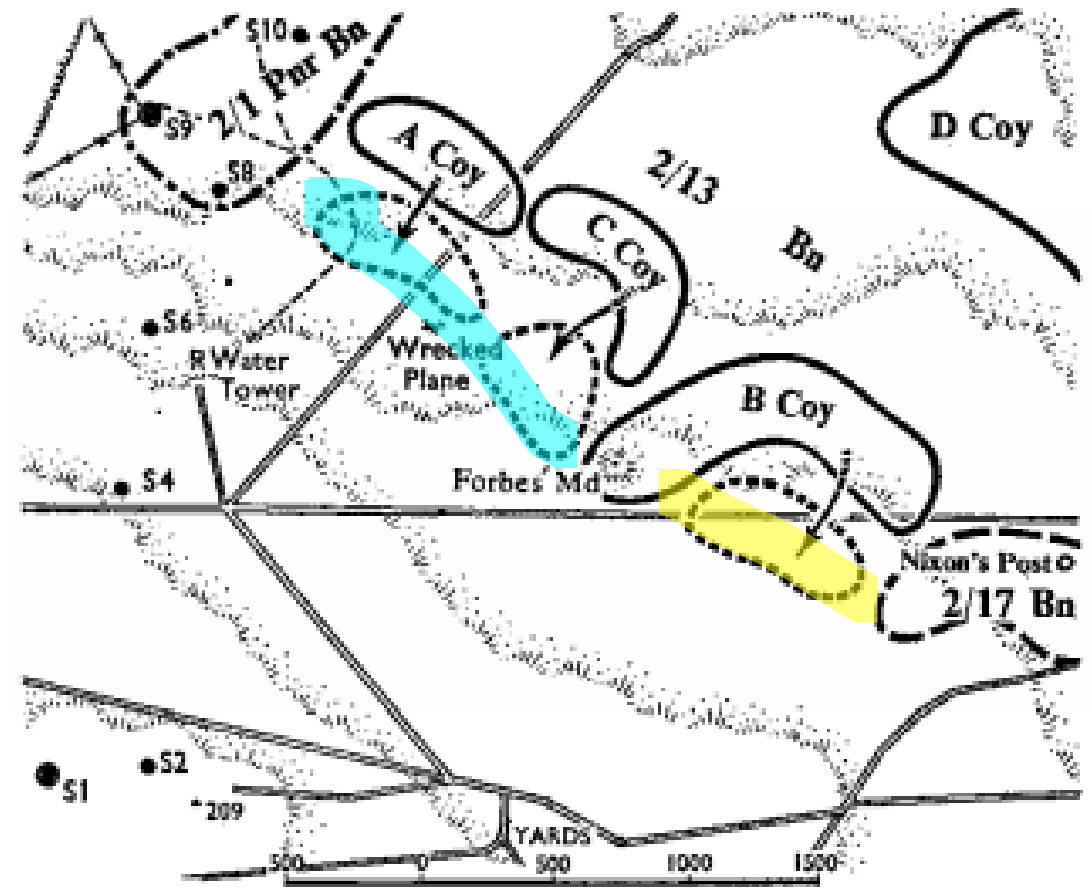
# 11 June 1941 - Melbourne

- Next day (11th June) in response to a request from Brooke-Popham (photo) a compromise was reached. It was decided that of the two A.I.F. infantry brigades in Australia, the 23rd, which had been sent to Darwin in April, in conformity with the agreement to reinforce Ambon and Timor in an emergency, should remain there.
- But the 27th, then at Bathurst in New South Wales, should go to Malaya to join the 22nd Brigade, which had landed in Singapore in February 1941.
- After the departure of the 27th Brigade Group the A.I.F. troops remaining in Australia would include in addition to the 23rd Brigade Group, the 2/4th Machine Gun and the 2/4th Pioneer Battalions, and four recently-formed Independent Companies. These companies were partly officered from the 8th Division.
- At the outbreak of war in September, 1939, Australia possessed a partly trained militia force of 80,000 men by mid 1941 the strength of the militia had declined to approximately 60,000. There were an additional 11,000 in Garrison Battalions.



# 10/12 June 1941 - Libya

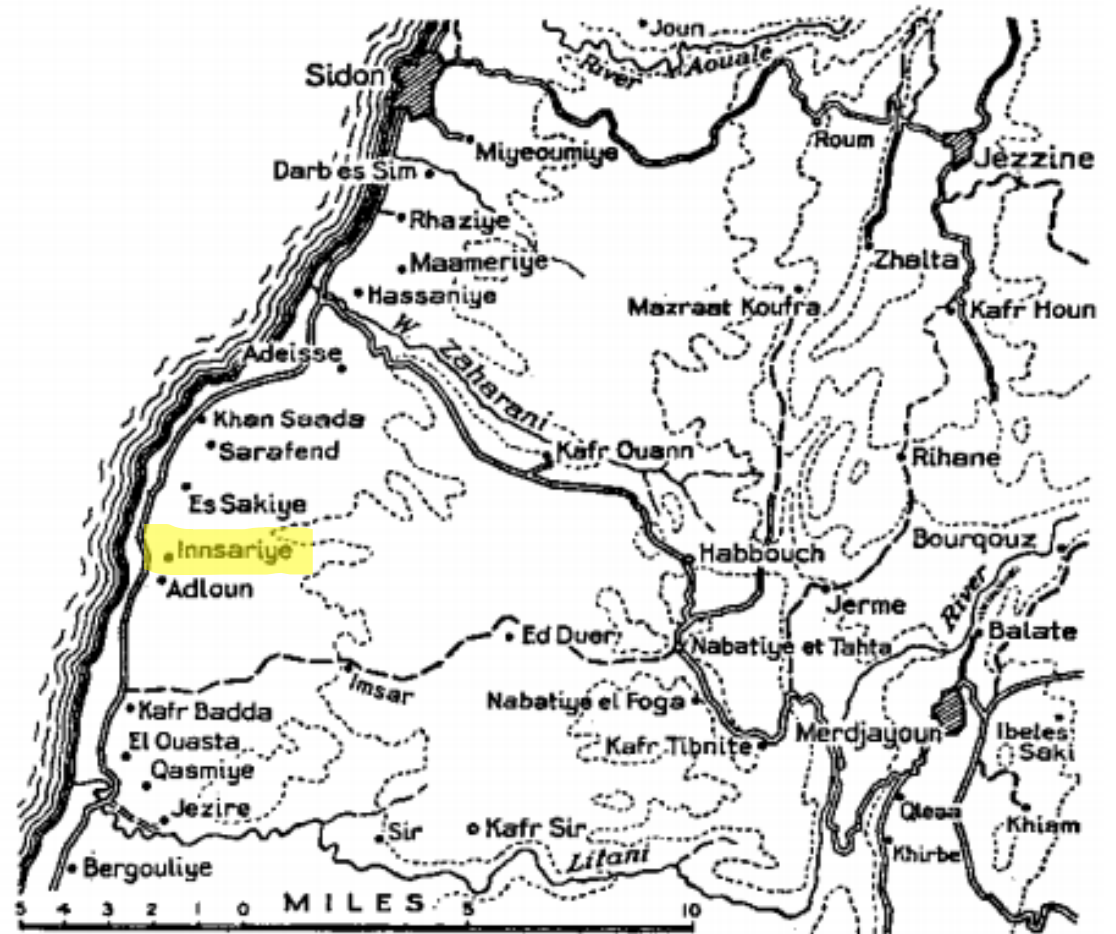
- On the left of Forbes' Mound Captain Hill's company advanced its line some 350 yards on the night of 10th-11th June.
- On the next night Captain Daintree's and Major Chilton's companies conformed, establishing new lines at distances varying between 250 and 500 yards forward of the old.
- On the two nights only two serious casualties (of whom one, an engineer, was killed) were caused by enemy fire. Heavier casualties resulted from booby-traps: four men killed and five wounded.
- These losses must have been greater but for the work of Corporal Hunt who, before the line was advanced, located a minefield and took out eight men to clear it. The minelifting was carried out under persistent mortar fire and one bomb eventually found its mark: two of the party were killed, three wounded. Hunt extricated the casualties and returned undeterred the same night with another party to continue the work.
- Brigadier Murray decided to take advantage of the shortening of the line to release one battalion from front-line duties and use it to constitute a brigade reserve.



Advancing of line in north of Salient,  
11th-12th June

# 11 June 1941 - Syria

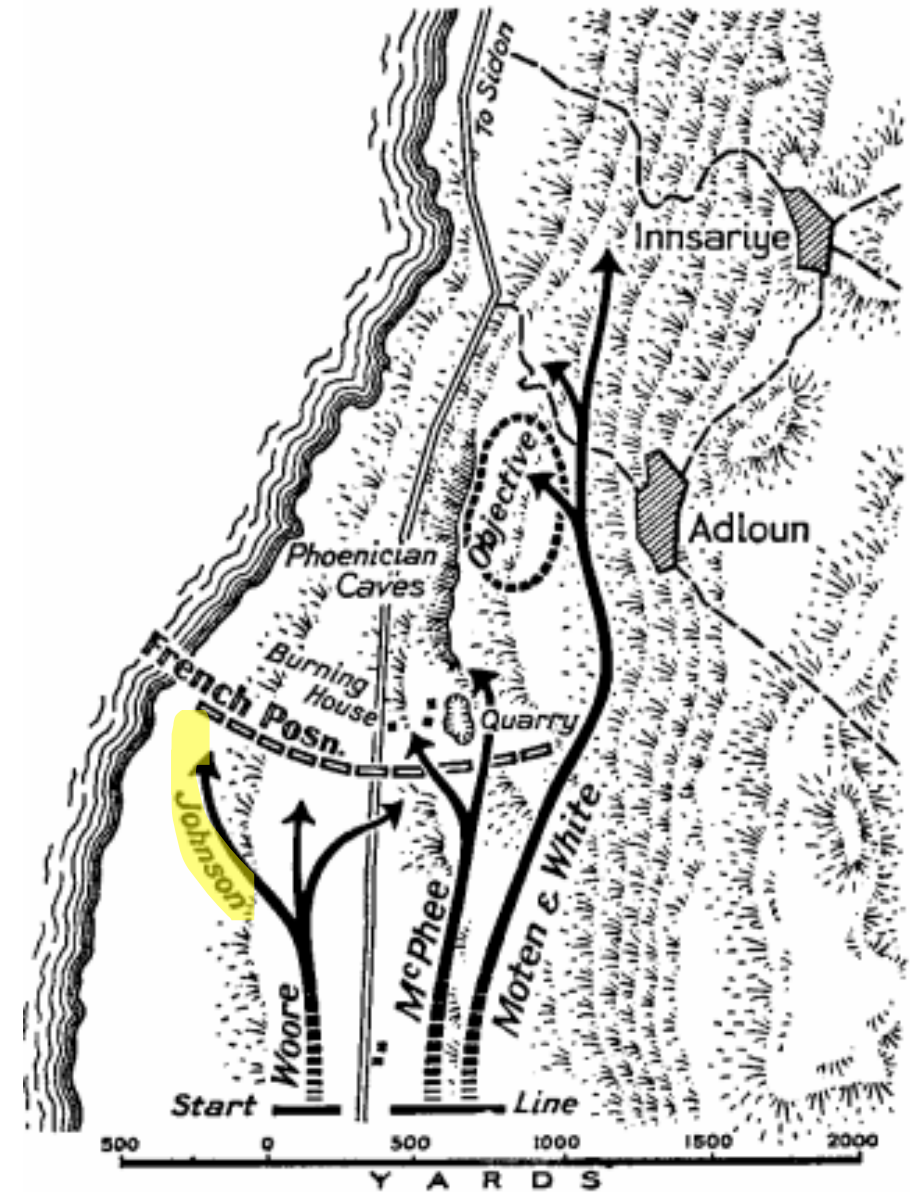
- Brigadier Stevens had ordered Lieut-Colonel Moten, the 2/27<sup>th</sup>'s commander, to attack the **Innsariye** position at midnight 10/11, giving the French no rest.
- The men of the 2/27<sup>th</sup> were hungry, and thirsty, and as they waited for the attack to open they sucked the juice of green tomatoes growing in the gardens.
- The guns fired for half an hour from midnight and then the two leading companies advanced, each with two platoons forward. Captain McPhee's was on the right of the road; Captain Woore's astride the road and extended well to the left.
- Captain White's was to follow McPhee's, pass through it and advance to the final objective— a position beyond a row of Phoenician caves cut into the cliffs just west of Adloun.
- After having advanced about 500 yards the leading companies suddenly came under severe fire at close range. McPhee's lost four men killed and six wounded, including the commander. On the left Woore, too, was wounded as he called his men forward.
- Fire was coming from French positions on either side of the road and particularly from round a cavalry carrier disabled the previous day. A grenade thrown into a building containing a store of petrol set fire to it and it illuminated the whole area brightly; the right company turned towards it " like moths to a candle".





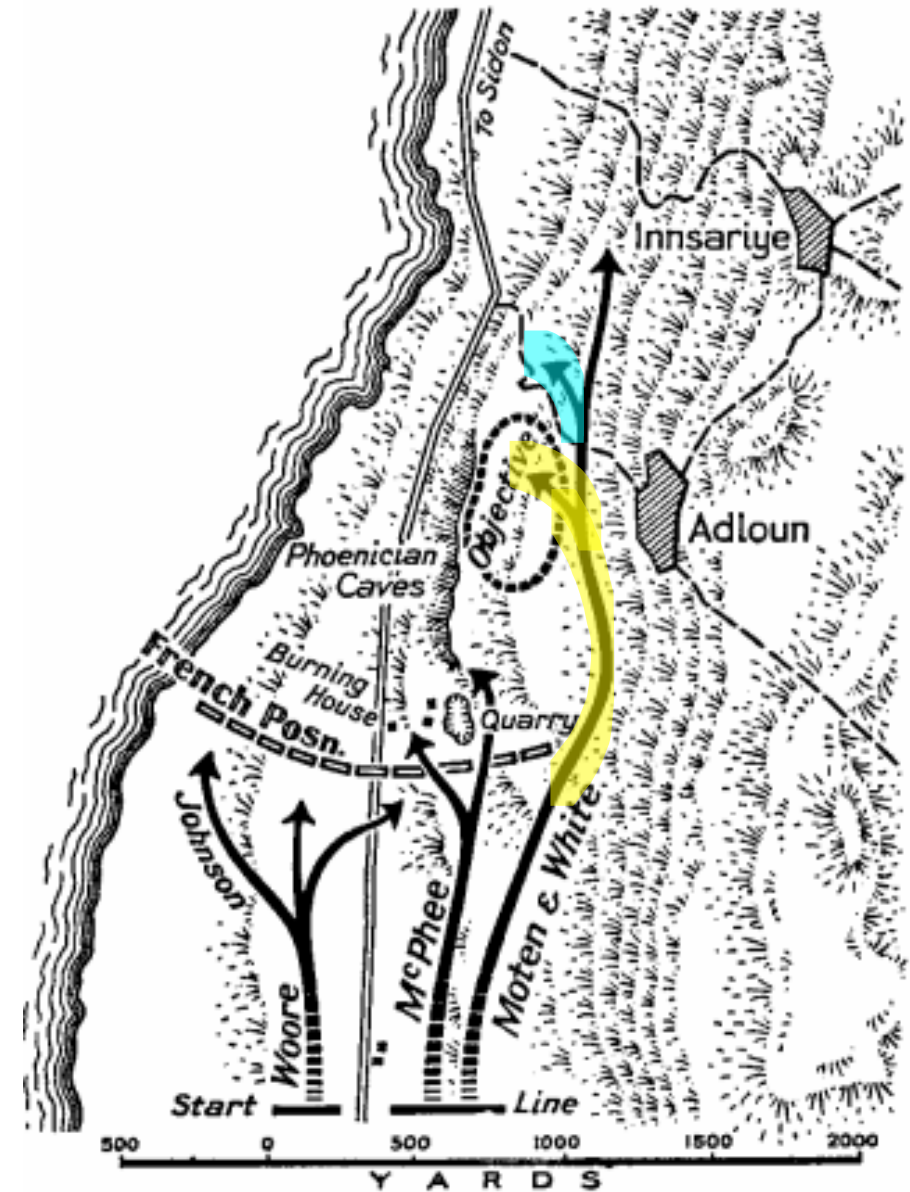
# 11 June 1941 - Syria

- A patrol led by Captain Johnson moved forward on the western flank and reported that eight light tanks were warming up their engines.
- Stevens ordered Major Rau, commanding the 2/4th Field Regiment, to have two 25-pounders and four 2-pounders ready by 3.15 a.m., and take them forward himself.
- At that time Stevens collected this reinforcement and led it to the advanced headquarters of the 2/27th, 1,000 yards behind the infantry, and after discussion with the adjutant (in Moten's absence forward), Rau, hurrying forward in a greatcoat over his pyjamas, took one of the field guns along the road, and in the moonlight opened fire at short range.
- The tanks made off, but the infantrymen pointed out a stone house only 200 yards away near the abandoned carrier whence an anti-tank gun and a machine-gun were firing.
- By arrangement Rau fired twelve rounds into the building, whereupon an infantry section which had crept near the house, having counted the rounds, charged. Inside the battered building were found four dead Frenchmen.



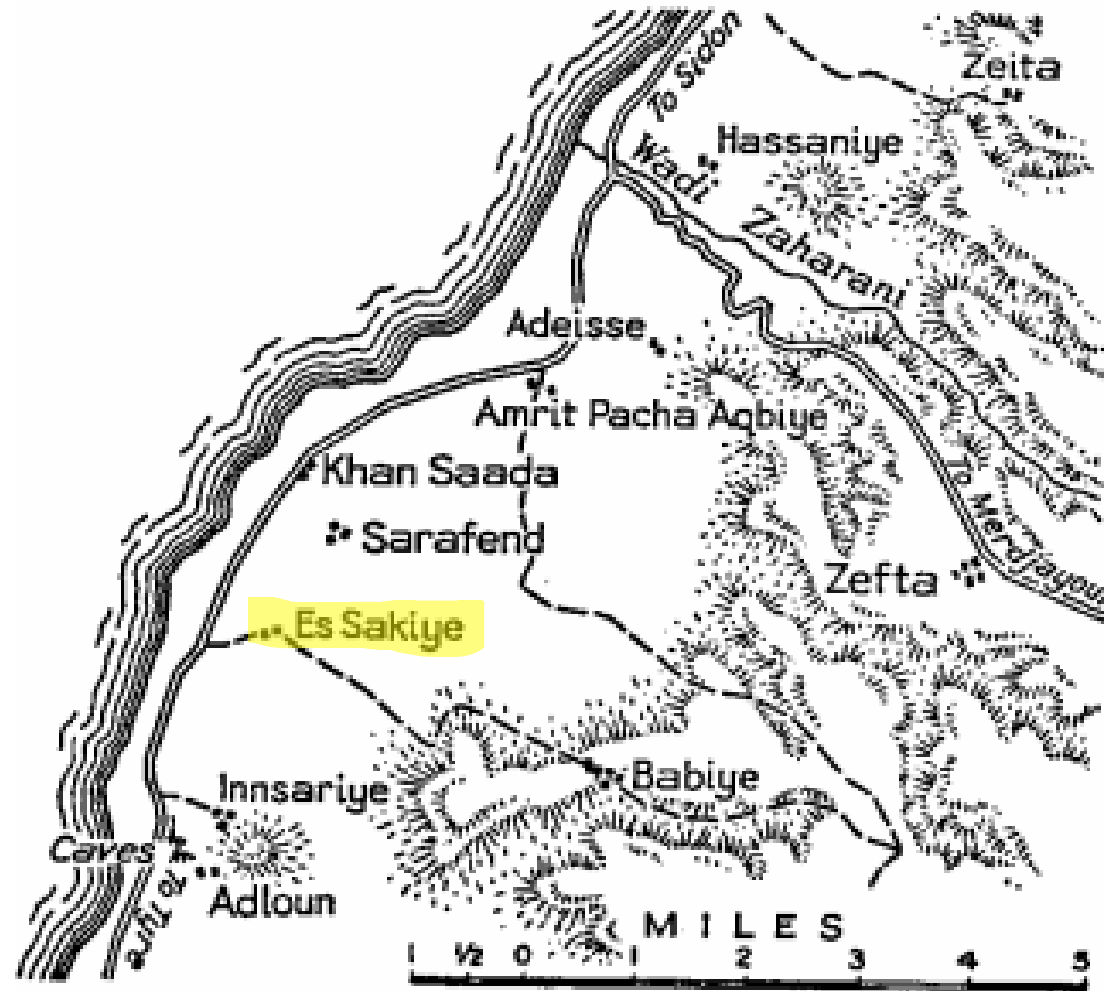
# 11 June 1941 - Syria

- Captain White's company was to advance over the heights on the right and pass through McPhee's to the final objective.
- When the house caught fire White's company (accompanied by Moten and his headquarters) swung right to keep outside the illuminated area, advanced silently round the eastern end of the first objective and, not finding McPhee's company there, pushed on to its own objective without opposition.
- Patrols were then sent out to find the other companies. Moten learnt that they were held up and heavily engaged on either side of the road 1,200 yards behind him. It was then 3.30 a.m.
- Moten, seeing an opportunity of encircling the enemy, ordered White to advance to high ground overlooking the side road to Es Sakiye, while, with the pioneer platoon and his headquarters, he took up a position above the coast road to block the escape of the French who were fighting his rear companies.
- At dawn these French troops surrendered.



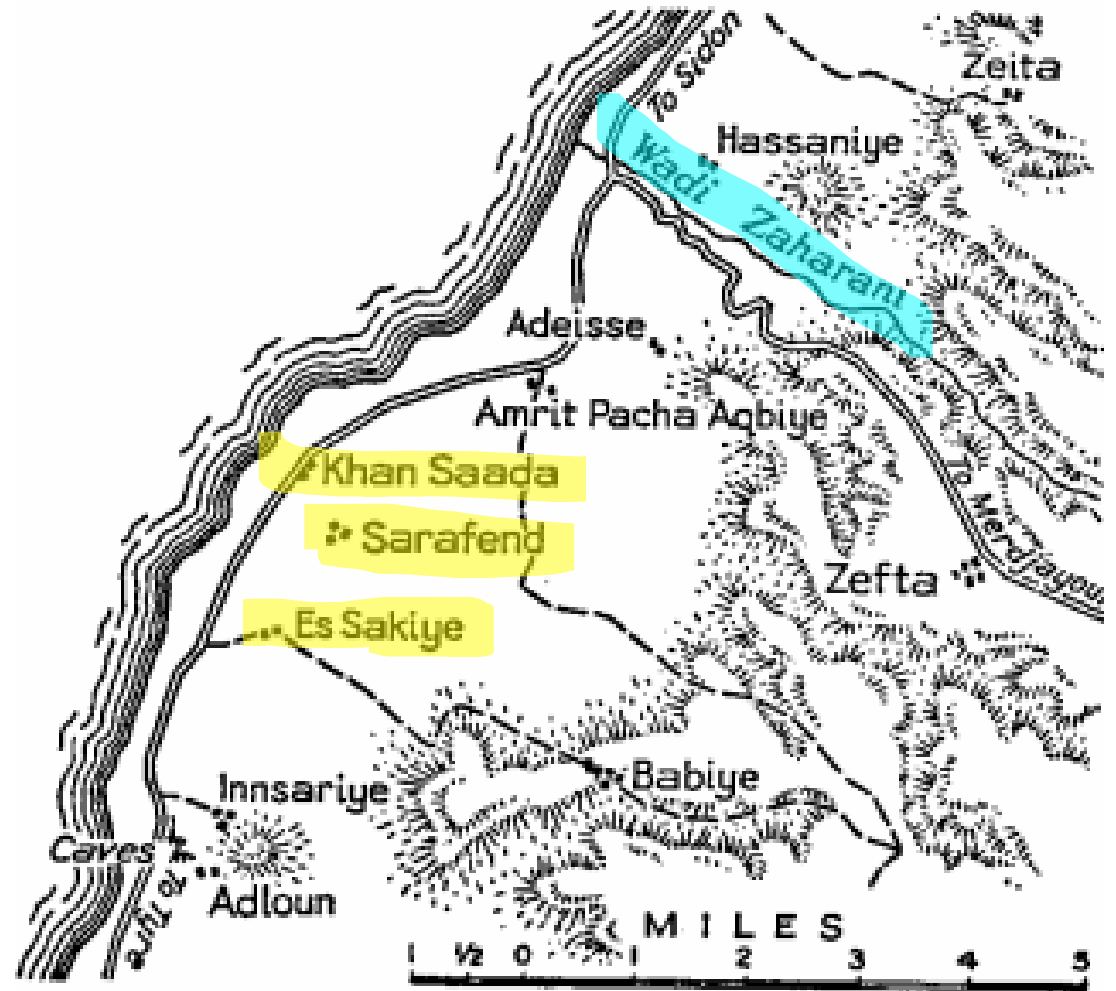
# 11 June 1941 - Syria

- At daylight on the 11th the 2/14th, with the cavalry squadron, was ordered to continue the advance.
- At dawn the cavalrymen moved forward; they met no opposition until, just beyond the **Es Sakiye** road junction, they came under the fire of a group of enemy tanks supported by anti-tank guns.
- Lieutenant Mills placed three of his light tanks behind a ridge, in reserve, then led some carriers forward. Taking from the crews of these carriers Sergeant Cramp, Sergeant Edwards and Trooper Killen, between them carrying an anti-tank rifle, Bren gun, sub-machine-gun and rifle, he worked his way to the crest of a ridge overlooking the French position.
- There a duel began between Edwards with the anti-tank rifle and the French tank and anti-tank gunners and eventually the tanks withdrew out of sight. Mills and his men concentrated fire on an anti-tank gun sited above the cutting and killed or dispersed the crews. Thinking he had disposed of the enemy Mills went forward down the ridge with Killen, but saw a party of Frenchmen dug in between him and the cutting.
- While climbing down the terraces he suddenly found that he was standing over another trench full of Frenchmen. His sub-machine-gun jammed, but the French dared not fire for fear of hitting their own men and, at this critical moment, Cramp, who was following, attacked the other enemy group and both parties surrendered.
- Between them Mills, Cramp and Killen captured forty-five prisoners of the Foreign Legion, five machine-guns, two mortars, and the two anti-tank guns, which were undamaged and plentifully supplied with ammunition.



# 11 June 1941 - Syria

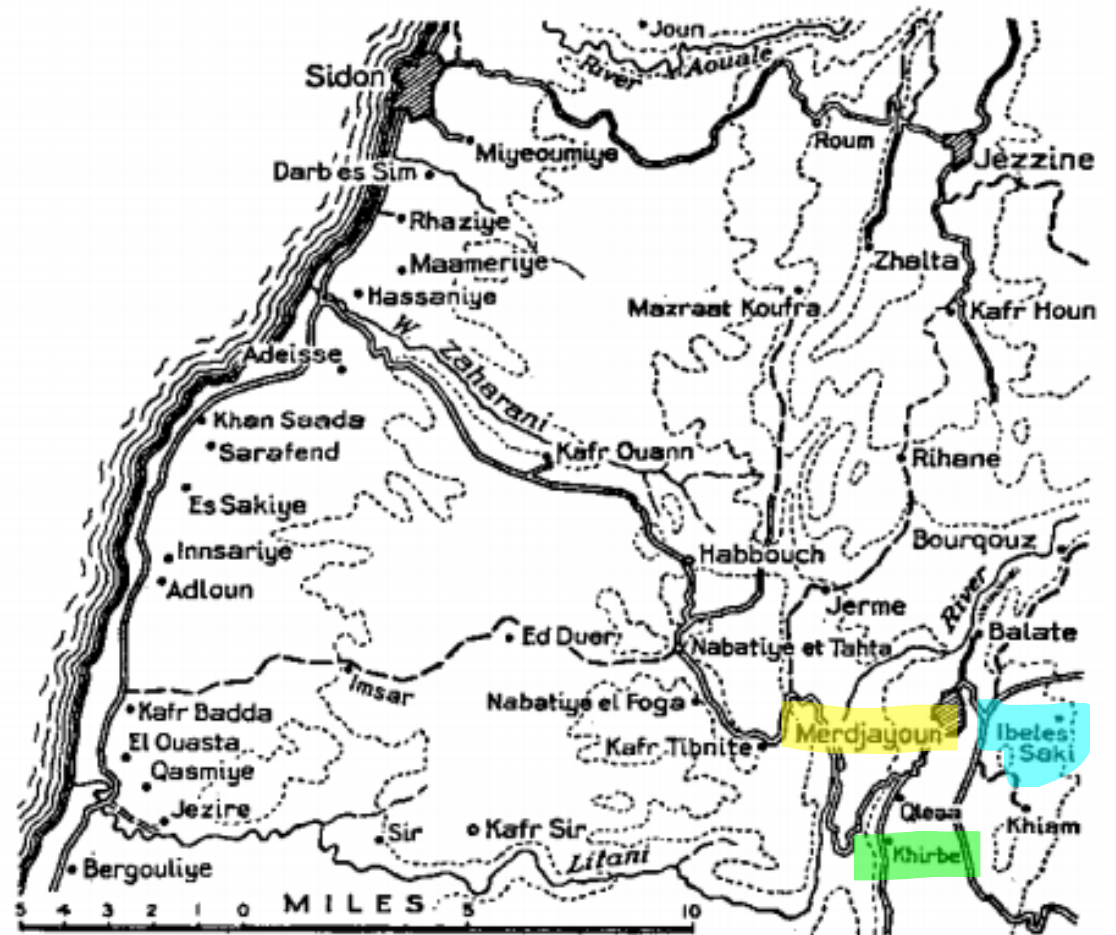
- It was then mid-morning and the 2/14th was now close behind, advancing astride the road and on the slopes east of it. The cavalrymen having dealt with the French rearguard, there was little opposition, except on the right where the 2/14th killed nine and captured forty-five.
- By the middle of the afternoon the infantrymen had taken a total of nearly 100 prisoners and passed through Es Sakiye, Sarafend and Khan Saada.
- Beyond Khan Saada the advancing infantry learnt from the cavalrymen scouting ahead that enemy machine-gun posts and five tanks had been seen about two miles beyond in the Wadi Zaharani.
- As soon as the troops began to move forward across the flat ground, on which young crops were growing, they came under severe machine-gun and mortar fire. On the left Lieutenant Kyffin led his platoon wide to the west and thence to within 50 yards of the bridge over the Zaharani, while Ayton's platoon, moving through banana fields, reached a point 100 yards from the bridge, where the men lay under sharp mortar fire.
- At 6.15 out of the smoke and dust ahead emerged six enemy tanks which formed up in a semi-circle round the leading infantry and bombarded them with shells and machine-gun bullets at short range. Cannon sent orders to Silverman to withdraw. But Silverman had been wounded; and Ayton and six of his men had already been hit. Both leading platoons withdrew, Corporal Staley leading out Ayton's, in which the sergeant, Buxton, stayed behind to assist the wounded and was himself hit. Fire from anti-tank rifles halted the enemy tanks but did not appear to damage them.





# 11 June 1941 - Syria

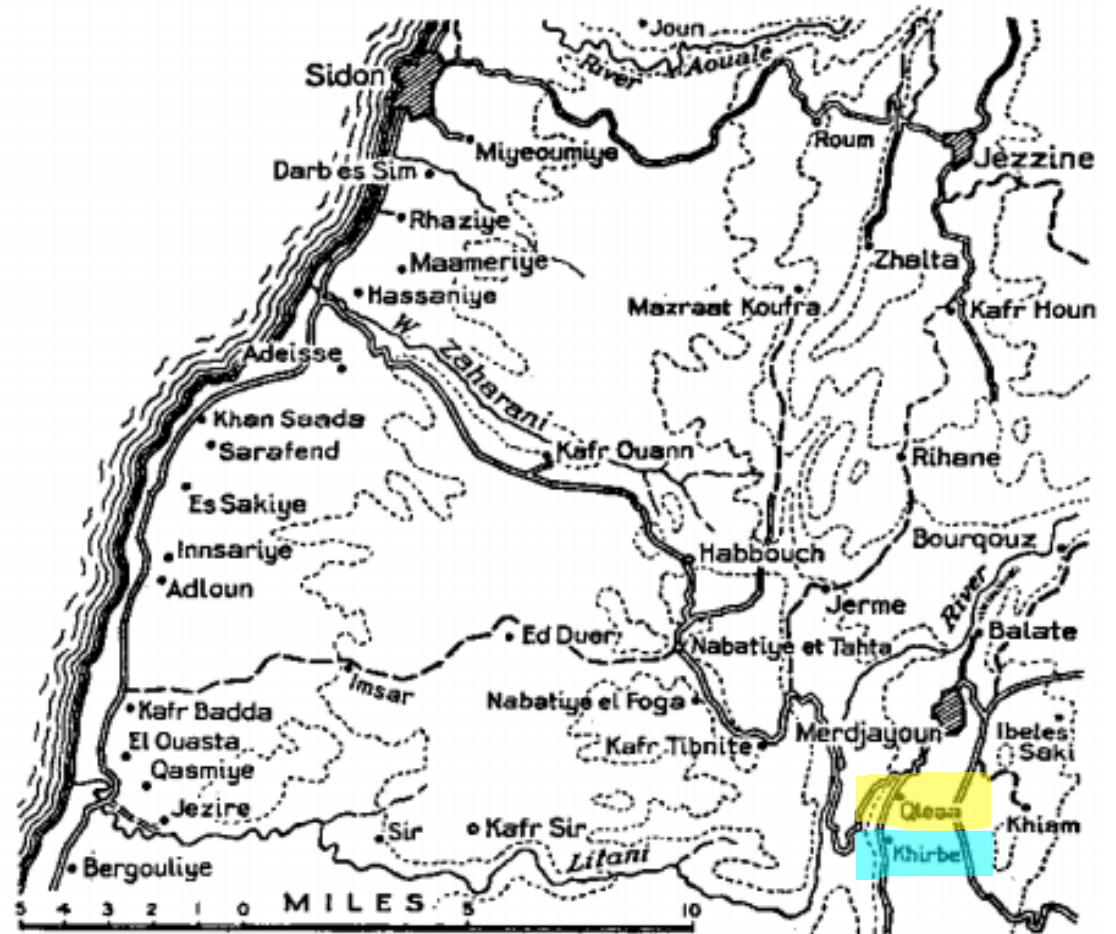
- On 10th June orders were issued for a renewed attack in the Merdjayoun sector by the 2/25th against Ibeles Saki and by the 2/31st against Merdjayoun, the 2/31st to be supported by the 2/5th and 2/6th Field Regiments.
- On the 10th the 2/25th had advanced along the narrow gorges until it was close to the steep-sided Ibeles Saki plateau. At dawn on the 11th its leading company began to move up the abrupt slopes towards the village but, finding this approach impossible, swung round to the north of the place, and it was eventually occupied by Lieutenant Butler's platoon with but one casualty.
- Porter of the 2/31st planned to attack astride the Khirbe ridge with two companies forward. When Khirbe had been reached the rear companies were to pass through and advance to Merdjayoun.





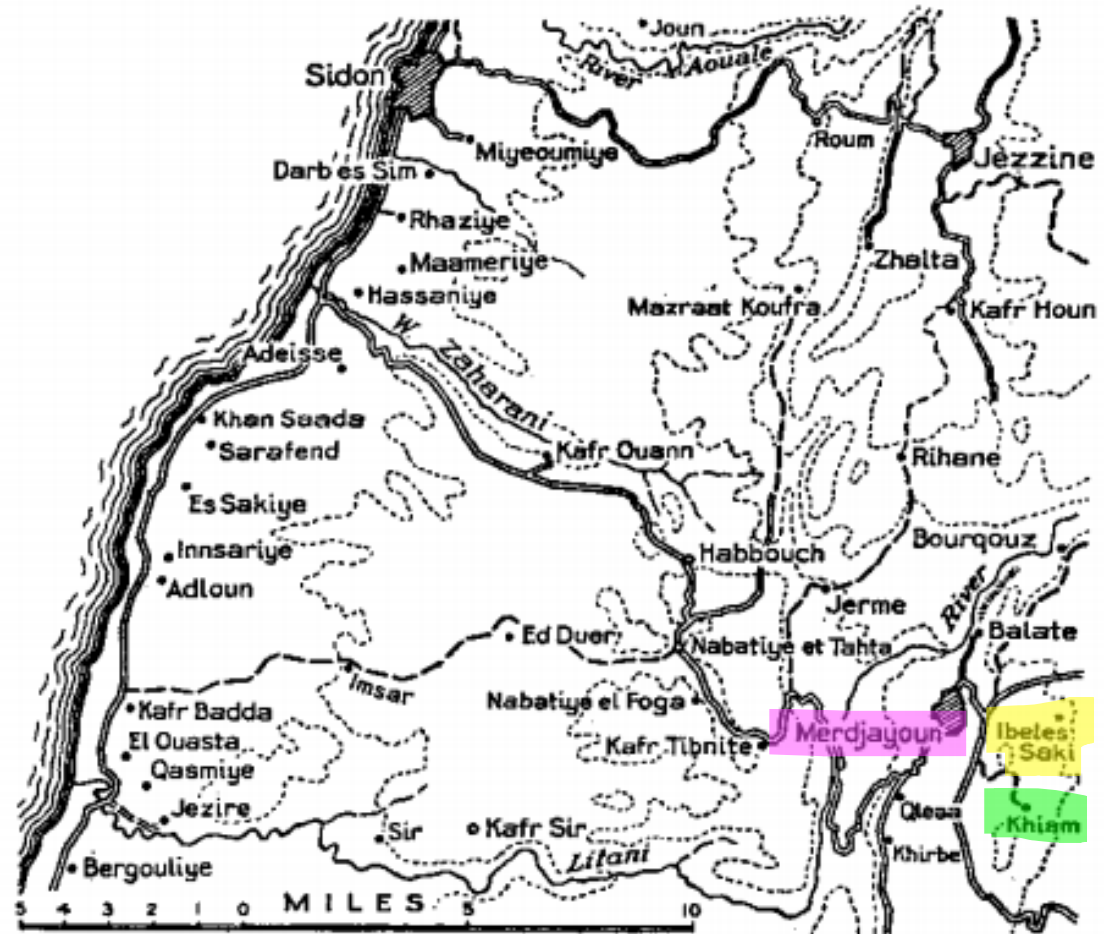
# 11 June 1941 - Syria

- The barrage covering the 2/31st opened at 2.30 a.m. on a front of 1,120 yards—one gun to 28 yards—and, because the country was rough and not reconnoitred, moved forward 100 yards at relatively long intervals of four minutes. The barrage travelled to a depth of more than two miles, each of forty guns firing in all about 130 rounds.
- The advancing infantry followed up so closely that the shells fell only some 30 yards in front, and often they had to halt and wait for the barrage to move on. Soon the leaders were among abandoned French positions and saw men moving off ahead of them, although some posts continued to fire after the advance had passed them.
- The leaders had passed through **Qleaa** and were at the cross-roads soon after 5 o'clock, with the supporting companies following closely to avoid French mortar bombs which were falling well behind the foremost platoons. These companies met the fire from enemy posts which the leaders had passed by. In **Khirbe**, for example, at dawn there was a sharp fight with grenades and bayonets between one company and the French garrison. Fifty-six prisoners were taken.



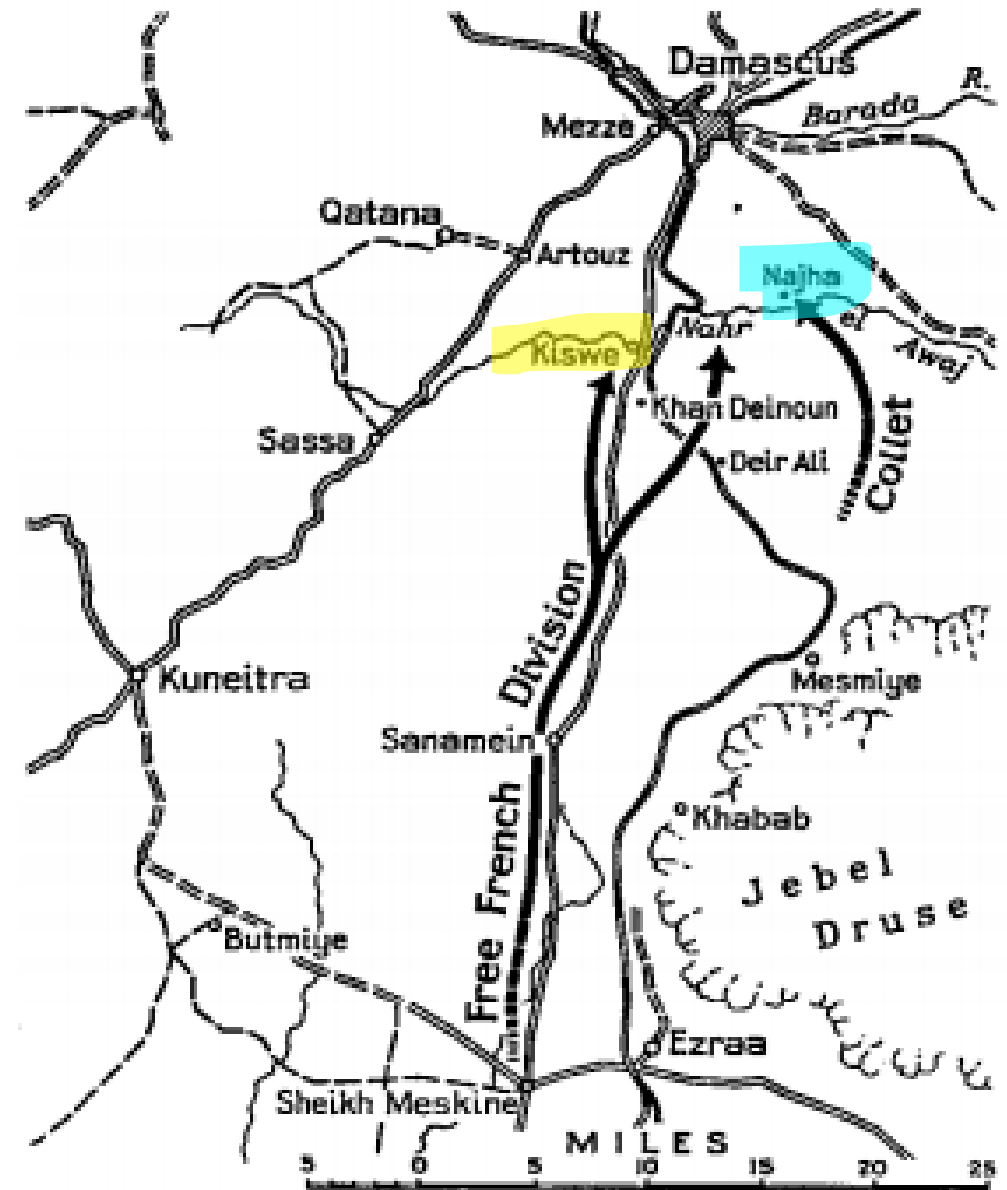
# 11 June 1941 - Syria

- The second phase of the advance was to open at 1 p.m. and carry the battalion to Merdjayoun on which shells were then falling. However, Lieut-Colonel Daly of the 2/6th Field Regiment suggested that he should parley with the French, and about 12.35 set out in a carrier flying a white flag. At 12.55 he had not reached the fort and, knowing that the guns of his own and the 2/5th Regiment were to open fire at 1 p.m., he withdrew. In the meantime, Lieut-Colonel O'Brien of the 2/5th, after consulting Porter, cancelled the fire plan.
- Porter set off to warn his left company of the change of plan, but it had already begun to advance and took the fort, which had in fact been abandoned.
- Out of hiding places in Merdjayoun appeared civilians waving white flags; they announced that the French had gone.
- The road to Merdjayoun was heavily mined; engineers led by Lieutenant Flint and Sergeant Giles advanced with the leading infantry, removing these mines.
- On the evening of the 11th the 2/25th were in position north of Ibeles Saki, the 2/33rd north of Khiam, the 2/31st at Merdjayoun.



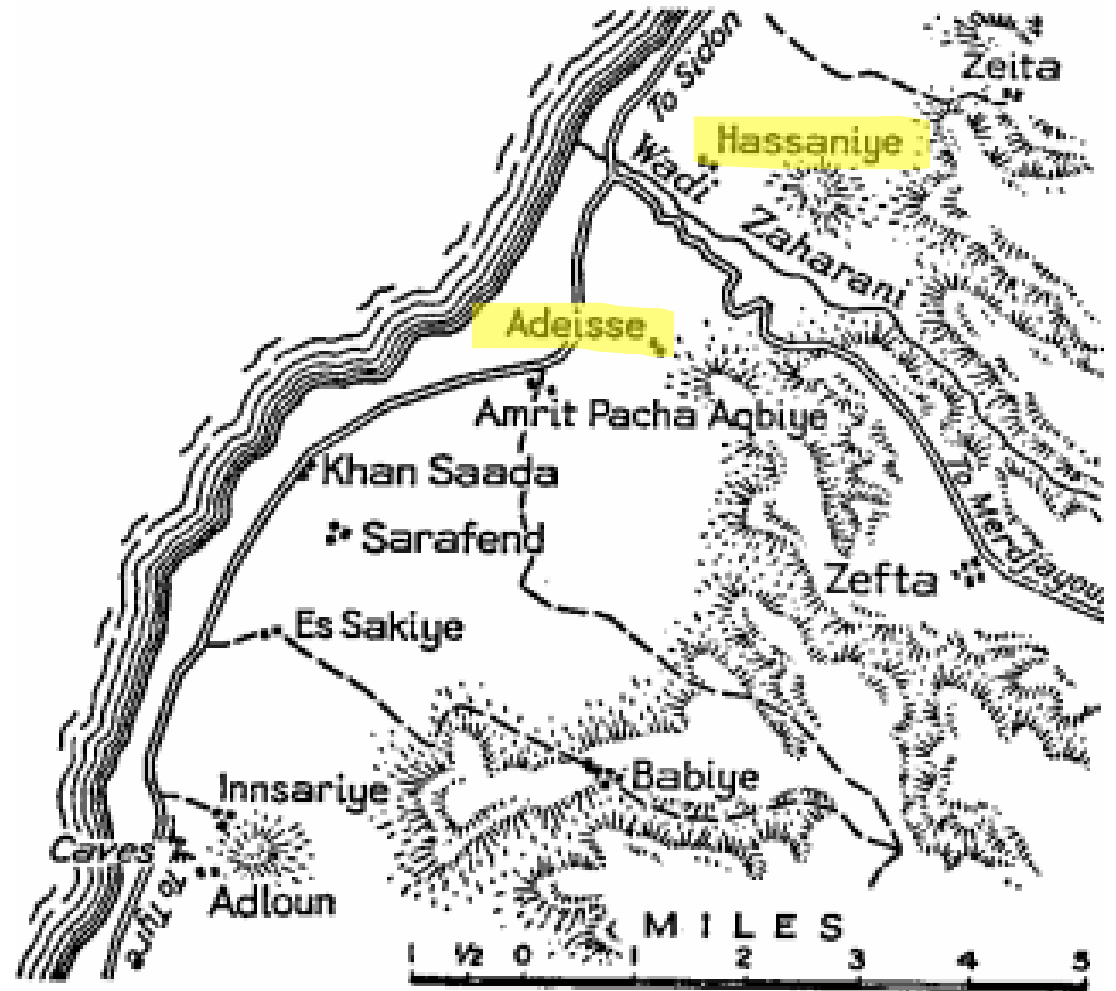
# 11 June 1941 - Syria

- On the 11<sup>th</sup> General Legentilhomme, with a Senegalese battalion, attacked towards **Kiswe** which was defended by Moroccans about equal in strength to the attackers.
- Colonel Collet was attacked at **Najha** on the 11th but, with his one anti-tank gun, succeeded in checking the enemy.



# 12 June 1941 - Syria

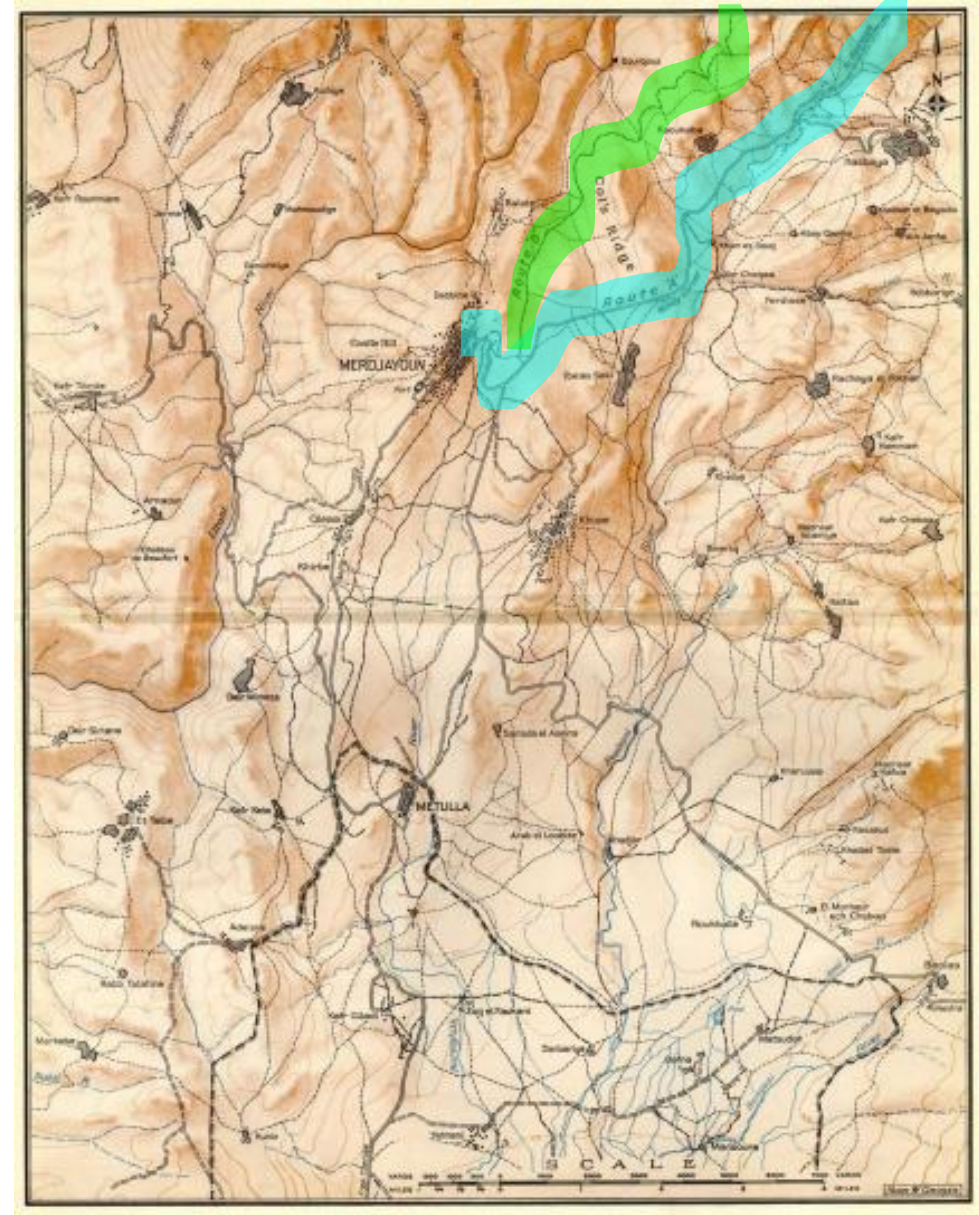
- Stevens ordered Moten's 2/27th to take over as the advance-guard on the morning of the 12th.
- Moten went forward about 3.30 a.m. and at daylight, as he was setting out to reconnoitre the right flank, he met Captain Buckler, the adjutant of the 2/14th, who suggested that there was a likely approach to the flank of the enemy's position to the east of Noonan's company. Thus at 11 a.m. Major Isaachsen's company struggled through the hills and across the river under sharp fire, while Johnson's advanced through **Adeisse**, across the river (where Johnson was wounded), and on to **Hassaniye** and Maameriye taking about forty prisoners and a number of mortars and machine-guns.
- On the coastal flats, the French tanks had been driven back by artillery fire; and the carrier platoon of the 2/27th, after a long exchange of fire with the French posts north of the Zaharani, advanced along the beach, and attacked the French holding the bridge taking about 60 prisoners, and held it until Lt Rudd's platoon arrived over the hills from the north-east. In the afternoon another 140 prisoners were taken.
- By dusk on the 12th the cavalry patrols moved beyond Rhaziye until they came under sharp artillery fire. Stevens thrust two field guns forward with the infantry. They came under well-directed French artillery fire, and in a duel over open sights, the section commander and a gunner were killed and five men wounded, and one gun was disabled; the other was withdrawn.





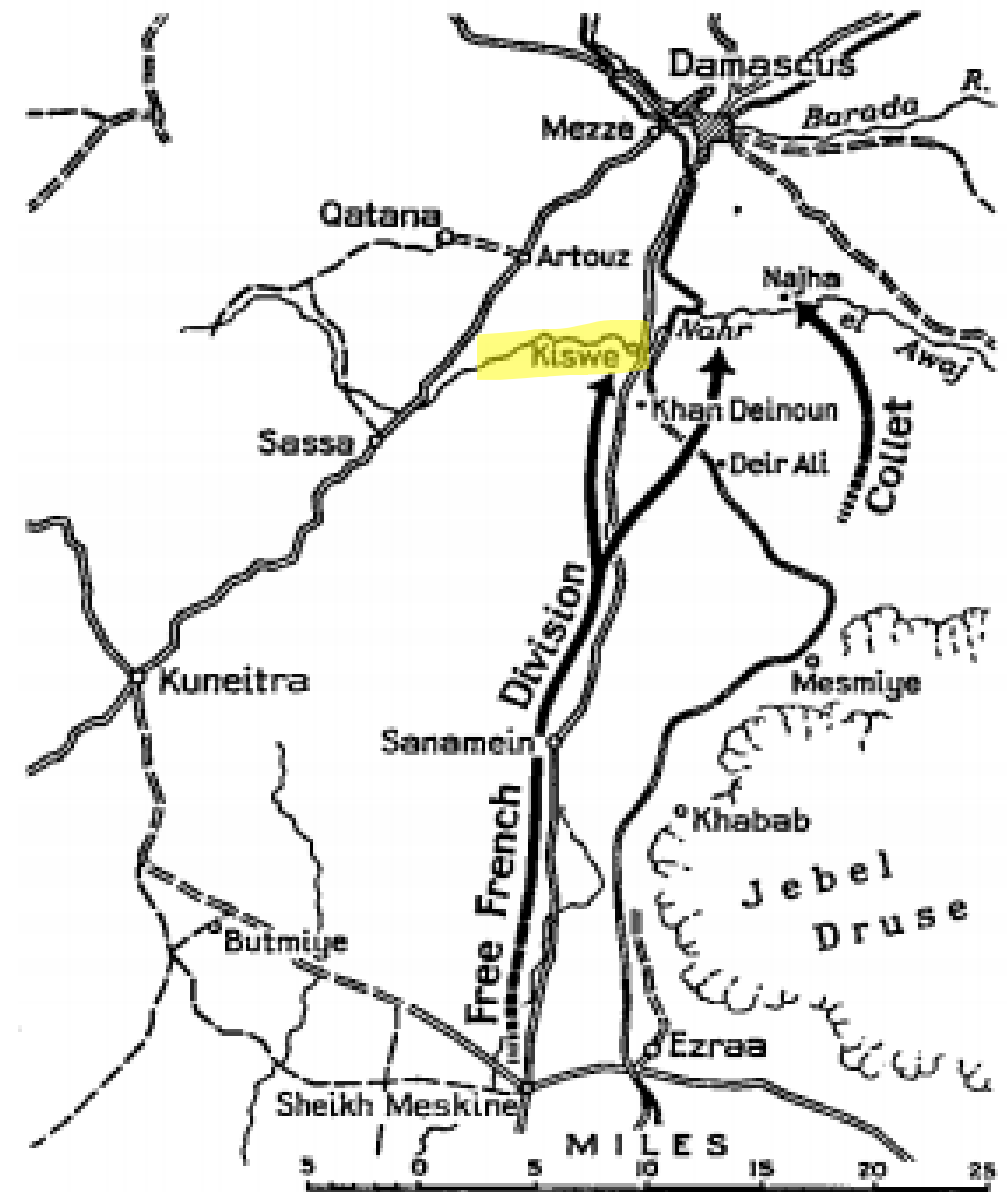
# 12 June 1941 - Syria

- On the night of the 11th the cavalry had been ordered to pursue the enemy believed to be withdrawing towards Zahle. The force was to divide and move along Routes "A" and "B", the force on "A", under Major Morrison of the 6th Australian Cavalry, consisting of three light tanks, some carriers and two guns, the force on "B", similarly constituted, under Major Macarthur Onslow.
- However, just after they divided, the columns were sharply attacked by six French aircraft, and later Morrison's force was halted at a point in the road where a cliff face had been blown down on to it. It took four hours until midday to repair this gap, and then—to the surprise of the cavalrymen, engineers and others who had been working there all the morning—when a carrier began to cross, a hail of shells and bullets fell on the area, and blew the tracks off the advancing vehicle.
- Onslow's column, after moving without incident to the point where the road swings right at Balate Ridge, had also run into accurate artillery and mortar fire which hit a carrier. Efforts were made to shell the enemy but it soon was apparent that from the heights north of Bourqouz he dominated the area.



# 12 June 1941 - Syria

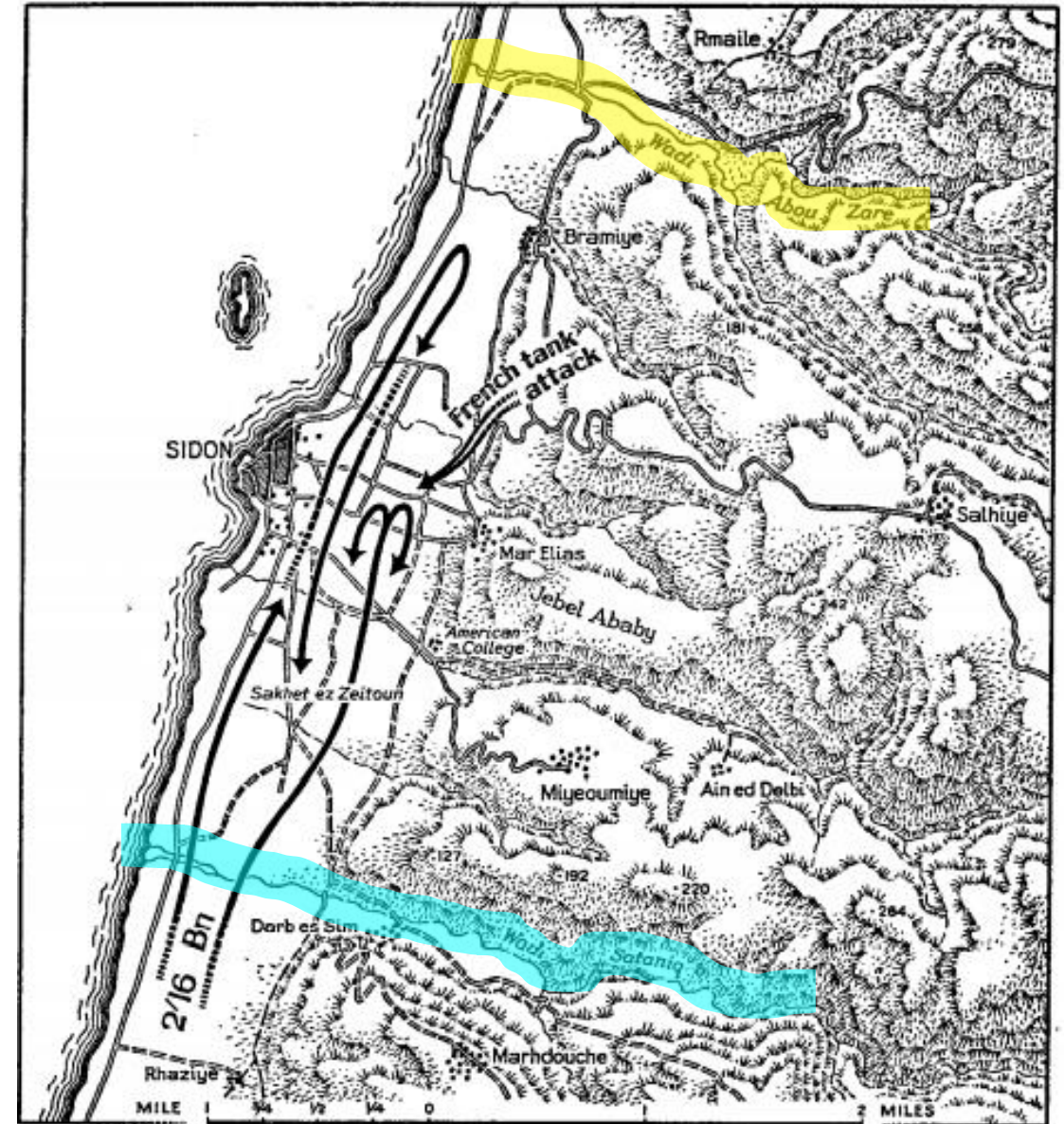
- General Legentilhomme had continued his attacks on the Vichy positions at **Kiswe**. Some progress was made on the 12th but when reports arrived that Vichy tanks were moving round the right flank Legentilhomme ordered his troops to stand firm on the Jebel Maani and Jebel Badrane.
- Later in the day Legentilhomme was wounded.
- General Wilson doubted that a counter-attack was developing. He put the 5th Indian Brigade under Free French command to renew the attack.





# 13 June 1941 - Syria

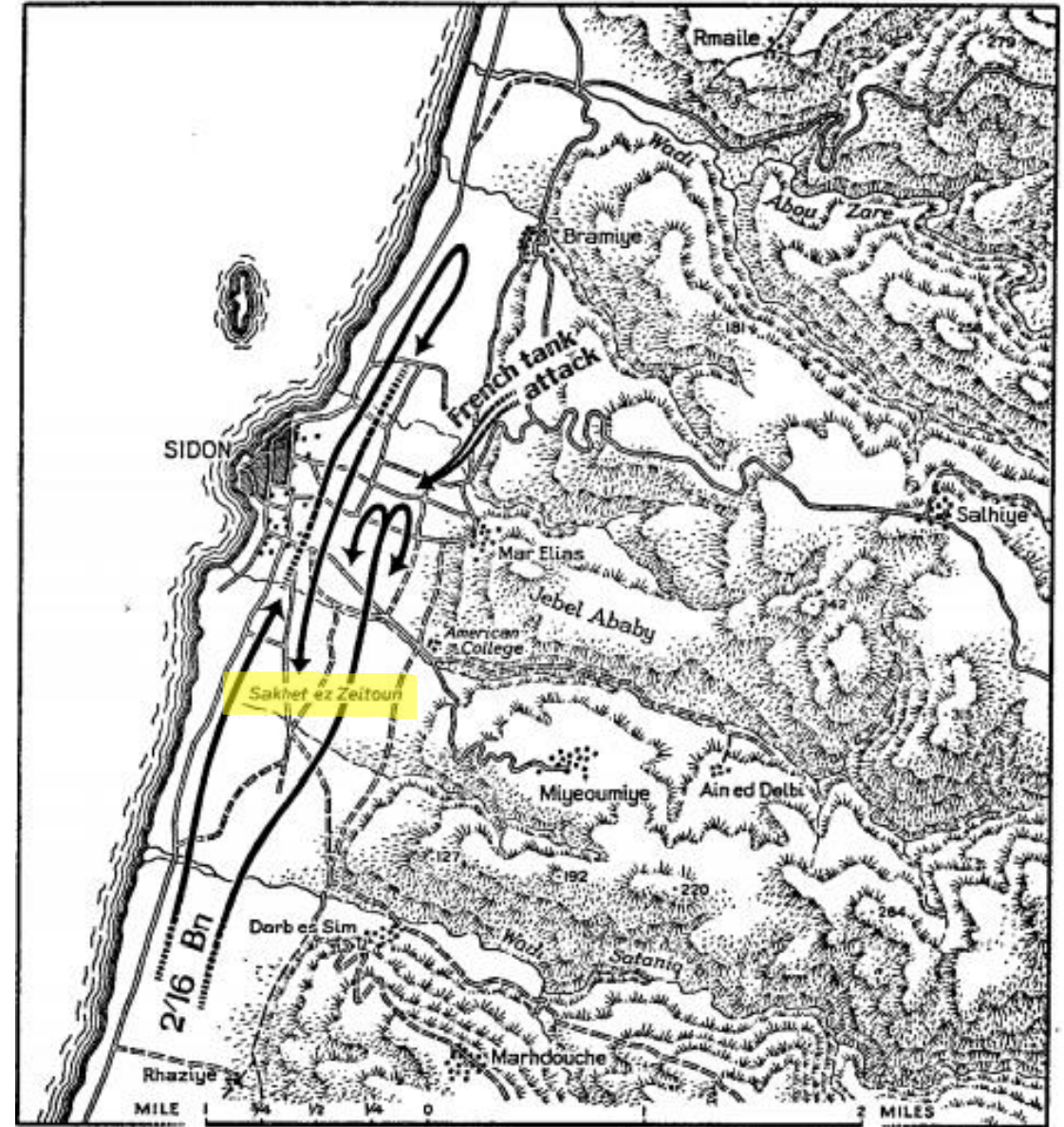
- Stevens gave the task of taking Sidon to the 2/16th, which had been in reserve for four days. They were to move through the 2/27th on the morning of the 13th, advance past the town and occupy the line of the **Wadi Abou Zare**.
- The leading companies—Captain Horley's on the right and Major Wain's on the left—moved from the start-line at 10 a.m. behind concentrations fired by the 2/4th Field Regiment.
- After advancing about two miles without serious opposition, Wain's company encountered a series of machine-gun posts just south of the **Wadi Sataniq**, half way between their start-line and Sidon. These were outflanked and withdrew.
- The company then advanced through the gardens until they were about one mile from the town, where they again came under sharp fire. Wain led forward a patrol, including Sergeant McCullough and one section, and overcame a post, taking seven prisoners, while the remainder of the company, mopping up among the orchards, took 40.
- By 3 p.m. after a couple more skirmishes the company was only a few hundred yards from the objective—the Wadi Abou Zare—but was out of touch with the company on its right.





# 13 June 1941 - Syria

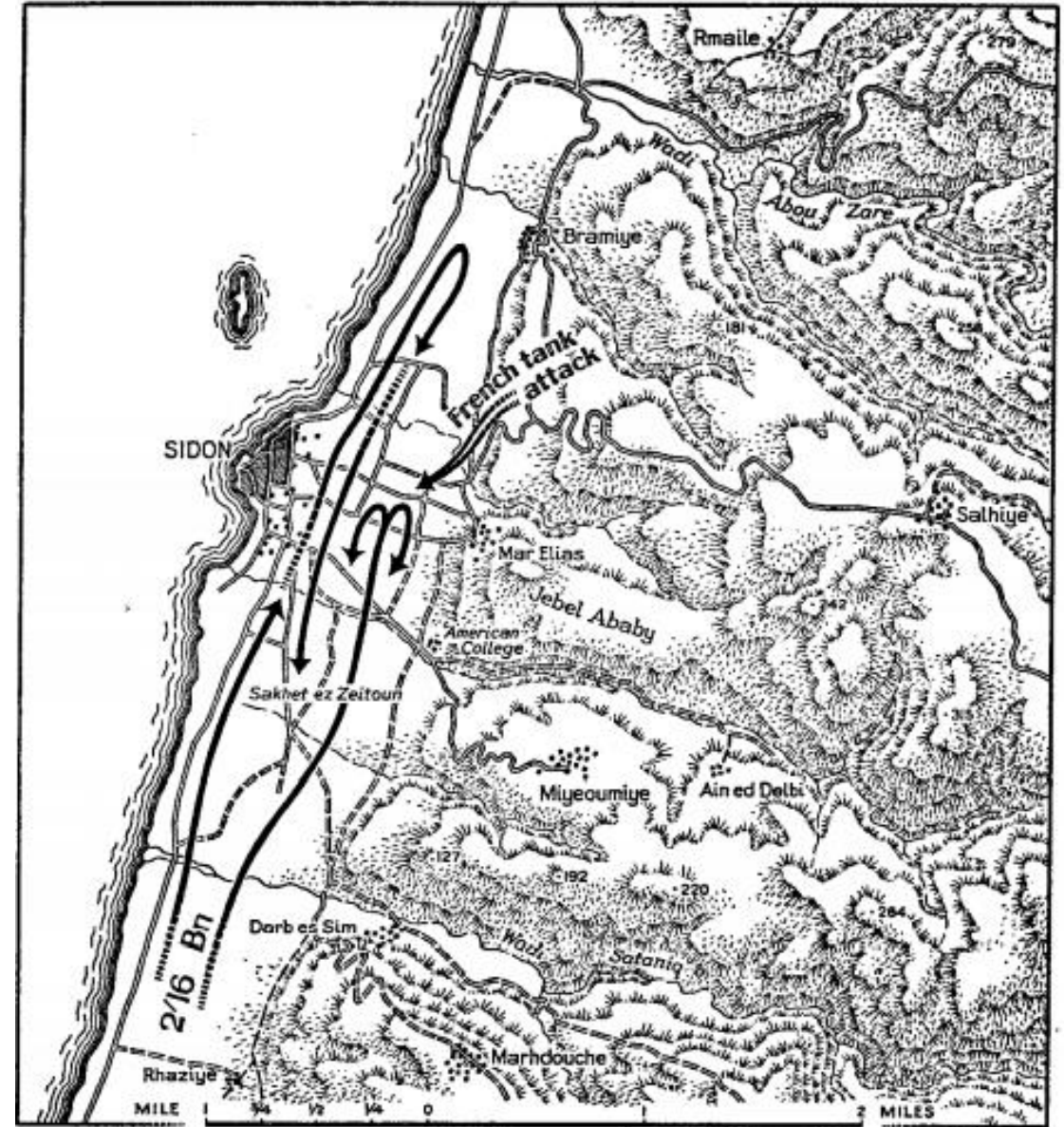
- Wain now found that his company was out by itself with an open flank and the company withdrew to Sakhet ez Zeitoun, south of Sidon, where it got into touch with its supporting company (Major Caro) about 5.30.
- The reason why Horley's company on the right had been far out of touch when Wain reached the limit of his advance was that, as that company, with Captain Inkpen's following, approached the outskirts of Sidon, several French tanks appeared and made a determined attack.
- Soon they were circling and firing on the West Australians who, seeking cover, split into small groups. Horley was killed and the company disorganised.
- The tanks advanced and attacked the supporting company, killing also its commander—Inkpen—and forcing some groups into the foothills on the east.





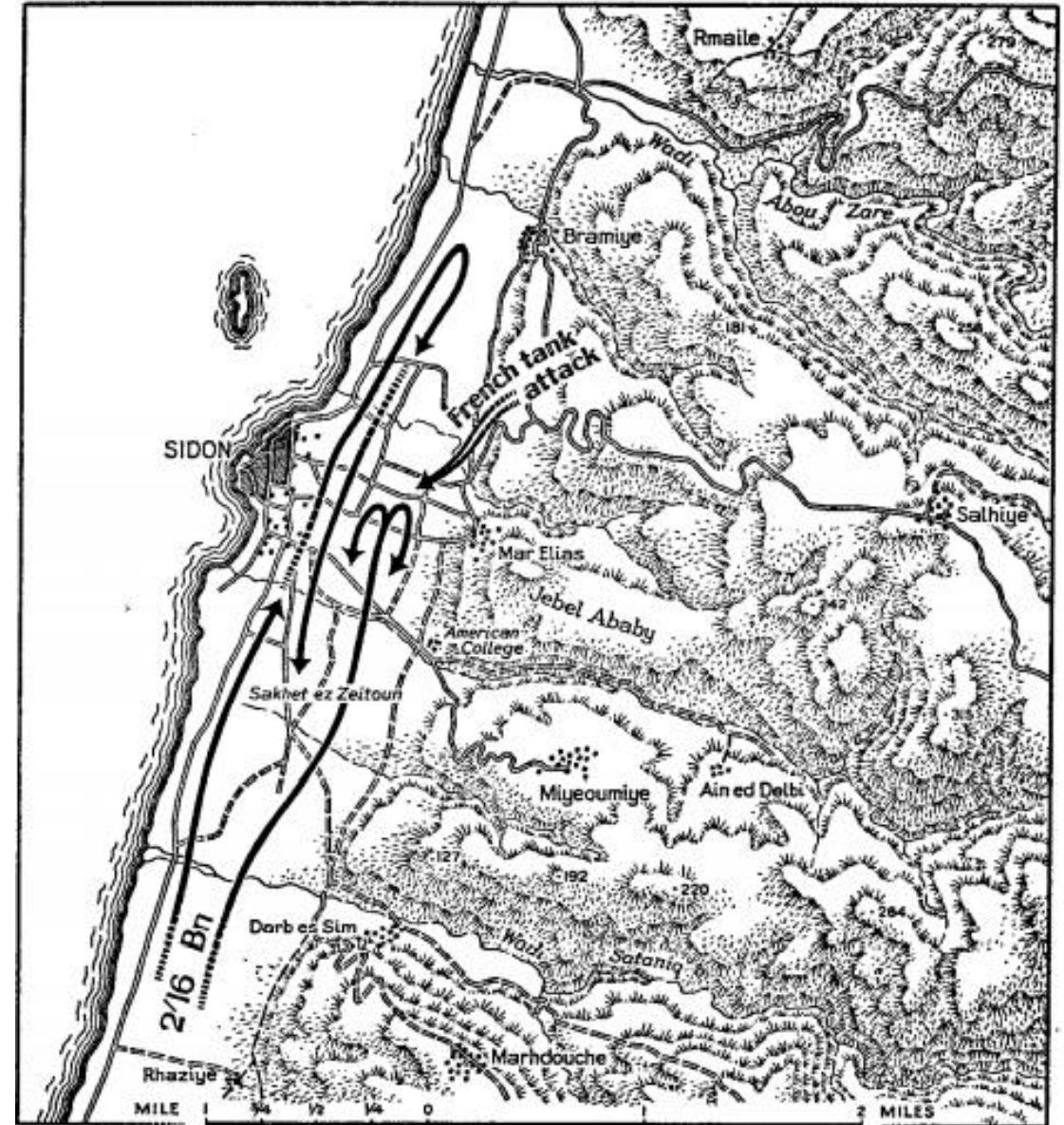
# 13 June 1941 - Syria

- Captain Mackenzie, now commanding what remained of this company, led a fight in which efforts were made to drive the tanks off by throwing grenades and hitting them with anti-tank rifle fire, and with machine-gun fire aimed at the slits.
- All three methods of attack were ineffective.
- At this stage Mackenzie's company comprised only a sergeant and 17 others. At length, about 6 p.m., he and his men broke away and reached the main road, on to which the tanks would not venture for fear of fire from the supporting field guns.



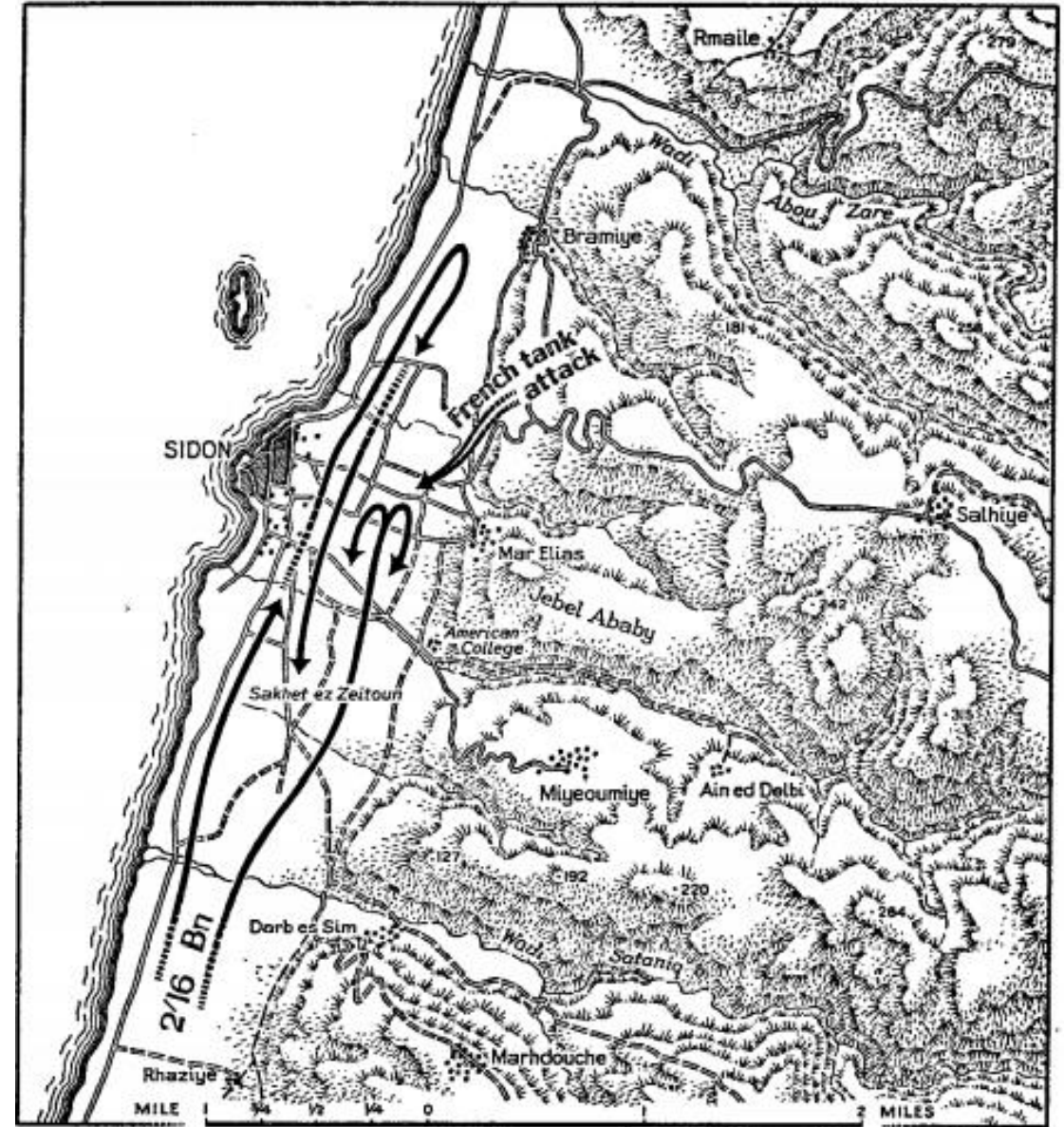
# 13 June 1941 - Syria

- Lieutenant Mills, of the cavalry, ordered to deal with the tanks, led forward a field gun and two anti-tank guns. The anti-tank guns were fired at 800 yards, but at that range their hits had no apparent effect and one gun was knocked out.
- Mills then led the 25-pounder forward to engage the tanks in the open from about 1,300 yards, but the commander of the gun detachment—Lieutenant Marsden—was wounded, the tractor damaged by cannon fire, and the gun was withdrawn.
- Two trucks carrying sticky bombs (which when thrown stuck to the side of the target and then exploded) and the battalion's reserve of ammunition were sent towards the infantry about 1.30 but a shell from a tank hit one and it exploded; the other was brought back.
- Mills then asked four of his carrier commanders to go forward to draw the French tanks into the open where the guns could deal with them. Lieutenant Wray, Sergeant-Major Baldock and Sergeants Stewart and Edwards drove their carriers forward through the river bed to the first orange groves beyond, and urged the infantrymen there—of Caro's company—to hurry back while the carriers covered their retreat. The infantrymen ran back.
- The carriers fired their Vickers guns furiously into the French positions until the French tanks appeared, when the carriers withdrew under fire from anti-tank guns, picking up infantrymen as they went.



# 13 June 1941 - Syria

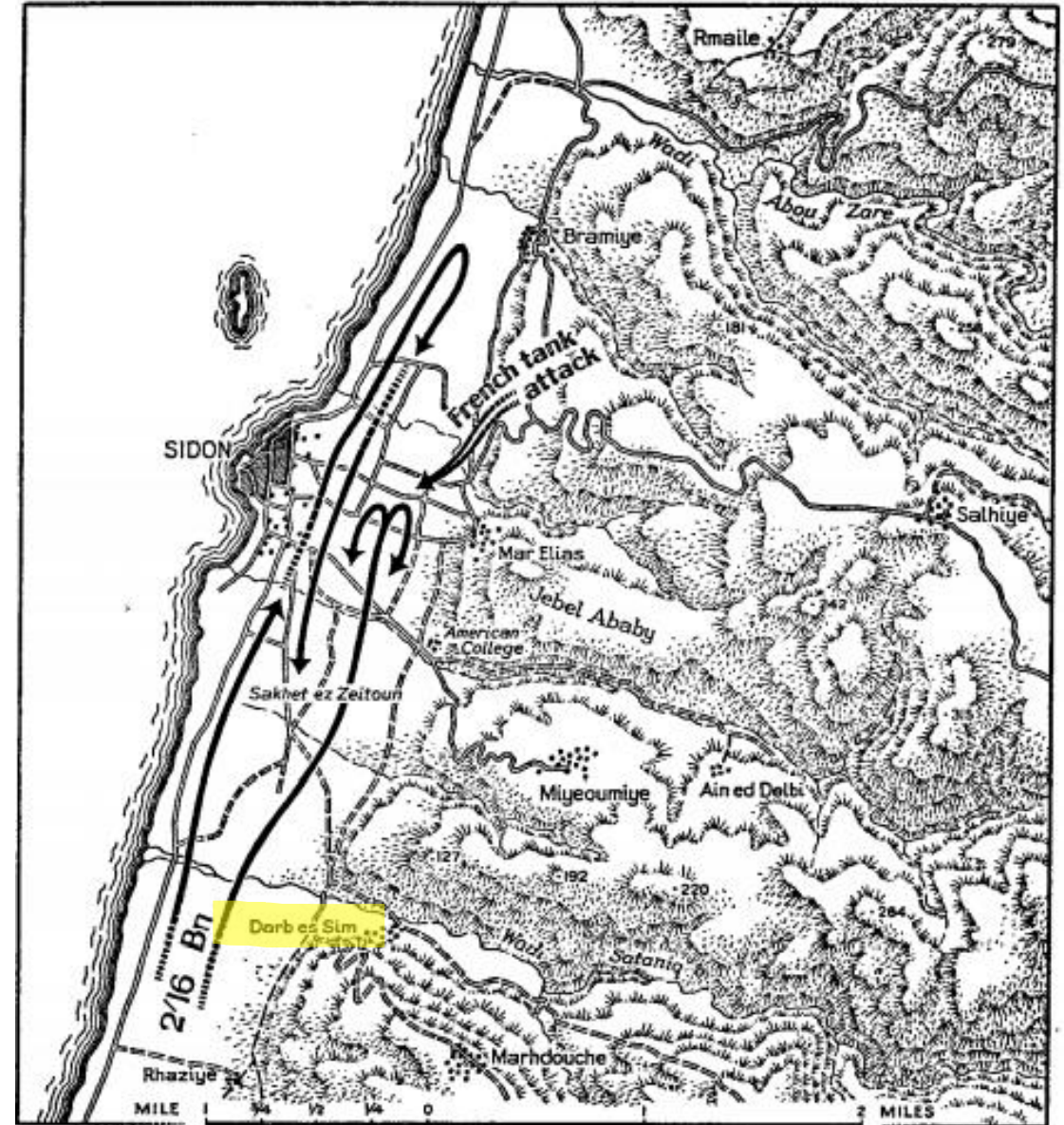
- Later in the afternoon Lieutenant Lucas was sent forward with two guns of the 2/4th Regiment to deal with the tanks which had trapped Horley's company.
- One gun fired on five tanks at about 1,000 yards and drove them off, while the second was sited farther back to cover a withdrawal, if necessary.
- After this shoot Lucas' forward gun detachment pulled their gun behind the crest of the ridge on which it was sited and man-handled it to another position from which it opened fire as soon as tanks reappeared.
- This manoeuvre was repeated during the remainder of the day.
- Throughout the day French aircraft made a series of attacks—the heaviest so far experienced in this sector—on the guns of the 2/4th Regiment and the headquarters of the attacking battalion.





# 13 June 1941 - Syria

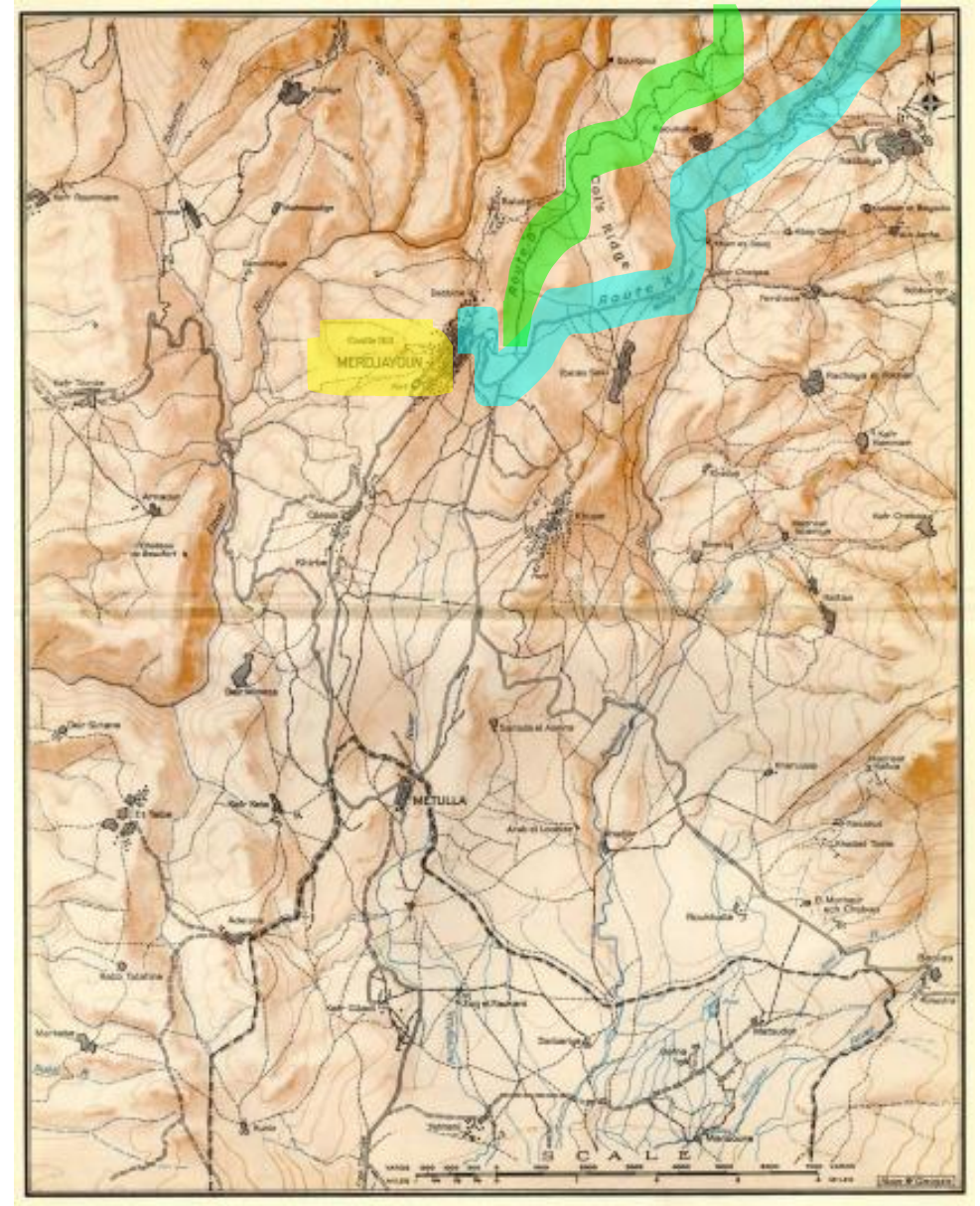
- On the 12th Moten had reached the conclusion that it would be best to avoid a frontal attack and instead to advance through the hills to Miyeoumiye and descend on Sidon from the east.
- The two leading companies of the 2/27th, very weary because they had had little rest since crossing the frontier five days before, were on the south bank of the Sataniq where it cut through the hills well to the east of the road.
- At 4 p.m. the remainder of the battalion moved into the hills from Hassaniye and about 5 p.m. turned north towards Darb es Sim. It was a gruelling march in single file over rugged country, and in darkness until about midnight when the moon rose.
- Except for an hour's rest at 11 p.m. the column moved steadily on, pausing only when, on several occasions, enemy aircraft attempted to bomb it.
- The infantrymen reached **Darb es Sim** at 4 a.m. on the 14th, almost exhausted, but relieved the leading companies, which were withdrawn to prepare to attack across the Sataniq that morning.





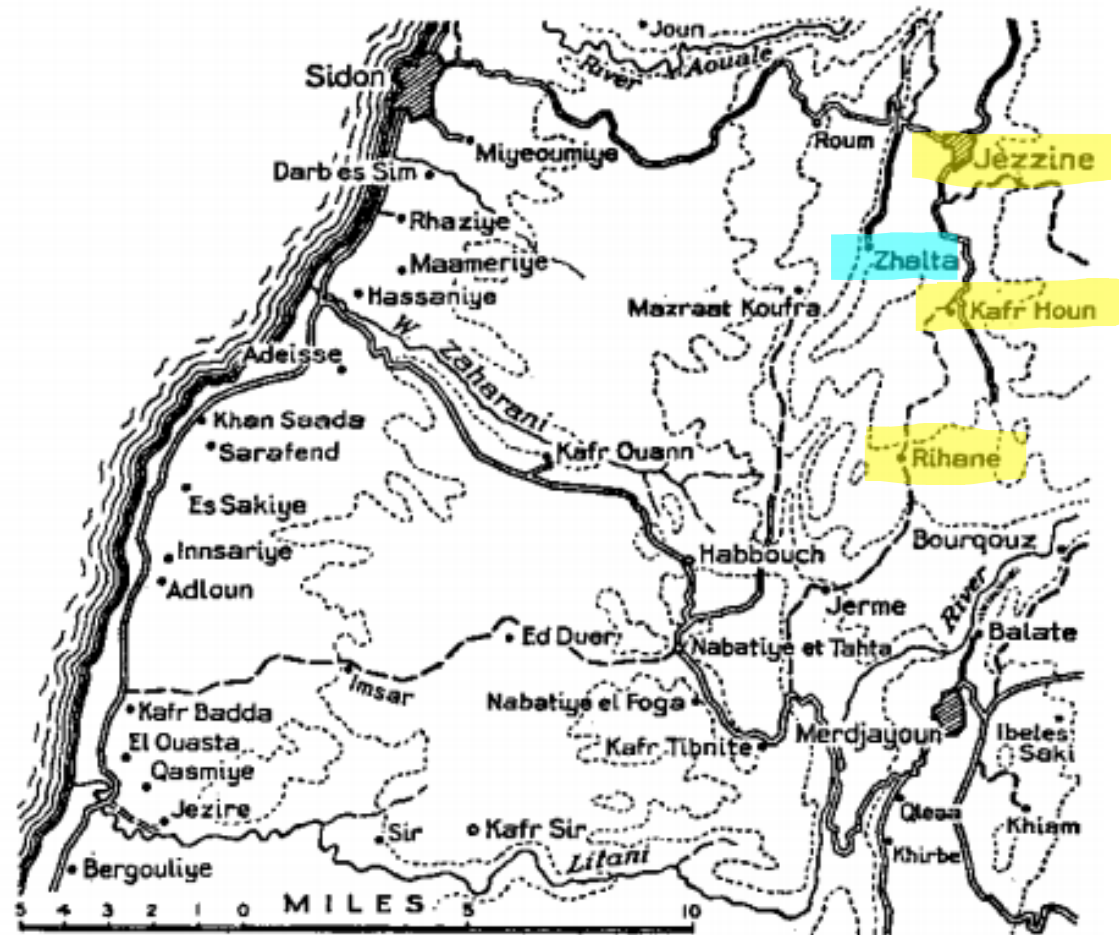
# 13 June 1941 - Syria

- The sharp resistance on the 12th and 13th north of **Merdjayoun** and the fact that on the 13th he began harassing Merdjayoun with occasional shell-fire showed that the enemy intended to hold his excellent positions on the roads leading north.



# 13 June 1941 - Syria

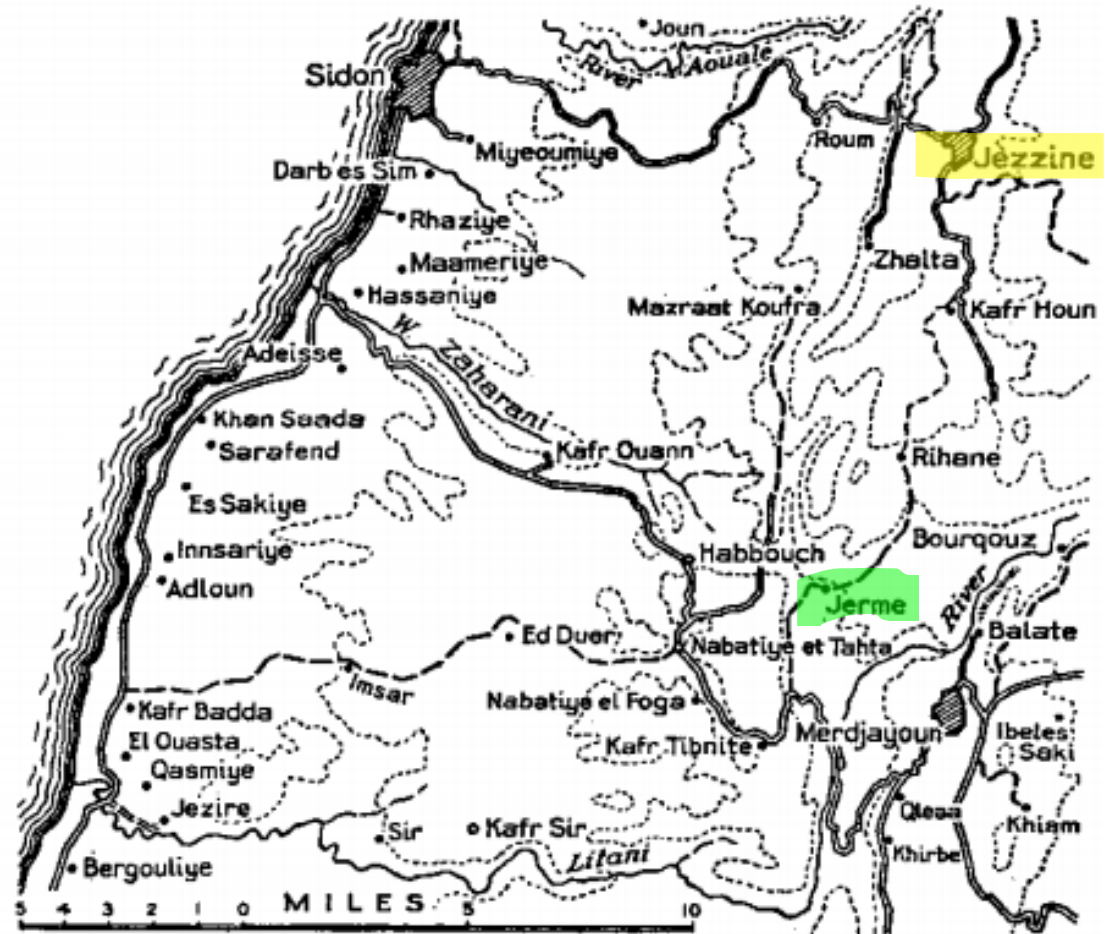
- Only one road travelled from Merdjayoun to Jezzine, and the map showed that it wound round a series of steep-sided mountains from which an enemy might attempt delaying actions. A patrol of the Cheshire Yeomanry had travelled about 500 yards along the road and reported that it would carry traffic at its southern end.
- Cox's plan was to send an advance-guard consisting of the 2/31st plus strong detachments of cavalry, artillery and engineers along the road with three successive objectives: the high ground south of Rihane, the Kafr Houn ridge, and finally, Jezzine itself. At the same time a squadron of the Cheshire was to move north through Zhalta to the Jezzine-Sidon road and establish touch with the 21st Brigade. The main body of the brigade was to follow.





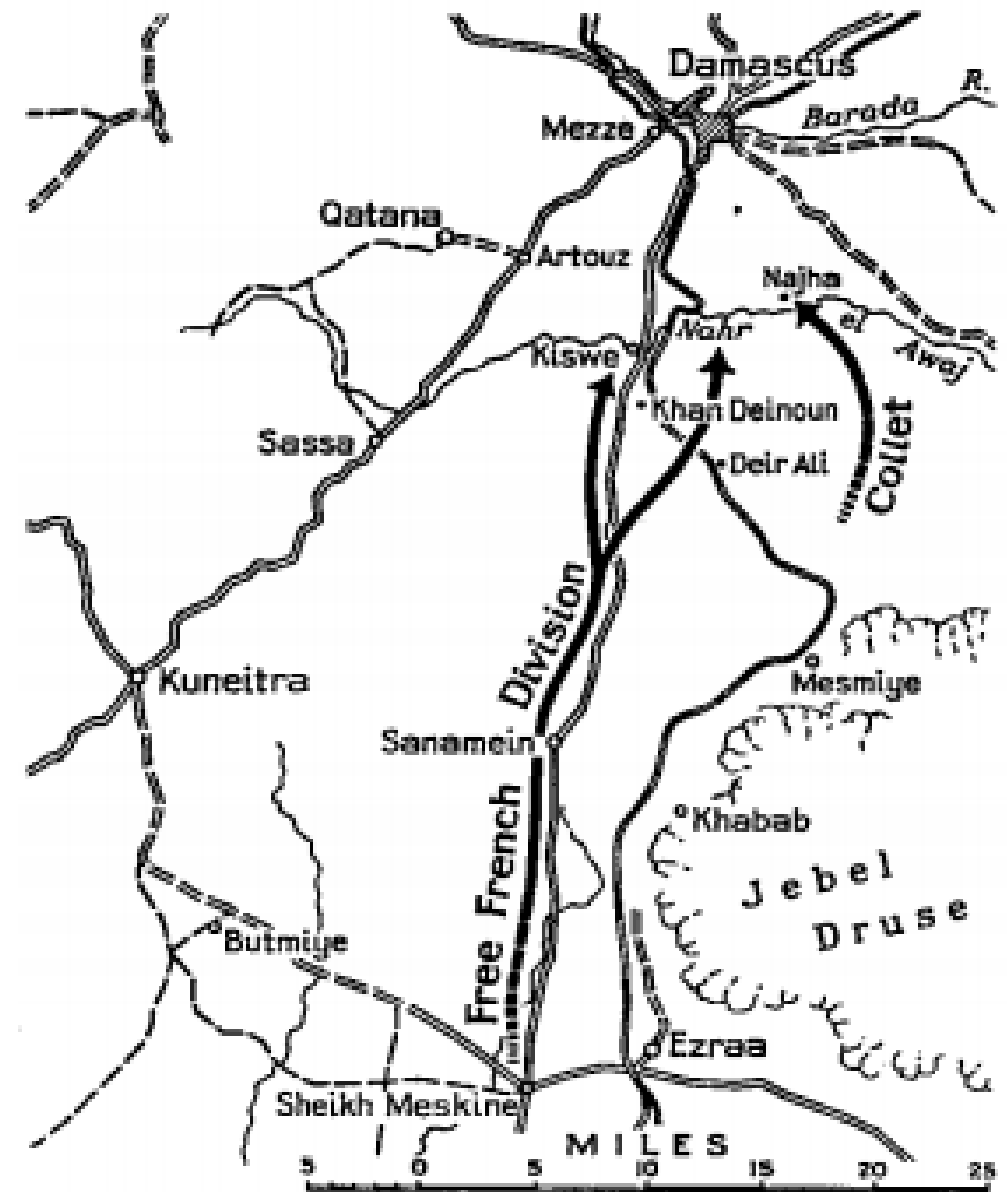
# 13 June 1941 - Syria

- At 9 p.m. on the 13th the 2/31st Battalion led by a troop of the 9th Australian Cavalry set off along the winding, narrow road to **Jezzine**. Three-ton trucks, drawn from a British transport company, carried the troops. The convoy drove all night without lights. At times the trucks had to back three times before they could get round the sharp corners and the guns had to be unlimbered and man-handled.
- Sometimes the trucks bogged in the mountain streams; one overturned. There was a delay of two hours at the turn from the Sidon road where no guide had been placed, and part of the convoy continued towards Sidon and had to be recalled.
- Just south of **Jerme** was a bend so sharp that the engineers had to work on it for two hours before heavy vehicles could pass; the tail of the advance-guard was still struggling round it when the head of the main column, which had set off at 1 a.m., arrived.
- Tracked vehicles delayed the convoy, blocking progress each time a tracked vehicle broke down. Once Porter ordered that a halted tank be pushed over the side of the road.



# 13 June 1941 - Syria

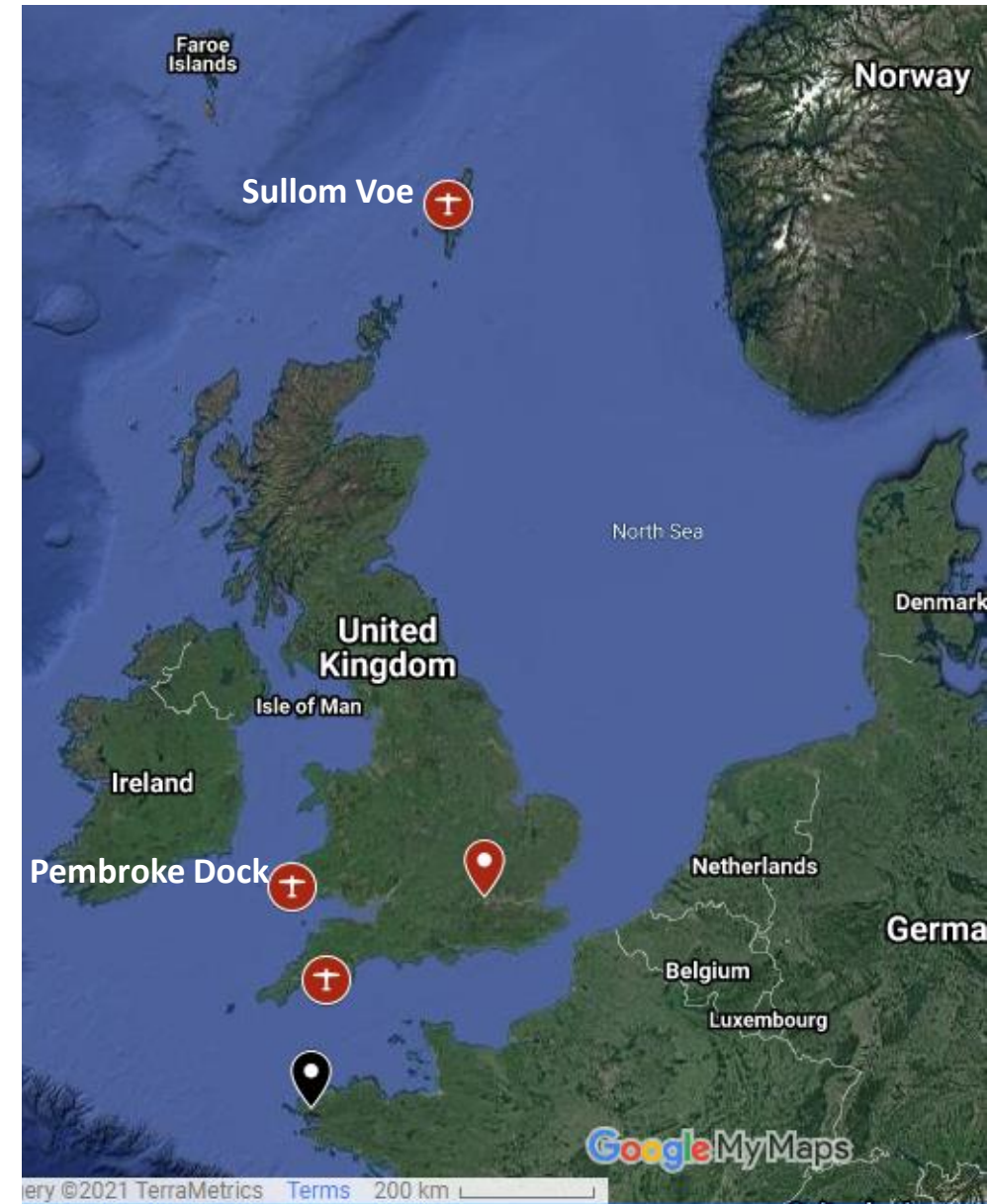
- When Brigadier Lloyd went forward on the 13th he decided that the enemy's positions at Kiswe were so strong that only a carefully-organised attack with artillery support would take them.
- He returned to the field ambulance at Deraa to discuss this proposal with the wounded Free French leader, who agreed that further attack, under Lloyd's command, should be postponed until the 15th. As a preliminary, on the 13th, the Indian brigade moved two of its battalions forward.





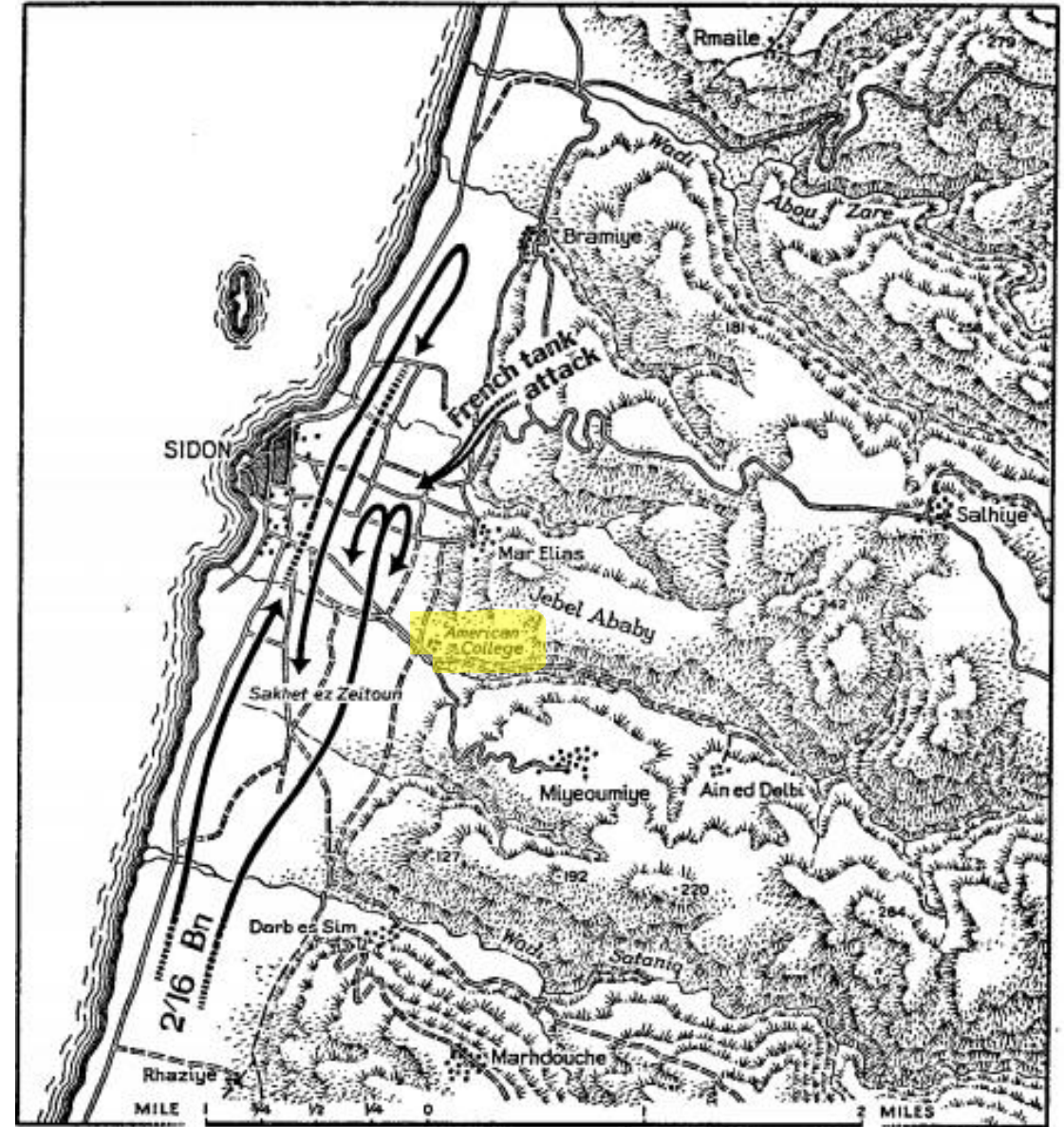
# 13 June 1941 – Atlantic

- The move of the "pocket-battleship" Lutzow up the Norwegian coast, as if attempting to break out into the Atlantic, led on 11th June to one Sunderland being sent from Pembroke Dock to Sullom Voe in the Shetlands to shadow this German "pocket-battleship".
- The aircraft returned to Pembroke Dock after one negative patrol on 13th June, as that day Beauforts of No. 42 Squadron R.A.F. had torpedoed the Lutzow which put back to Kiel.



# 14 June 1941 - Syria

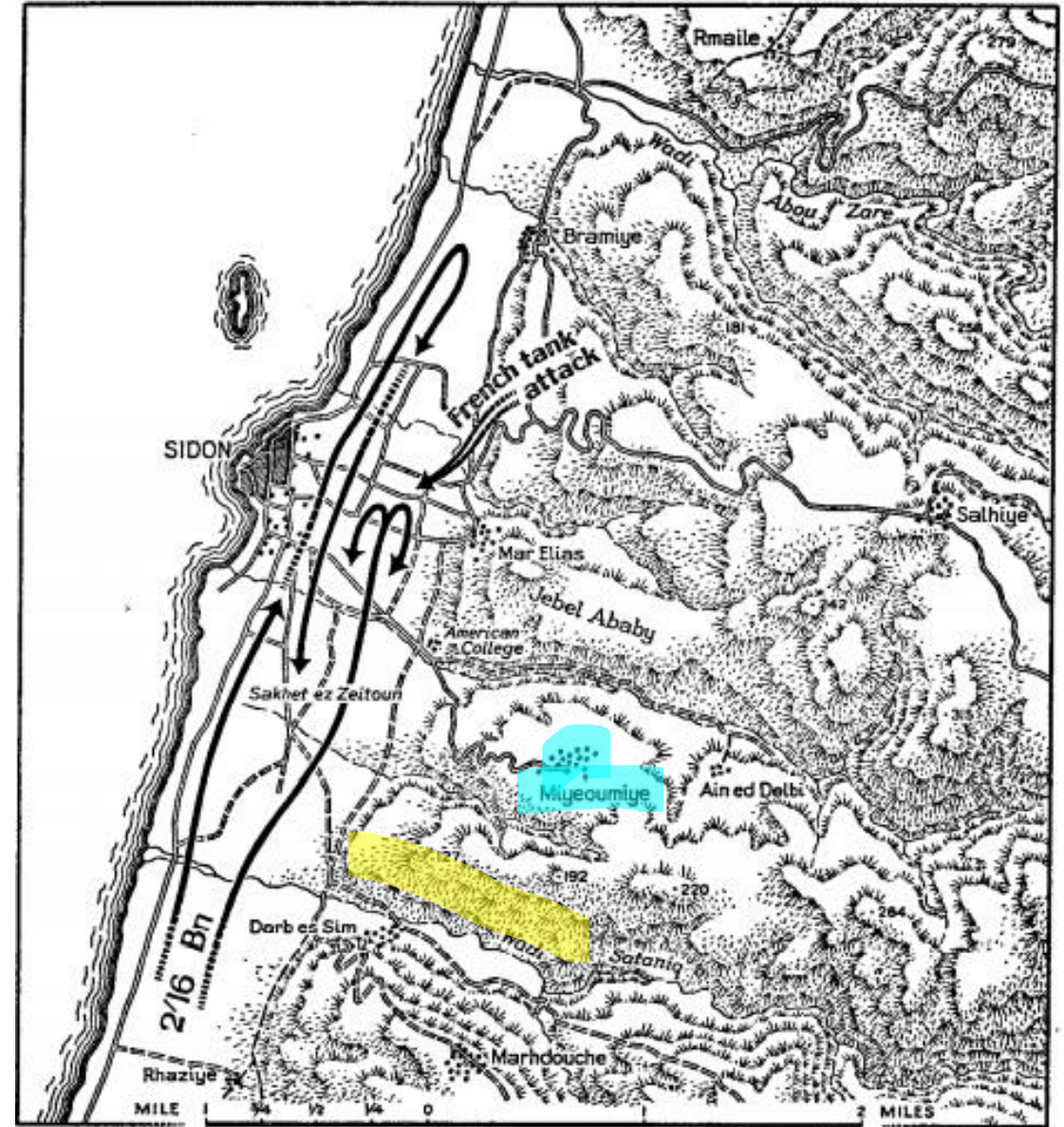
- During 14th June the 2/16th Battalion was still in the gardens south of Sidon.
- At 4.30 p.m. the French counter-attacked with about eight tanks and infantry, which advanced, as on the previous day, from behind the **American College**.
- Brigadier Stevens saw the opening of the attack from the artillery observation post; artillery fire was brought down immediately at about 4,000 yards, and two tanks were hit and the attack broken.





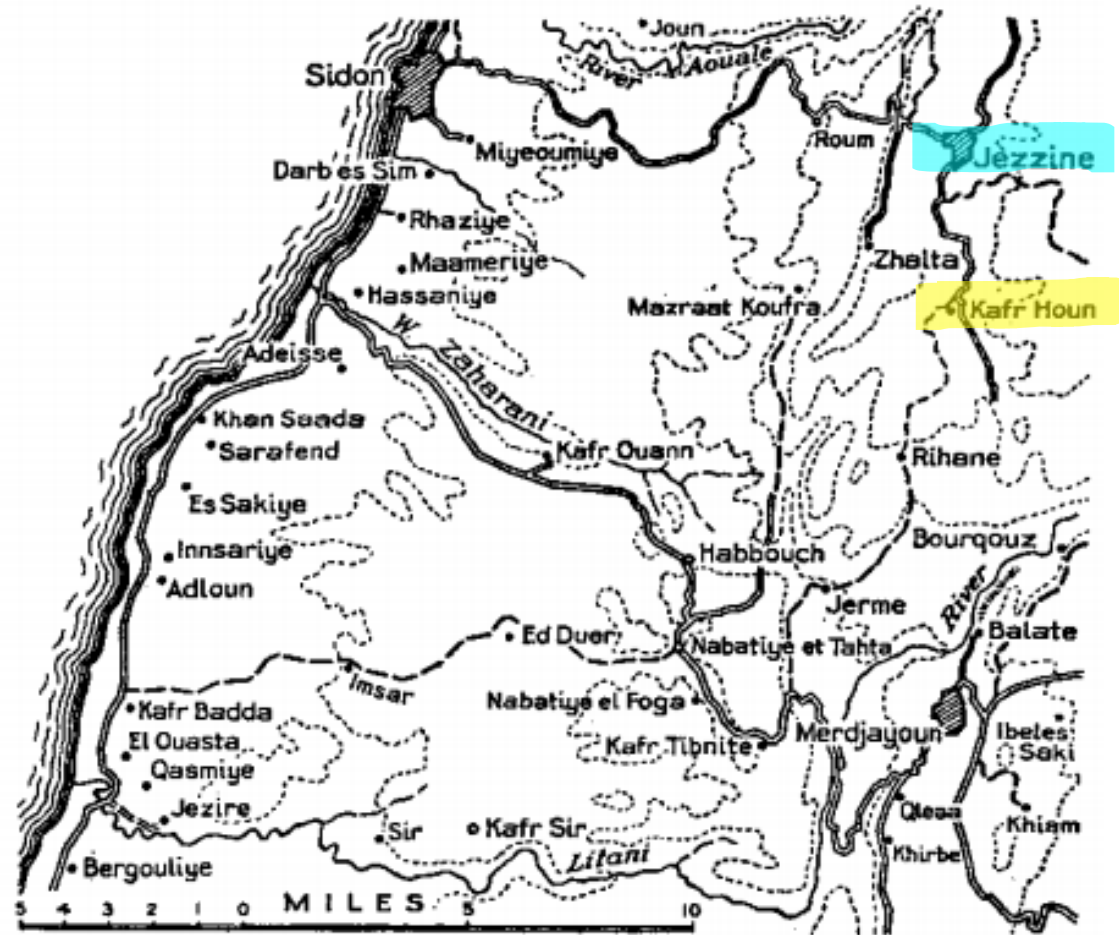
# 14 June 1941 - Syria

- The start-line for the 2/27ths attack—to open at 9.30 a.m.—was the ridge on the opposite side of the Sataniq from Darb es Sim. The objective was Miyeoumiye where a large building with a tiled roof was a conspicuous landmark.
- Sergeant Macpherson's platoon on the right gained the objective, killed or took prisoner forty of the enemy and returned after becoming isolated because the rest of the battalion failed to make any ground.



# 14 June 1941 - Syria

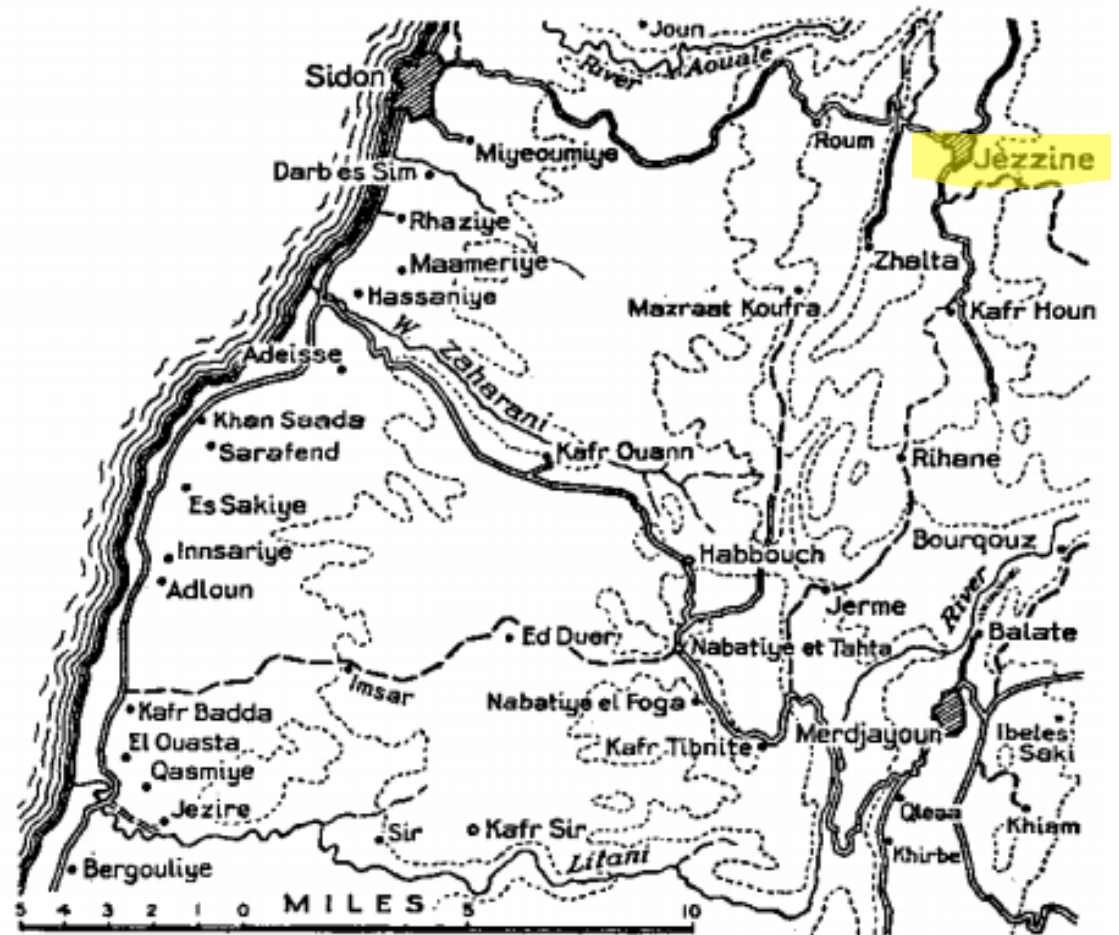
- By daybreak on the 14th the column had reached Kafr Houn.
- Here the head of the column was fired on by riflemen in the hills beyond. The companies debussed and marched forward towards Green Hill, dominating Jezzine, where the cavalrymen had reported strong enemy positions.
- About 3 miles south of Jezzine, Porter was shot through the thigh but insisted that it was not serious and carried on.
- He attacked with two companies forward. A troop of field guns and the battalion's mortars were in support, the guns deployed only 1,000 yards from the enemy's position.
- The attackers formed up under mortar and artillery fire on a rocky outcrop facing Green Hill. The hill below them and the face of Green Hill were terraced every ten yards or so, the terraces being up to three feet high. Vines covered the slopes. At 6 p.m. "As the guns opened up the men surged down the hill like ants." They jumped down the terraces, so well dispersed, moving so fast, and making such skilful use of what cover offered that Captain Robson's company reached the road without a casualty, though under rifle and machine-gun fire and completely exposed.





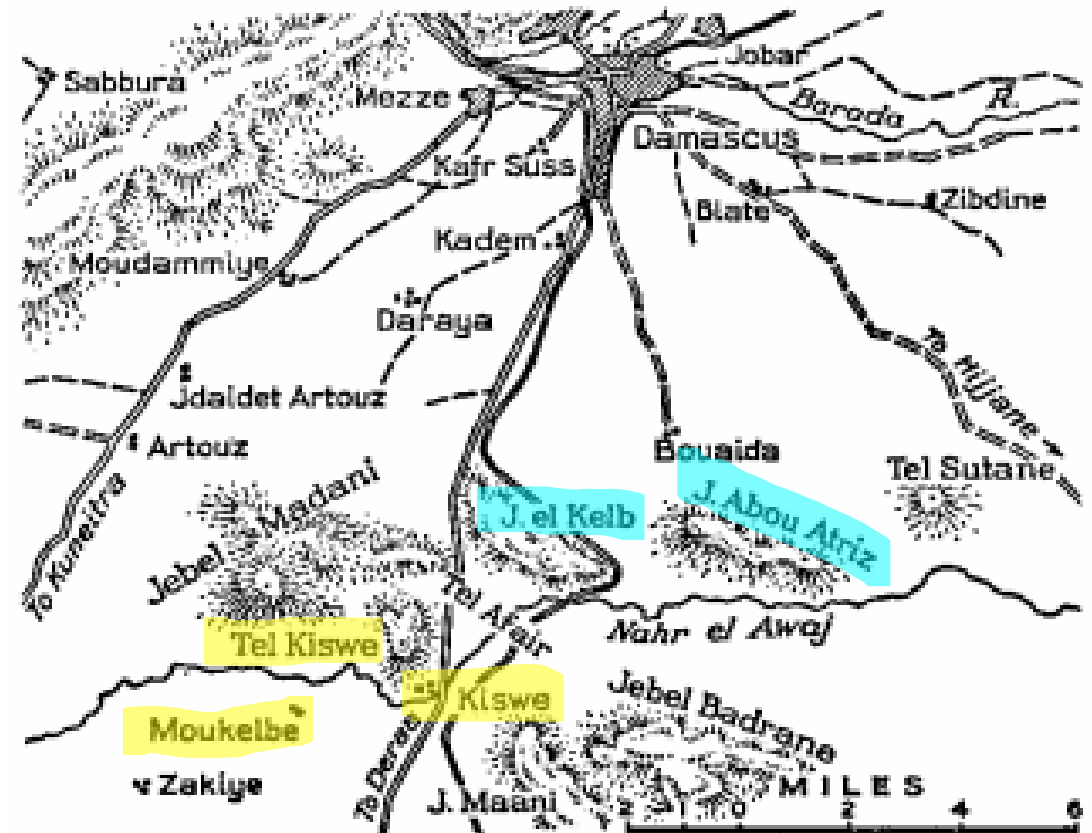
# 14 June 1941 - Syria

- The French fought for the hill. Private Luffy in Houston's company saw a section in the platoon on his left held up by a machine-gun just in front. He stalked to the rear of the French position and killed the five Frenchmen in the post with rifle and bayonet. The attacking companies lost four men killed and eight wounded.
- At the bottom of the hill was a flat area about 100 yards across, swept by the fire of machine-guns. The men sprinted across it—casualties were heavier there—and climbed to the summit over - looking Jezzine itself.
- Porter ordered the two rear companies to pass through the forward ones and push on to the town. The final advance to Jezzine was down a cliff face so steep that the men had to scramble all the way, swinging down the terraces with the help of vines and the branches of trees, and often falling.
- There was no opposition now. When, about 8.30 p.m., the troops entered the town riderless French cavalry horses were roaming round the streets.



# 14 June 1941 - Syria

- On the 14th Brigadier Lloyd had replaced the wounded General Legentilhomme in command of the British and Free French forces; Colonel Jones took over the Indian brigade.
- Lloyd's plan of attack provided that the Indian brigade, plus the Free French battalion of marines, should attack west of the road before dawn on the 15th and occupy Moukelbe, Tel Kiswe and Kiswe village, whereupon, about 8 a.m. , Colonel Casseau's Free French brigade on the right was to advance and take Jebel Abou Atriz and Jebel Kelb.
- It was believed that a Vichy Moroccan and Tunisian battalion were in and round Kiswe and two Foreign Legion battalions at Tel Kiswe and Moukelbe; thus the defenders outnumbered the attackers. In addition, conflicting sentiments were taking the heart out of the French mercenaries.
- Casseau had two Senegalese battalions and one Foreign Legion, and they now faced Senegalese and Foreign Legion battalions on the Vichy side. Their enthusiasm was visibly waning.



# 14 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- From the 9th June onward No. 3 Squadron had flown frequent patrols over the naval squadron.
- On the 14th, eight Tomahawks led by Jeffrey shot down three out of eight German Ju-88's which were attacking it.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

010926

Armourers working on a Tomahawk Mk.II from No. 3 Squadron RAAF in North Africa, 23 December 1941.

# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- During the morning of the 15th, acting on Macpherson's information that the enemy had abandoned Miyeoumiye, Moten moved the 2/27th Battalion forward into that village and on to the "Monastery" (which had been French headquarters) without opposition. It was soon apparent that there had been a considerable French withdrawal.
- Moten suspected that Sidon itself had been abandoned, and Sergeant Johns removed his steel helmet and equipment, mounted a captured motor-cycle, and rode into the town and up the main street. As soon as he returned Moten, at 11.15 a.m., entered the town with a few men of his headquarters, demanded and saw the mayor, who said that the French had withdrawn in the night, and appealed to him to stop the shelling—the naval ships were firing on the northern outskirts, the field guns on the southern.
- Thereupon Moten commandeered a taxi and drove back to Stevens' headquarters to report.
- Stevens entered the town and at 4 p.m. formally took it over from the mayor and proclaimed martial law.



Australian troops at the Crusader castle in  
Sidon



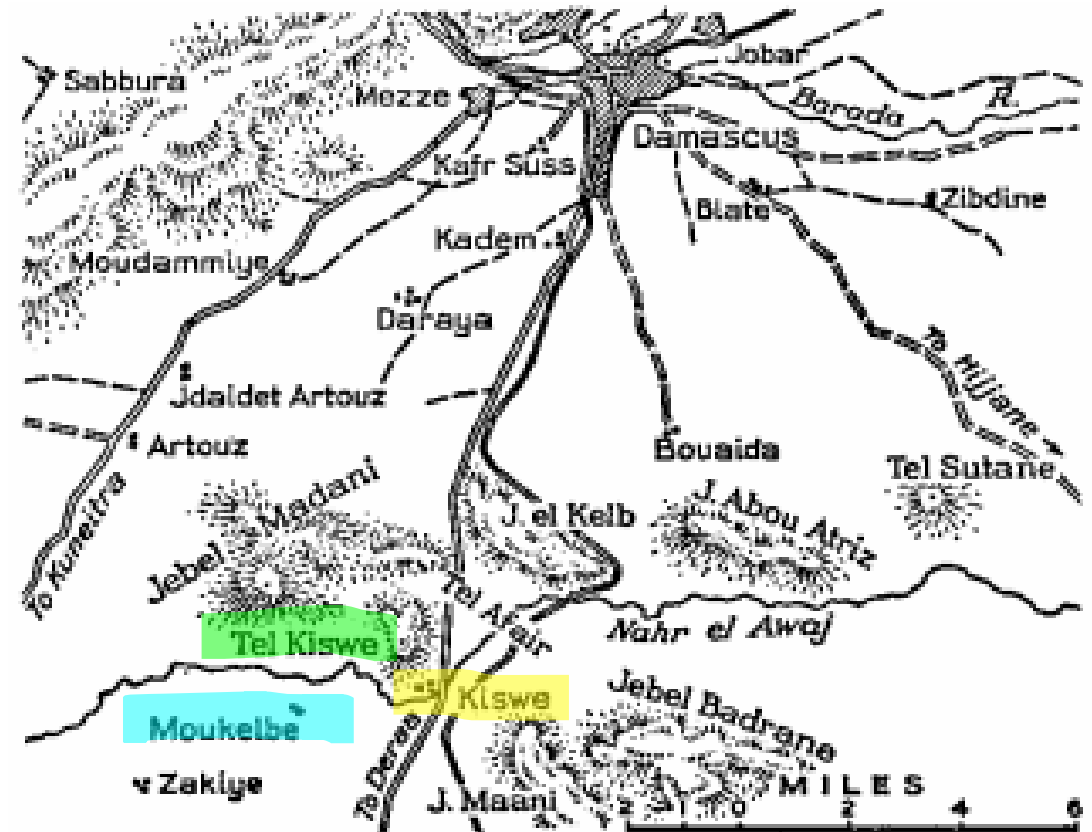
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- It soon became evident that the French had not only abandoned **Sidon** but made a long withdrawal. Cavalry patrols found the coast road clear as far north as **Ras Nebi Younes**, and the lateral roads north of Sidon unoccupied as far as **Salhiye, Jamliye** and **Seblin**.
- That night the weary infantrymen washed, ate a hot meal and had their first genuine rest for several nights.



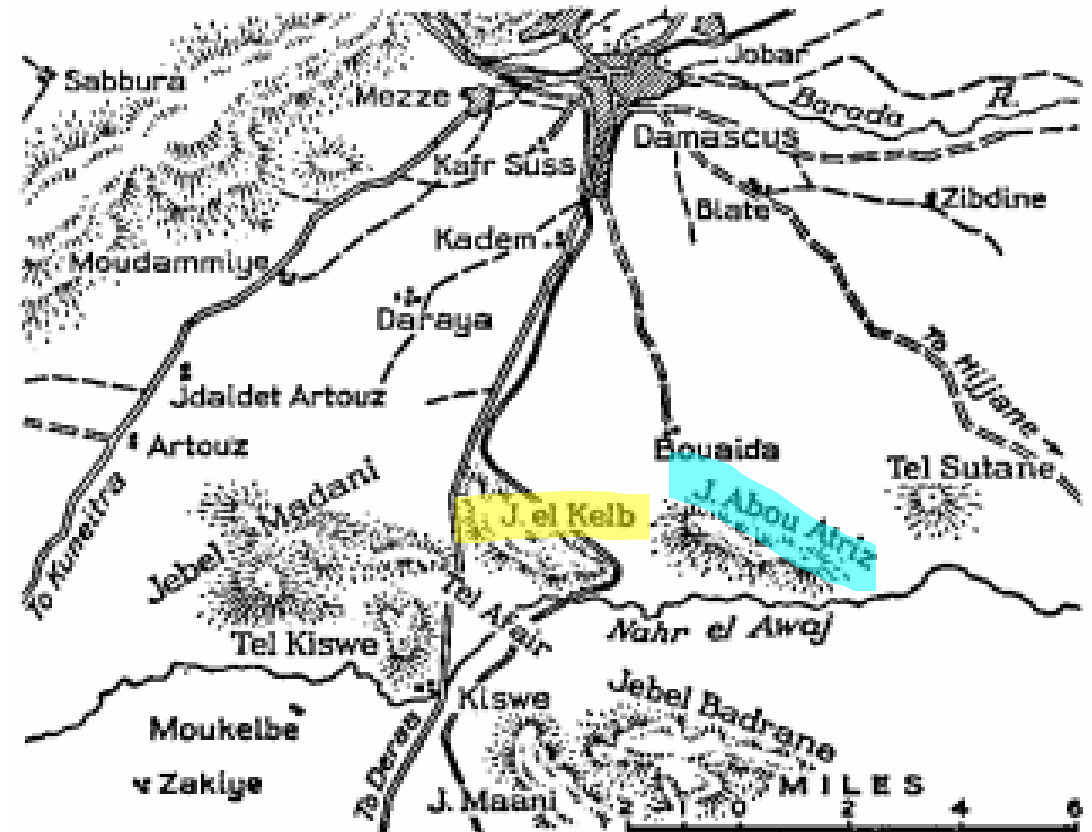
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- At 4.30 a.m. the 3/1st Punjab Battalion, with a company of the 1/Royal Fusiliers on its left, moved out to attack **Kiswe** village, carrying thirty wooden ladders with which to cross an anti-tank ditch 13 feet wide and about the same in depth.
- The guns of the 1st Field Regiment fired on **Tel Kiswe** and the enemy positions below it as the Indians advanced in the darkness, and, just before 6 a.m., the infantry crossed the wadi east of the village, and confused fighting began in the gardens and houses.
- By 8.30 the French were beaten. A determined attack in the darkness, though made without tanks across an area that offered little cover and against an enemy twice as strong, had succeeded.
- At once the Rajputana began to move forward through the Punjab to attack Tel Kiswe. In little more than an hour the Rajputana, veterans of Keren, had taken the hill, and by 11.30 the French marines and the Fusiliers on the left had taken **Moukelbe**.
- Four Vichy French battalions had been forced out of their positions and the enemy flank had been broken.



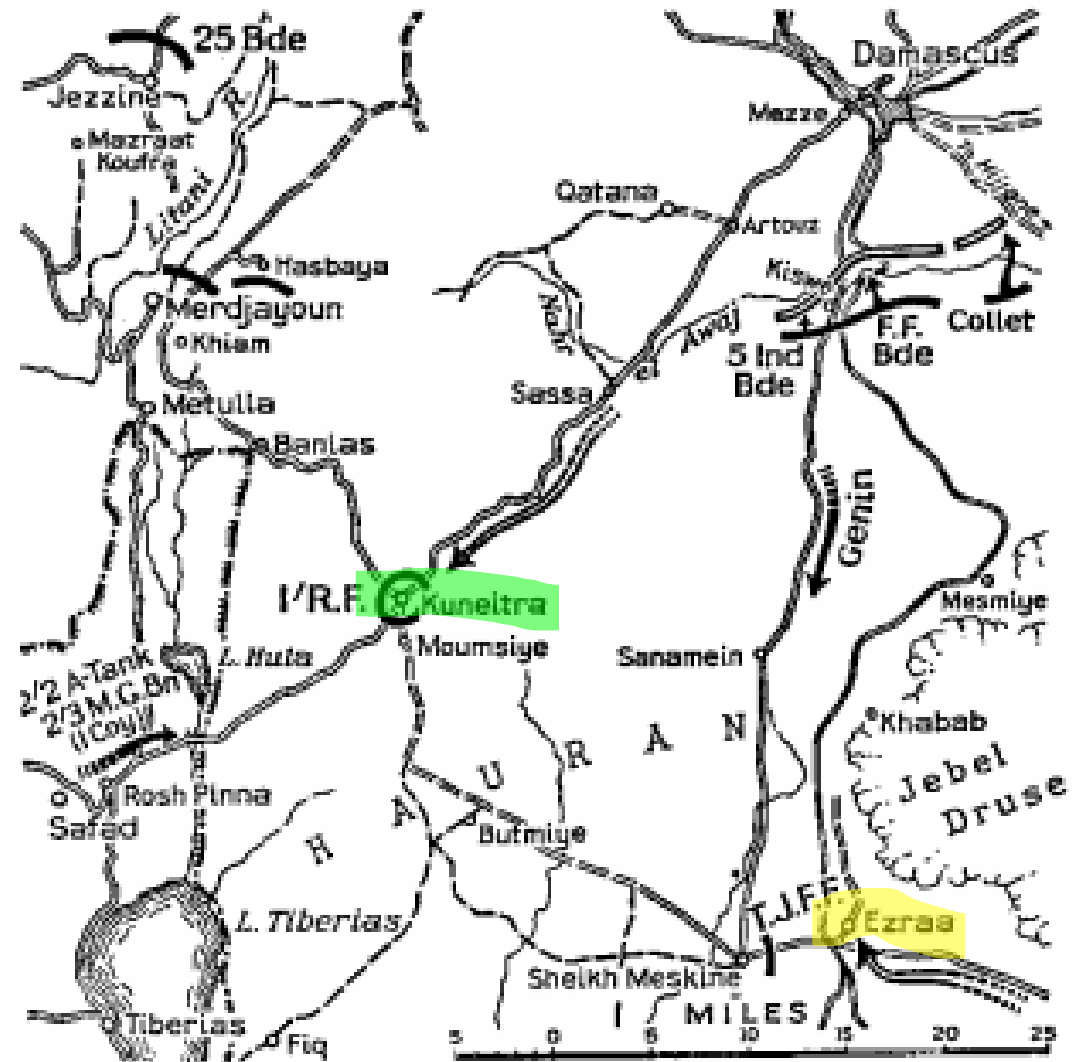
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- On the right, however, the Free French attack failed. The **Jebel el Kelb** was taken, but flanking fire from the **Abou Atriz** prevented further progress, and, on the far right, Colonel Collet's cavalrymen were held by artillery fire and tanks.
- Meanwhile Lloyd received disturbing news from his rear.



# 15 June 1941 - Syria

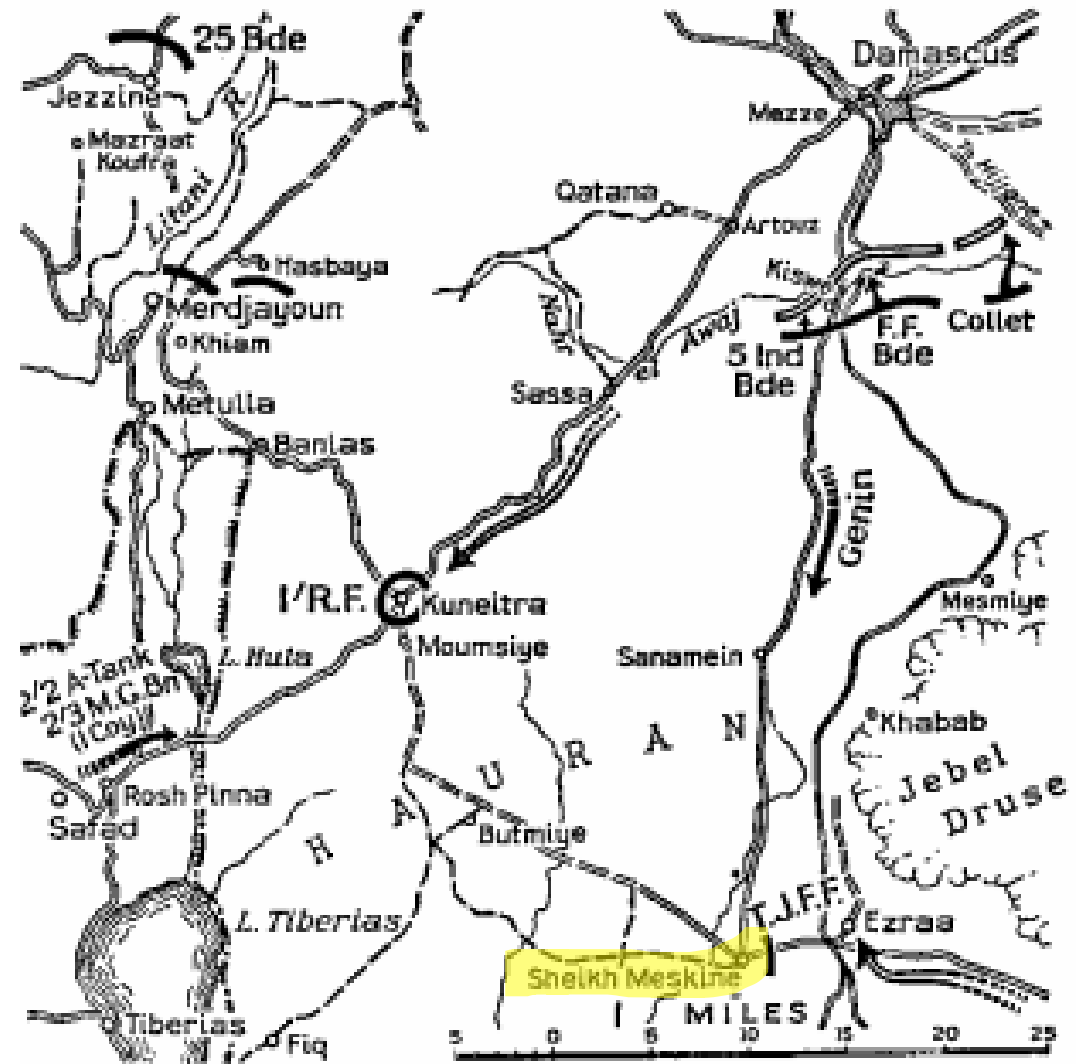
- From **Ezraa** on the railway and near the road, 35 miles behind, came a report that on the afternoon of the 14th a column of two companies of Tunisians with ten armoured cars and some artillery had recaptured the town, driving out the two squadrons of the Transjordan Frontier Force, which took up a position across the Ezraa-Sheikh Meskine road.
- From **Kuneitra** came news that a strong force was advancing against that town from the north-east. About 2.30 a.m. on the 15th this force, including about ten armoured cars, had moved out from Sassa and driven off the company of the 1/Royal Fusiliers, which, with a few carriers and two armoured cars had been sent forward from Kuneitra and was in position four miles south of Sassa.
- During the day the enemy appeared to be sending south towards Kuneitra large bodies of infantry, tanks and cavalry. The Indian and Free French force had merely blocked the Kuneitra-Damascus road and advanced on Damascus along the circuitous route through Kiswe, leaving the Vichy French force astride the Kuneitra road to its own devices.
- It now appeared that this force, and their garrison in the Jebel Druse, which had also been by-passed, had sallied out to cut both roads behind the invader.





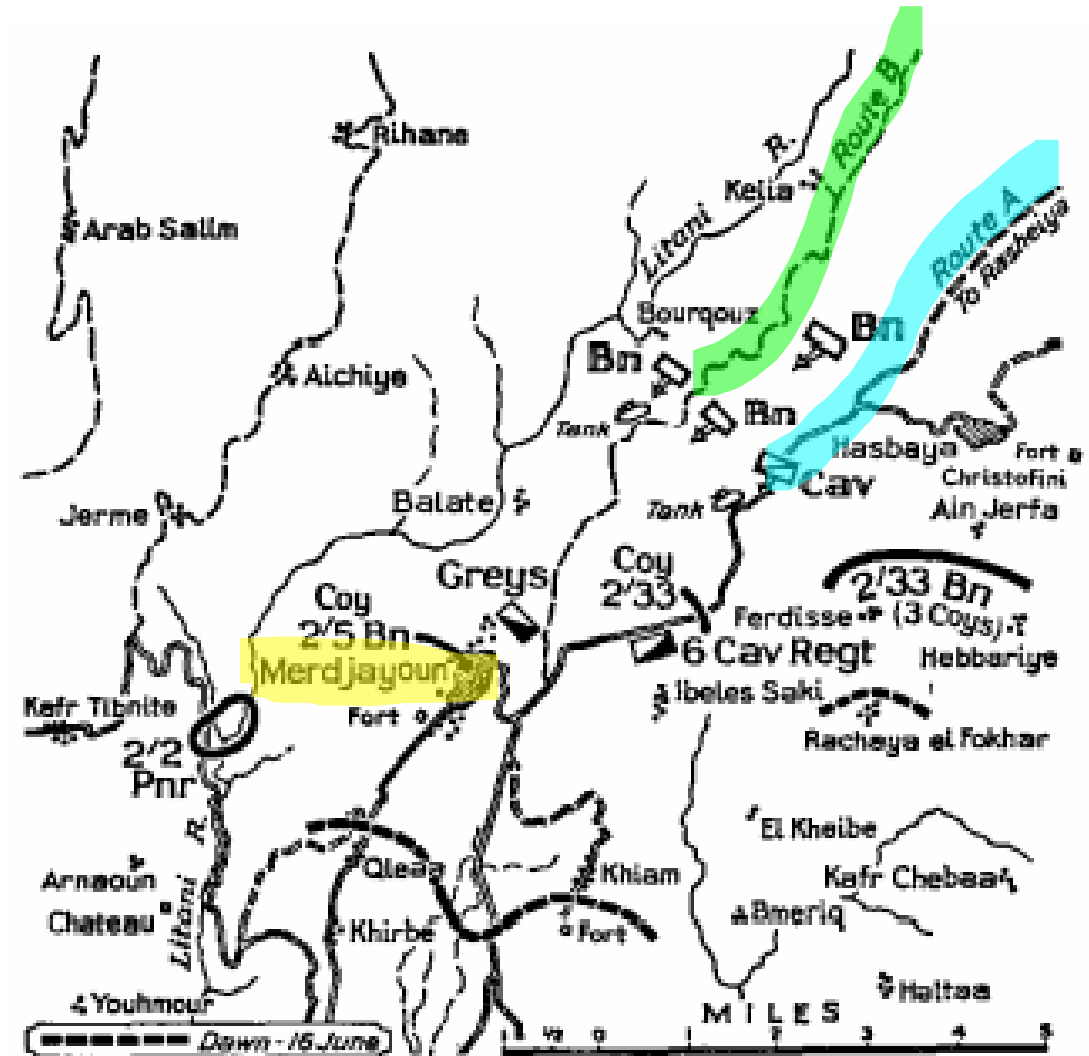
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- Promptly Lloyd sent a column consisting of two companies of Free French troops and some British guns under Colonel Genin towards **Sheikh Meskine** to hold that road.



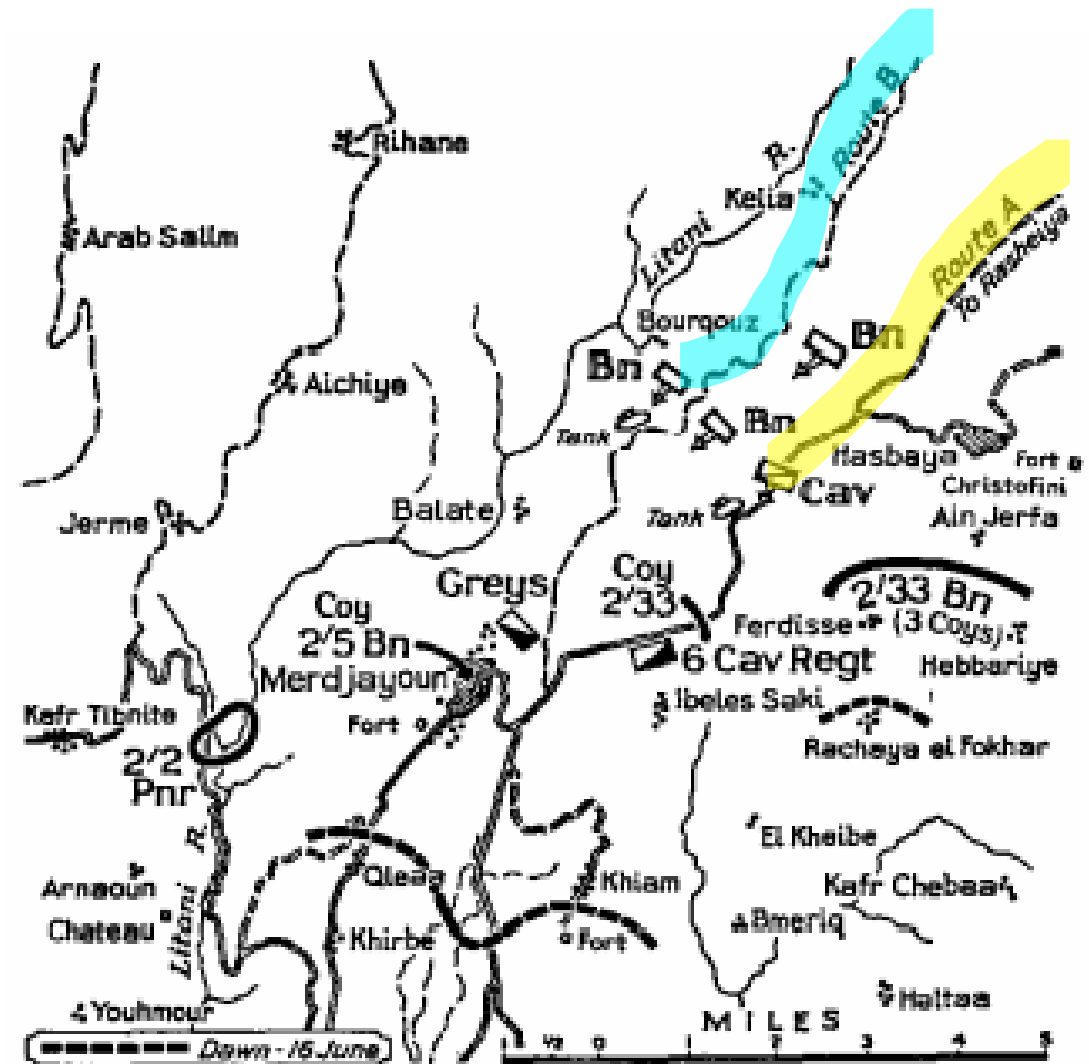
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- On the afternoon of the 15th French guns opened fire on the British positions north of Merdjayoun.
- One company of the 2/33rd was astride Route "A" at "Windy Corner", under the command of Major Onslow of the 6th Cavalry, who had his two squadrons in the same area.
- Between the road and Ibeles Said were a platoon of machine-guns (Lieutenant Clarke), two anti-tank guns and the 10th Field Battery, one of whose observers, Captain Brown, was on the slopes overlooking "Windy Corner" from the south, while the other (Captain Hodges) overlooked Route "B" from a post on the south end of Balate Ridge.
- At 3 p.m. a rapid concentration of shells fell on Balate Ridge and round it, and, half an hour later, ten French tanks and about fifty cavalymen appeared on Route "B" and deployed across the valley, while what appeared to be two companies of infantry assembled on the north end of Balate Ridge and set up machine-guns there.
- About 4.30 p.m. tanks attacked along both routes. As they came round "Windy Corner" they were hotly engaged by the anti-tank gunners and machine-guns from the Ibeles Saki slopes.
- The gunners hit and disabled the leading tank and two others retired hastily round the corner and concentrated their fire on the machine-guns. At the same time French troops on "Col's Ridge", towering above the road on the northern side, opened heavy fire with mortars and machine-guns on gun positions of the 2/5th 200 feet below them and about 1,200 yards away.



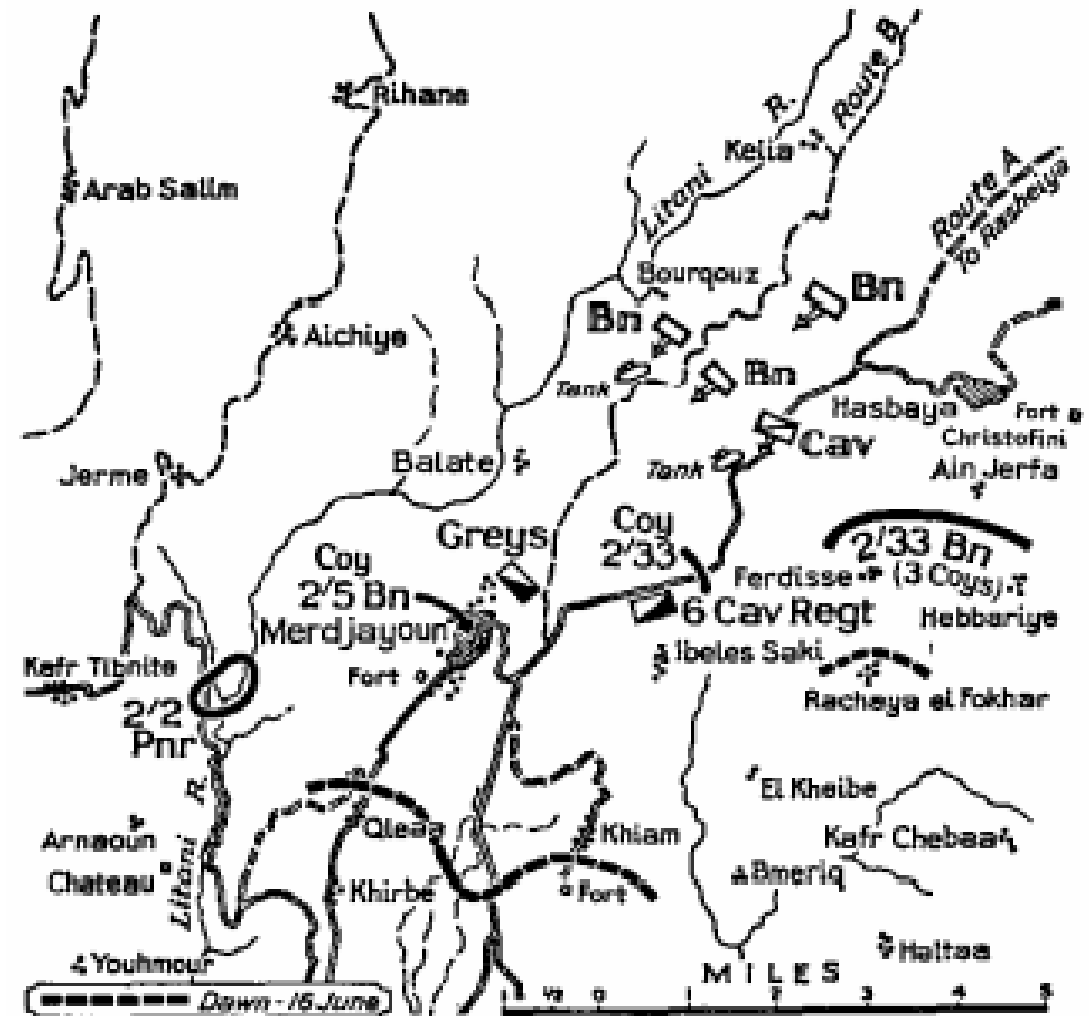
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- On Route "B", where the French were attacking in greater strength, supported by intense artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire, the Greys had now begun to withdraw down the road while the French tanks drove forward under hot bombardment from field and anti-tank guns.
- Eleven tanks attacked here. In quick succession four were put out of action; the remainder withdrew round the bend in the road. Meanwhile the enemy infantry were steadily advancing.
- At Route "A" two anti-tank guns were overrun; at Route "B" after a second duel with the enemy tanks the guns were withdrawn. The line to Hodge's observation post was cut and a gunner sent back to find what was happening returned with the news that the Greys had gone back.
- Hodge and his team then withdrew.
- There was now a general withdrawal along the whole front. On the right the tanks had been held thus far but the situation seemed dangerous. Monaghan instructed Onslow to coordinate the retirement of the troops in the forward area, and then went to Todd and suggested that the Greys should hold the high ground immediately north of Merdjayoun while Monaghan held Khiam and organised a counter-attack by his companies round Rachaya el Fokhar.



# 15 June 1941 - Syria

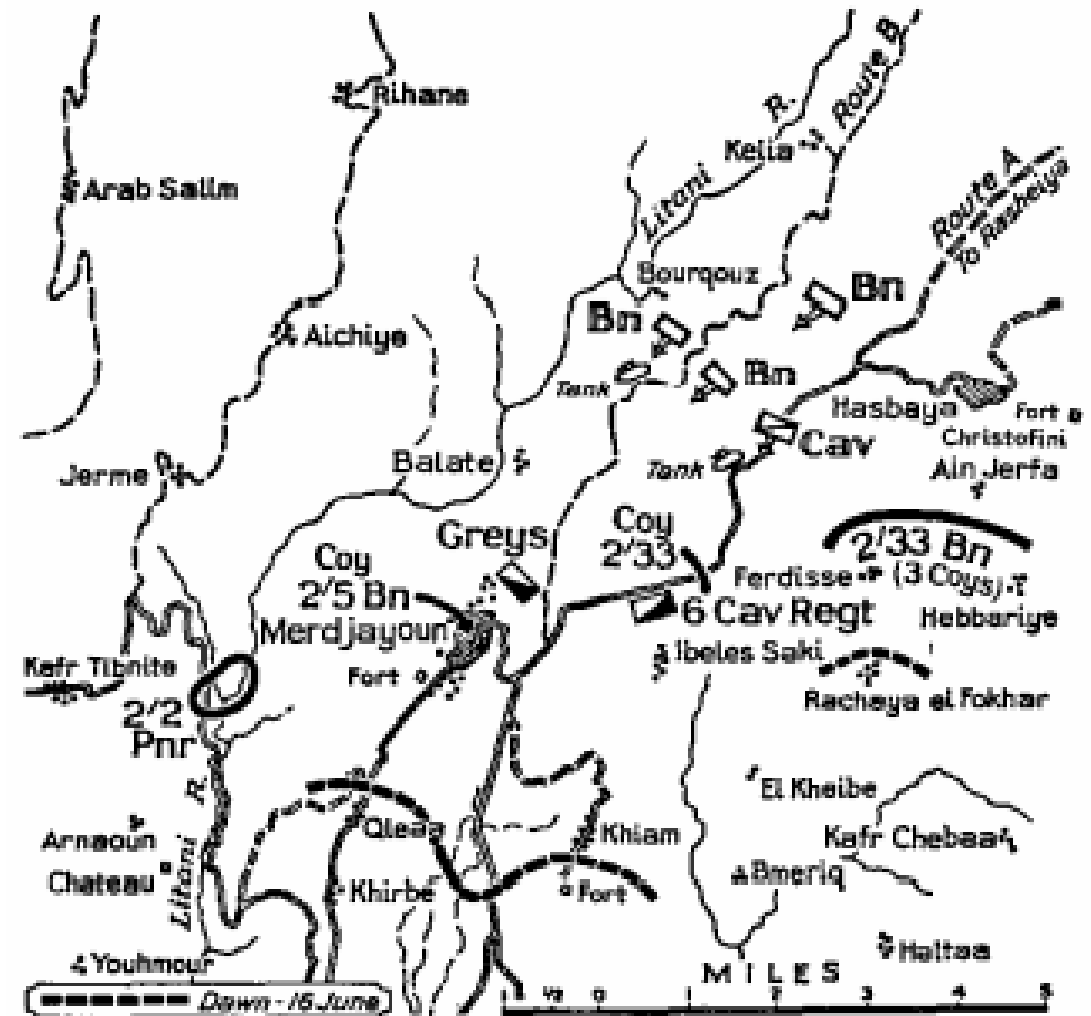
- The French continued to press the attack. At 7.15 p.m. about two companies of French infantry, following intense artillery and machine-gun fire, drove the squadron off the Balate Ridge and it withdrew to Merdjayoun. At 8 p.m.
- Mayberry who now, though not being pressed, was 700 yards north of the leading enemy troops, withdrew to Merdjayoun, where he was instructed to join a troop of the Greys, which, with two anti-tank guns, had orders to hold a road-block in the town until 2.45 a.m. on the 16th, while the regiment prepared and occupied defensive positions at Qleaa.
- At 4.45 it was decided to withdraw the field guns a troop at a time to the Qleaa road junction. One troop moved out safely through Merdjayoun to a position near Qleaa and continued firing.
- Drivers bringing up ammunition found a canteen at the Police Post abandoned and brought forward to the gun teams not only ammunition but cases of beer and cigarettes. However, at 5.15 p.m., when tanks were advancing astride Route "A" and French machine-guns were firing from the slopes northeast of Ibeles Saki, four guns were still in the battery position near Ibeles Saki.





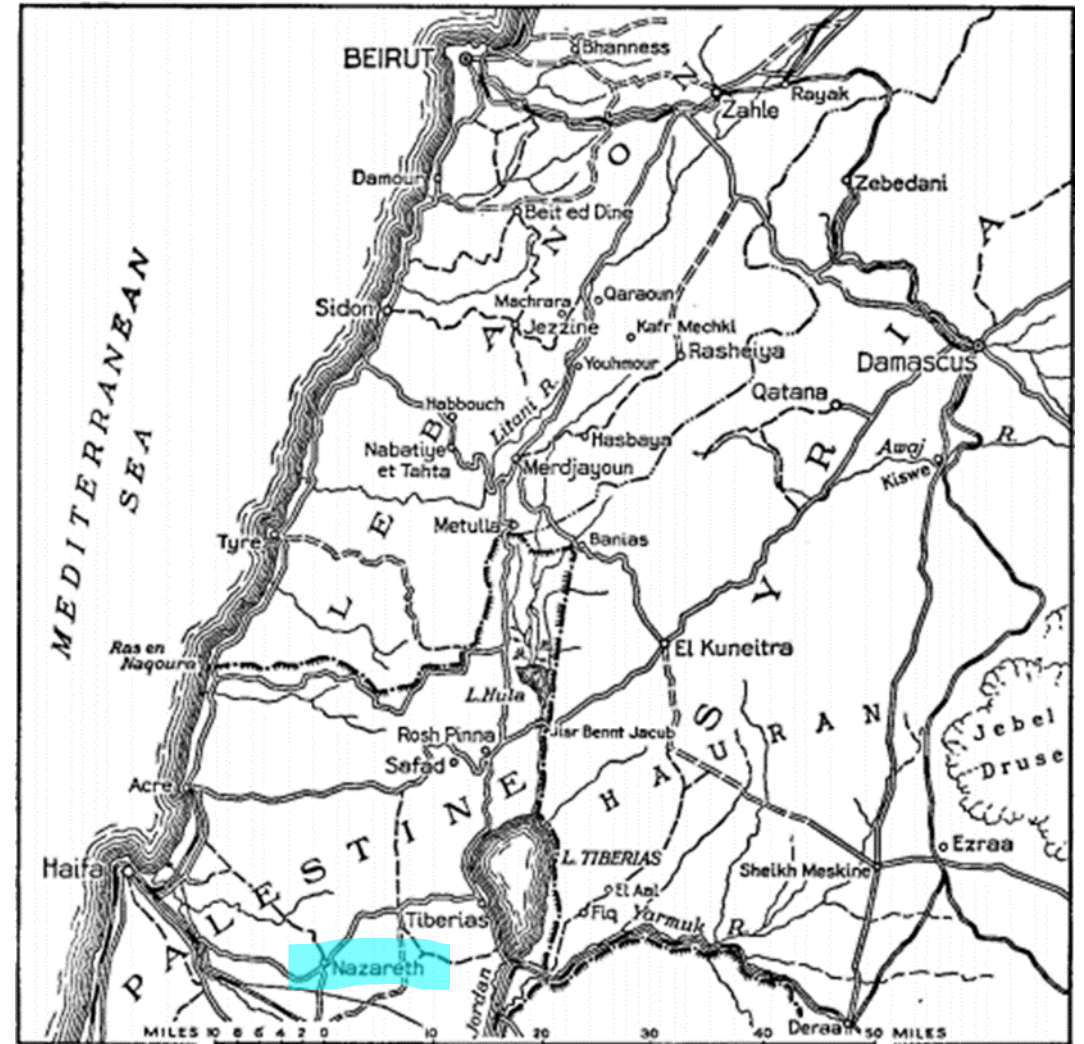
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- Infantrymen were moving past exclaiming that tanks were coming and, when a driver informed Major Humbley, the battery commander, that tanks were on Route "A", he decided that the guns must be withdrawn directly along the terraced wadi leading south to Khiam.
- Under machine-gun fire from Ibeles Saki the column of trucks and guns moved off and bumped their way along the wadi. Three vehicles, disabled by the rough going, were abandoned. Farther on, in an effort to avoid the difficult country, a leading driver began to make a detour, but it led the column to a series of three stone terraces where runways were furiously cut with picks and shovels and the guns themselves hauled up the slope with winches. Lieutenant Gilhooly brought the rear gun into action and fired at the French on Col's Knoll—the southern end of Col's Ridge—over open sights.
- From the top of the hill the guns were driven back to the Khiam-Banias road junction. At dusk the troop of field guns at Qleaa withdrew to Metulla.



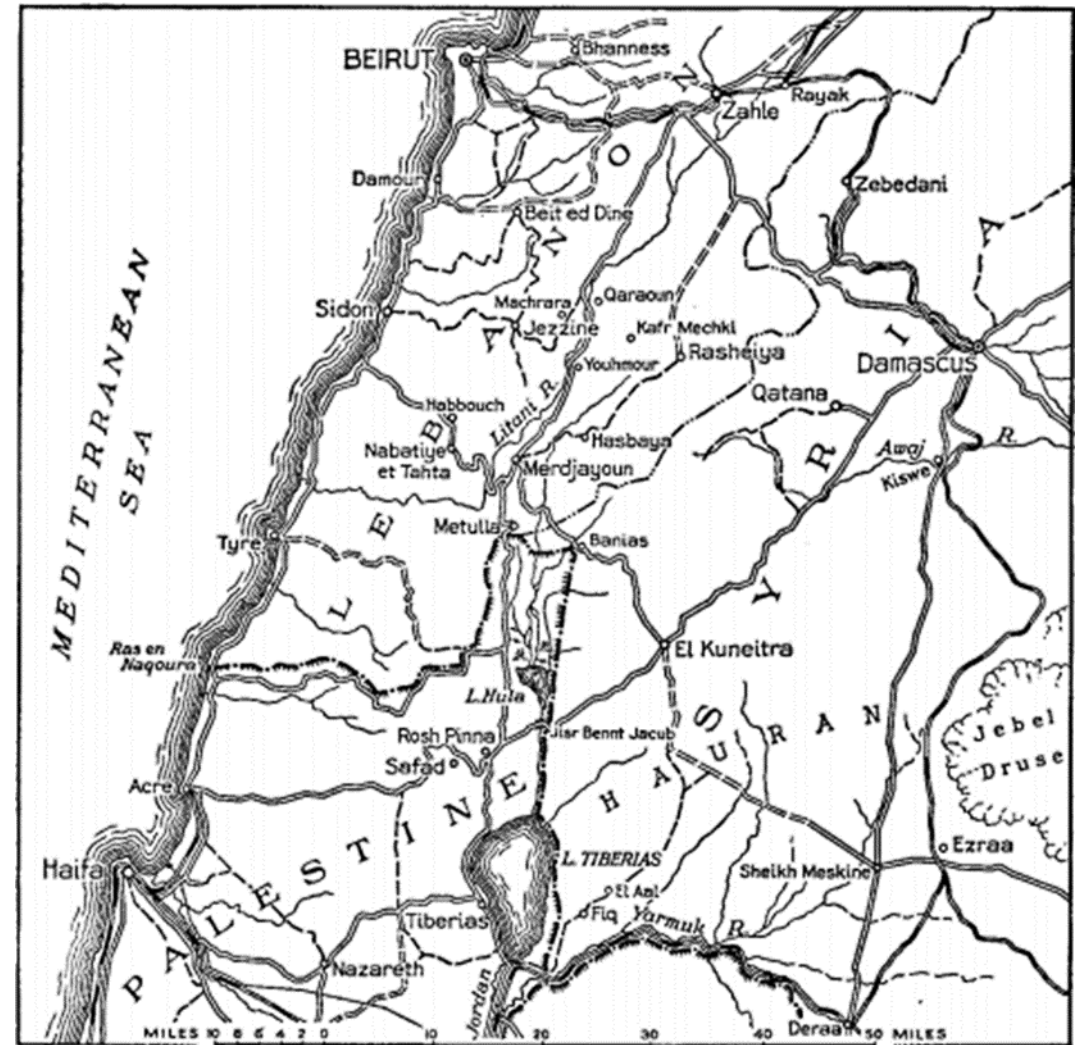
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- Early in the afternoon alarm had begun to spread among bodies of troops behind the forward positions. Reports were rapidly circulated that "the tanks had broken through", and were in Merdjayoun and approaching Ibeles Saki.
- An Australian artillery officer saw a troop of the Greys return to their vehicle park and find their vehicles gone, whereupon a "wave of panic set in among some of the men and control, both mass and individual, was lost".
- Four vehicles of the 2/5th Field Regiment "which had not received orders from the battery in the confusion, had got mixed up in a wild stampede through Metulla, and from there on every order received en route was to keep going and to get the roads clear, whilst on arrival at Rosh Pinna wild stories of tanks on the Metulla road were current and no vehicle was permitted to go forward.
- Eventually, after wandering for two days, during which Nazareth and Er Rama were visited to obtain orders, the little convoy of four trucks returned to the battery".



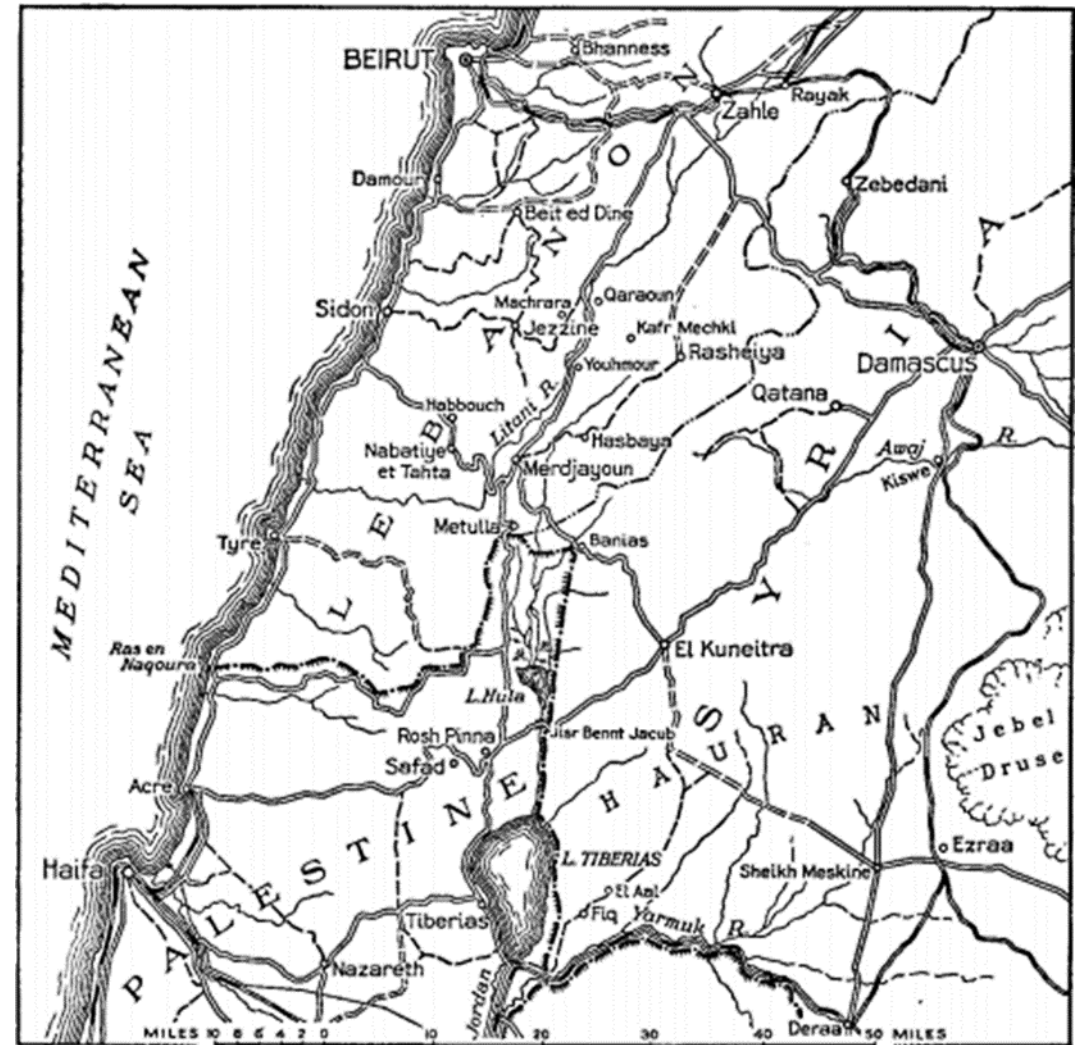
# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- This double-pronged counter-attack, with its immediate threat to the communications of all the invading forces east of the Lebanon, transformed the situation. Few reserves were available to meet it. General Wilson called upon the 7th Australian Division to furnish anti-tank guns and ammunition to help the defence of Kuneitra and ordered the 2/Queen's the leading battalion of the 16th British Brigade to Deraa.
- The reserves of the 7th Division consisted of the headquarters and two companies of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion and the headquarters and one battery of the 2/2nd Anti-Tank Regiment at Er Rama. The 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion, which might be employed as infantry, was engaged in engineer work in the 7th Division's area.
- Lavarack decided to send the depleted 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, with the remaining anti-tank battery, to hold the crossing over the Jordan at Jisr Bennt Jacob (bridge of the daughters of Jacob) and to dispatch a proportion of the anti-tank and machine-guns north towards Metulla. The 2/2nd Pioneers were ordered to prepare the Litani bridge west of Merdjayoun for demolition and to protect the crossing.



# 15 June 1941 - Syria

- These decisions disposed of Lavarack's only reserves.
- Lavarack then ordered that the 2/25th Battalion, the 2/5th Field Regiment (one of whose batteries was already with Monaghan) and a troop of the 2/6th should move from Jezzine to the Merdjayoun sector.
- The order to guard the Jordan crossings reached Lieut-Colonel Blackburn of the 2/3rd Machine Gun at 6.30 p.m. on the 15th, and he hastened forward from Er Rama to reconnoitre, driving as fast as he could without lights over a twisting road crowded with vehicles. As he descended into the Jordan Valley a thick mist was enveloping road and river. He reached the bridge about midnight and found some British horsed cavalry guarding it.





# 15 June 1941 - Mediterranean

- In the evening of the 15th June German dive bombers severely damaged Isis with near misses; and two hours later a formation of sixteen or so French aircraft attacked the force and similarly damaged and incapacitated Ilex (photo).



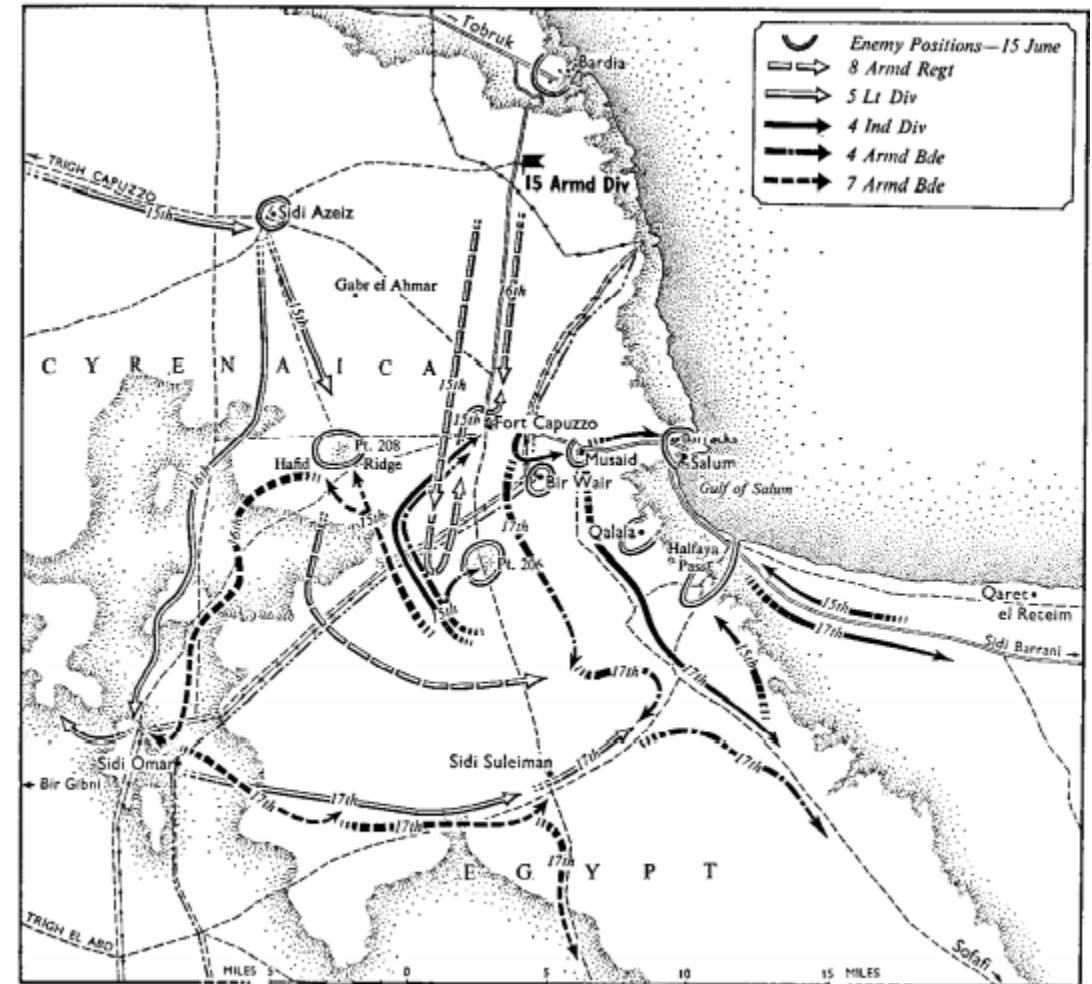
# 15 June 1941 - Egypt

- Certain disquieting facts had come to light since the first week of May when Wavell had predicted that an effective blow might be struck in about a month's time.
- The British armoured cars had proved very vulnerable to air attack and were out-gunned and out-paced by the heavy German cars; this was a great handicap in the fight for information.
- The 'I' tanks were too slow for the armoured battle in the desert and yet were vulnerable to the larger German antitank guns. The cruisers, a little faster than the German mediums, were too liable to breakdowns.
- General Wavell (photo) confided all this to the CIGS, General Dill, in a telegram of 28th May, and added that he had doubts about the measure of success to be expected of 'BATTLEAXE'. He did not think that the first stage would fail, but he thought there might be insufficient strength left for the second.
- He had impressed upon General Beresford-Peirse that this very important operation was to be carried out with the utmost boldness and resolution.



# 15 June 1941 - Egypt

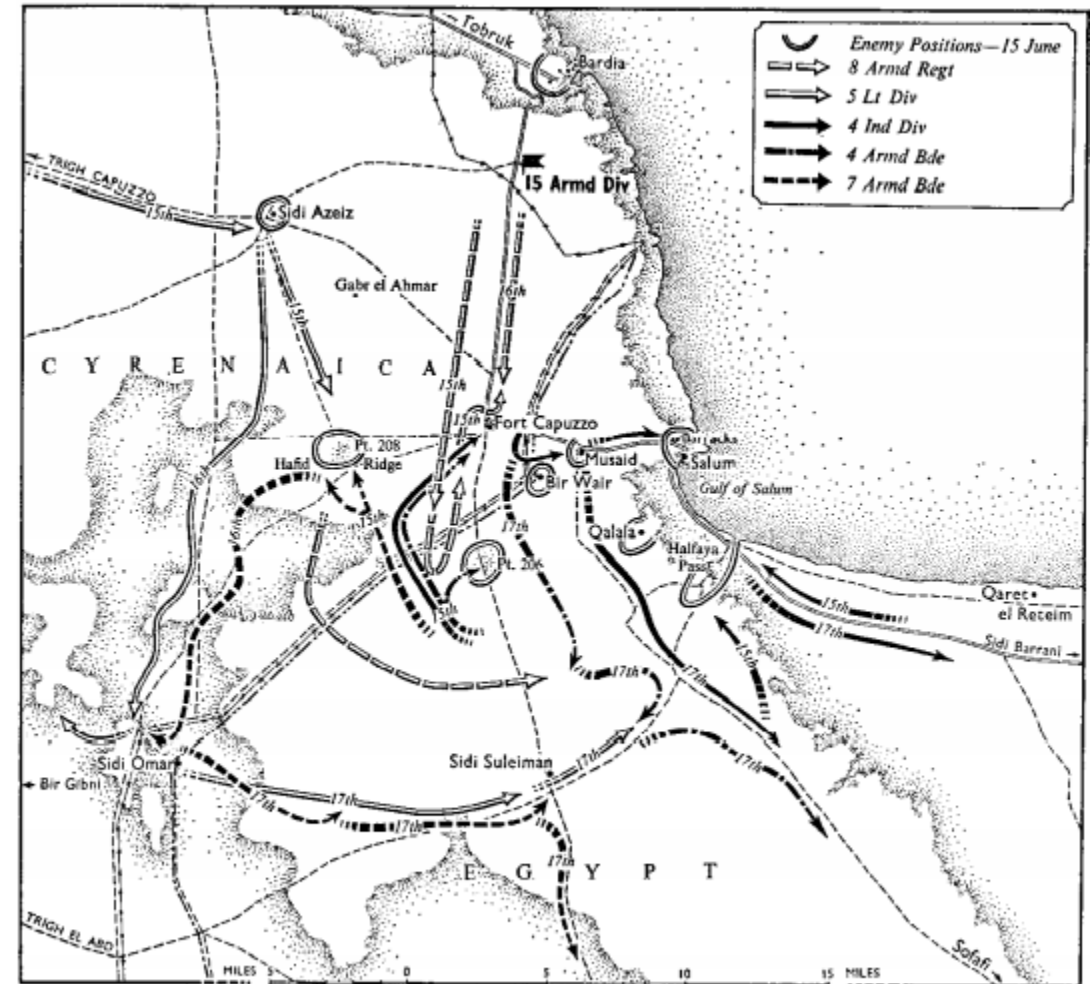
- On 15th June Battleaxe was launched. The RAF quickly established local air superiority, and the enemy made only six air attacks, all light, during the whole day.
- The attacks by the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade Group on the Halfaya Pass position failed, mainly because of the powerful anti-tank defence; above the Pass the German guns accounted for eleven out of twelve tanks engaged, while the minefields below trapped four out of six.
- On the desert flank the advance was held up all day at the Hafid ridge. The leading troops of 7th Armoured Brigade, who had previously seen only enemy patrols, discovered by 9 a.m. that a defensive position of some sort lay ahead. Morning mist had made it difficult to see the ground, and the enemy's exact dispositions were never located because the Germans were disposed in depth and well concealed among a series of ridges.
- During the day the British tanks, supported by 'Jaxo' column's troop of 25-pdrs, attacked three times, rather blindly. One attack overran part of the defences but no impression was made on the remainder. The British tanks, however, had many casualties, and by nightfall the 7th Armoured Brigade had only 48 cruisers fit to fight.



Operation BATTLEAXE

# 15 June 1941 - Egypt

- In the centre General Messervy's attack began at about 10.30 a.m., when the 4th Royal Tank Regiment advanced against Point 206. This thrust drew into action a battalion of German tanks and a hot engagement began.
- While it was going on Messervy decided to attack Fort Capuzzo, and at about 1.30 p.m. the 7th Royal Tanks were launched against it. This double attack by 4th Armoured Brigade drove the German tanks north-eastward and after some time Point 206 fell.
- Meanwhile 7th Royal Tank Regiment broke through at Capuzzo and passed beyond, but the infantry, owing apparently to a failure in communications, were late in following up to consolidate the ground won. This resulted in the tanks having to hang about, instead of rallying to replenish and reorganize.
- The enemy made several counter-attacks which were all repulsed. It was then some time after 6 p.m.
- The day had therefore ended with a failure at Halfaya on the right, a success in the centre, and a sharp check at the Hafid ridge on the left.
- The air had reported large numbers of vehicles moving eastward along the Trigh Capuzzo, which showed that the enemy was reinforcing his front.

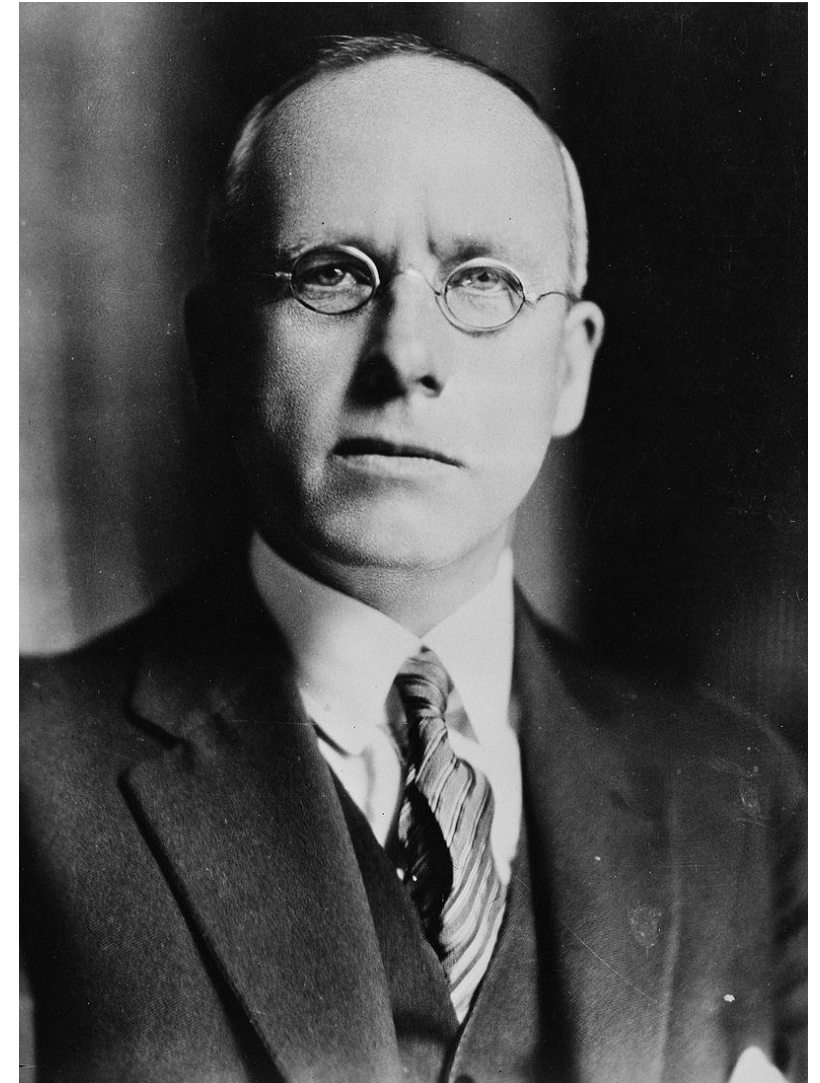


Operation BATTLEAXE



# June 1941 – Middle East

- A British Inter-Services Committee sat in Cairo to consider some aspects of the Greek campaign. At Fraser's request, it considered also some criticisms of Freyberg's conduct of the Division's retreat in Greece.
- As Freyberg reported later, the committee “upheld my action and gave me an unsolicited testimonial.”
- He was then sent for by his Prime Minister, and told that he had failed the New Zealand Government in not giving warning that the Greek operation was in his view dangerous and not feasible.
- This explosion raised forcibly the whole problem of the relations between a dominion army and its British High Command, a problem which was also being thrashed out in Australia.
- Faced with this situation, Fraser (photo) laid down plainly the conditions under which the New Zealand Expeditionary Force should continue to be used. ‘No matter who your commander in chief or what his rank may be, it is your duty to keep us in touch with the situation.’ In particular Freyberg was required, when the Division was ordered into action, to satisfy himself personally that air cover and armoured support was adequate. ‘We are not going to have another Greece and Crete.’



C.O.I.C. DAILY SUMMARY OF OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

L.O.D.  
D.N.I.  
D.D.M.I.  
D.O.I.

Serial No.DS/26

0800/14K-0800/15K.

North of Australia Station.

C in C. China  
0064Z/14.

C in C China 1  
1029Z/14.

Japanese Transport Movements. 21

S.O.(1) Shanghai reports that ~~xx~~ Destroyers and 27 transports were reported from the vicinity of Wenchow on the night of 12/13th June proceeding south.

The coastal area in the vicinity of Swatow has been declared closed to shipping from midnight Japanese time 16th/17th June by proclamation issued by the C in C Japanese China Fleet.

COMMENT.

Swatow is 400 miles south of Wenchow.  
Canton is 200 miles S.W. of Swatow. Tainan, capital of  
Formosa is 150 miles to Seaward of Swatow.  
It would appear that further troops are being mobilized at  
Formosa with a view to using <sup>THEM</sup> for a fresh drive against  
China. OR Possibly INDO CHINA & THAILAND.

A council meeting in Tokyo 24/4 is reported to have planned a  
settlement of the China incident regardless of costs and the  
use of troops in Indo China for an attack on Yunnan.  
Considerable air force reinforcements are known to have  
gone to Formosa recently.

This intelligence also links with the F.E.C.B report that  
the Japanese War ministers southern expansion plan was to  
include.

1. The total blockade of South China.
2. The sending of a strong force to Thailand and Indo China to occupy Yunnan and the Burma road.
3. The requisitioning of Naval Bases in Thailand and Indo China, with permission to lay mines in the neighboring coastal waters.

F.E.C.B  
27/5/41.  
C.O.I.S.  
0903Z/3.

F.E.C.B  
27/5/41.

*Donner* N.  
*Wulfran* M.  
*J. Maclean* A.

C.O.I.C.15/6/41.



# 15 June 1941 - Melbourne

- The Australian government certainly shared Fraser's unhappiness about the decisions made to commit troops to theatres where they were exposed to superior enemy forces without air and armour support.
- There was clear advice of imminent Japanese adventurism.
- However there is no evidence that the Australian Cabinet took any advice about the extent to which Australian troops sent to Malaya would be provided with adequate air cover and armoured support, nor is there any record they asked for advice about the adequacy of the armed forces remaining in Australia for the defence of Australia before committing the 27th brigade to Malaya.



- Thanks for your attention