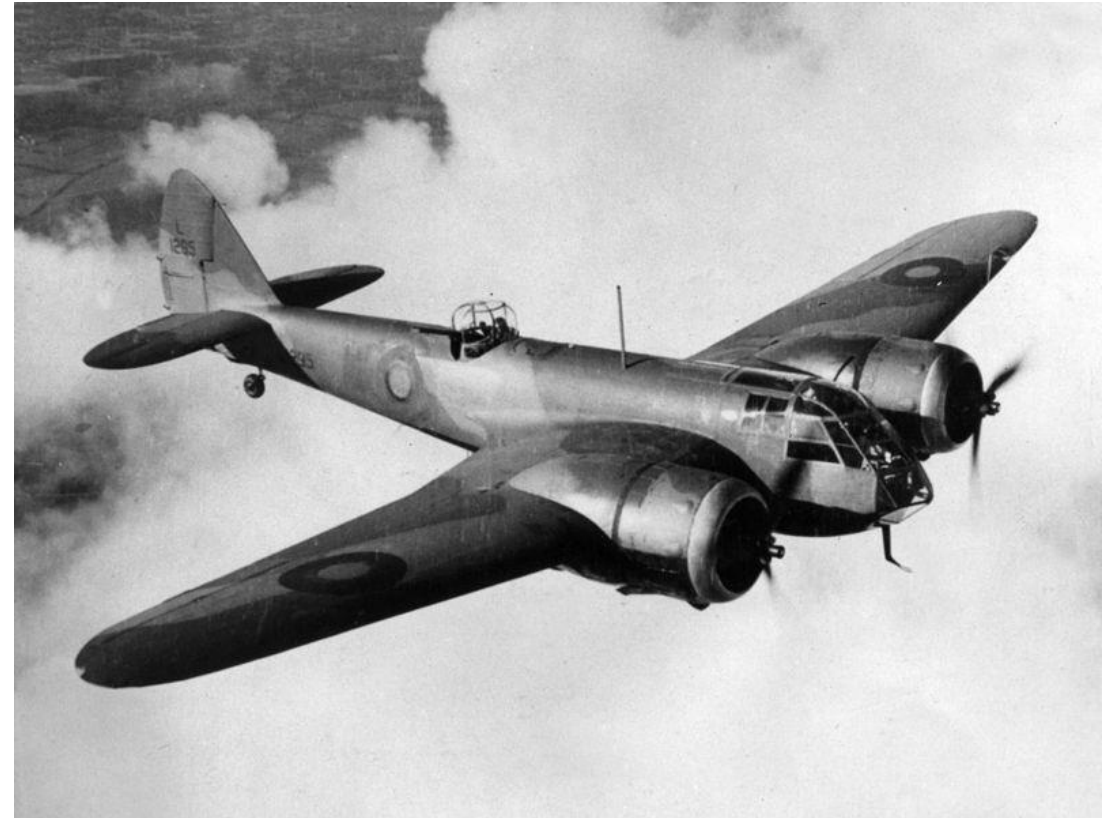


17 November 1941 – North Africa

- A special operation was staged on 17 November designed to cause the maximum damage to German fighters immediately before the battle began, as it was anticipated that German dive bombers and Italian aircraft would present few difficulties in the absence of the Messerschmitt 109F.
- Blenheims, escorted by No. 2 Operational Wing, led a naval fighter squadron in an attack on Bir el Baheir landing ground to achieve this aim.
- The purpose of the bombing was three-fold for in addition to any direct damage, it indicated the exact position of the target to the strafing Hurricanes which followed at low level, and distracted the attention of the anti-aircraft crews from the new danger.
- This attack went well but unfortunately could not be repeated for shortly afterwards enemy fighters were withdrawn to Gazala out of R.A.F. fighter range, and timely withdrawal continued to keep them out of range. As a result the R.A.F. had to revert to the policy of fighter sweeps to destroy the Messerschmitts in the air.



A Bristol Blenheim Mk I in flight

17 November 1941 – North Africa

- In this week before the opening of the second British Libyan offensive, the Australian squadrons were relatively inactive.
- Including the operation against Bir el Baheira, No. 3 Squadron flew only thirty-six sorties without once meeting air opposition.
- No. 451 flew only three reconnaissance sorties during the last three days while
- No. 1 Air Ambulance Unit, now able to operate three DH-86 aircraft and one Lodestar attached from the South African Air Force, stood by for orders.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

021621

17 November 1941 – North Africa

- Next evening—the 17th—the 2/13th was again required to act as beach night-watchman. There was still no information of the British offensive.
- The fact that there was no news from the frontier added to their discouragement; fortress veterans remembered that practically no information of BATTLEAXE had been passed down to them before that offensive's failure had been announced.
- That night above Tobruk the skies which throughout the summer had shed not a drop of rain and had since bestowed only a few token showers were murky with heavy cloud. Lightning sporadically illuminated them. With an accompaniment of thunderclaps, drenching rain fell, wadis quickly became coursing torrents and crawl-trenches, weapon-pits, dug-outs, and other entrenchments, deep and shallow alike, were soon water-filled.
- At the Wadi Sehel pumping station men of the 2/13th Battalion carrier platoon who provided the standing patrol withdrew quickly, while their warning flares and rockets, triggered by torrent-borne debris striking the trip-wires, shot to the sky.
- Dawn brought a scene that seemed funny to some but not others when Australian patrols were discovered on the enemy side of the Wadi Sehel, waiting for the torrent to subside.



A 2/13th patrol at Tobruk, September 1941

18 November 1941 - Malaya

- On 18th November, Bennett left Malaya by air to visit the A.I.F. in the Middle East.
- Bennett's subsequent comments suggest that he was not impressed by what he saw there.
- Blamey was in Australia at the time to try to persuade the government to reverse a decision to break up one of the divisions in the Middle East and secondly to press for the 8th Division to be sent to the Middle East.



ALEY, SYRIA. 1941-12. GENERAL GORDON BENNETT, GOC 8TH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION DURING HIS VISIT TO 1 AUSTRALIAN CORPS WHERE HE CONFERRED WITH THE ACTING GOC, A.I.F. (MIDDLE EAST) GENERAL LAVARACK.

18 November 1941 - Malaya

- A large well-led labour corps would have been of great value to the defending force in Malaya, but all efforts to form such a force had failed.
- General Bond had foreseen this need in 1940 and succeeded in obtaining two Indian labour companies.
- In April 1941 Malaya Command obtained permission from the War Office to raise six companies locally, but the Malayan Government advised against this on the grounds that it would interfere with rubber production and in any event local labourers might be difficult to recruit.
- Since the rate of pay fixed by the War Office was only a fraction of the ruling rate, recruiting proved not merely difficult but impossible. General Percival then asked for more Indian companies, but without success.
- He next tried, also without success, to obtain labourers from Hong Kong.
- On the 18th November, the Treasury having fixed a higher rate of pay than the original War Office figure, Percival informed the War Office that he proposed to begin recruiting labourers in Malaya on the 24th.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

134880

MALAYA, 1941-10. THE SULTAN OF JOHORE, GENERAL PERCIVAL, CinC FAR EAST AND GENERAL BENNETT, GOC 8TH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION, AT MANOEUVRES AT KLUANG.

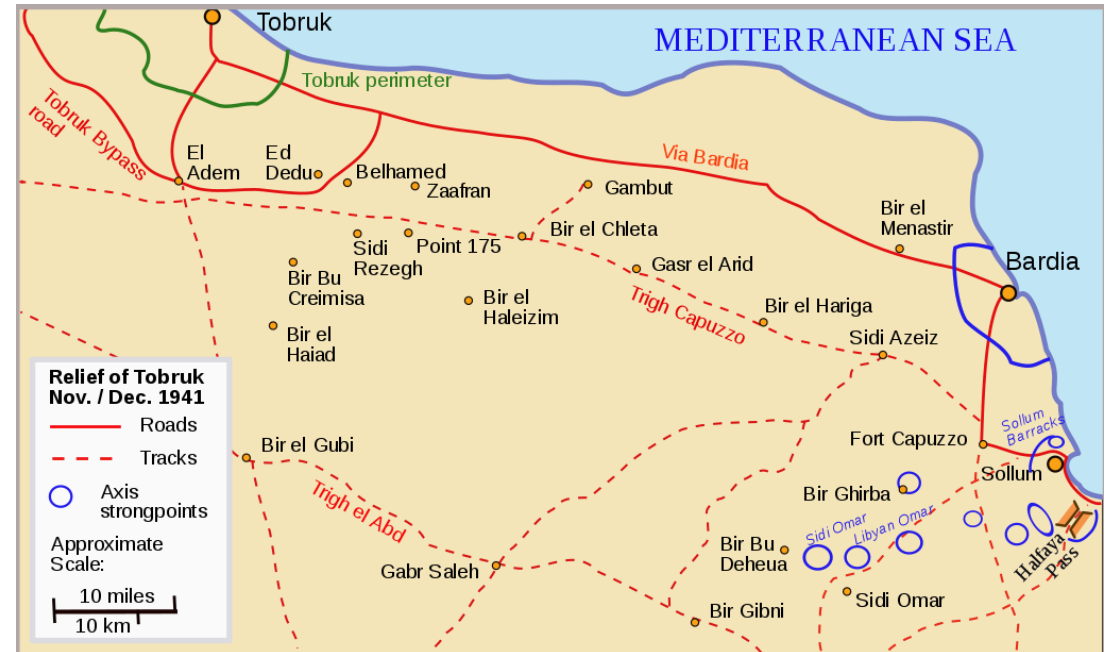
18 November - Egypt

- With six days before the offensive began, Air Headquarters Western Desert had begun to move its units forward.
- Bomber squadrons were unaffected but Nos. 258 and 262 Fighter Wings advanced to Sidi Barrani on 12th November.
- They moved again to Maddalena (LG's 122, 123, 124, 125) on 18th November without ceasing operations, one wing headquarters controlling all squadrons while the other was moving, and the squadron mobility scheme working well in practice.



18 November 1941 – North Africa

- Early in the morning of the 18th November 1941 the British Eighth Army launched the long-planned attack to drive the enemy out of Libya.
- the Eighth Army, under the command of General Cunningham. The Eighth Army had XXX Corps, under General Willoughby Norrie, and XIII Corps, under General Godwin-Austen and the Tobruk garrison.
- XXX Corps was made up of 7th Armoured Division (General Gott), the understrength South African 1st Infantry Division with two brigades of the Sudan Defence Force, which was newly arrived from the East African Campaign and commanded by General Brink, and the independent 22nd Guards Brigade.
- XIII Corps comprised 4th Indian Infantry Division (General Messervy), and the 2nd New Zealand Division (General Freyberg) and the 1st Army Tank Brigade.



In reserve, the Eighth Army had the South African 2nd Infantry Division.

18 November 1941 – North Africa

- The Army had a total of 770 tanks (including many of the new Crusader Cruiser tanks, as well as new American M3 Stuart light tanks).
- Photo: Crusader I tanks in Western Desert, 26 November 1941, with "old" gun mantlets and auxiliary Besa MG turret.
- The enemy had two German armoured divisions, the 15th and 21st, with 260 tanks and the Italian Ariete armoured division with 146 tanks.



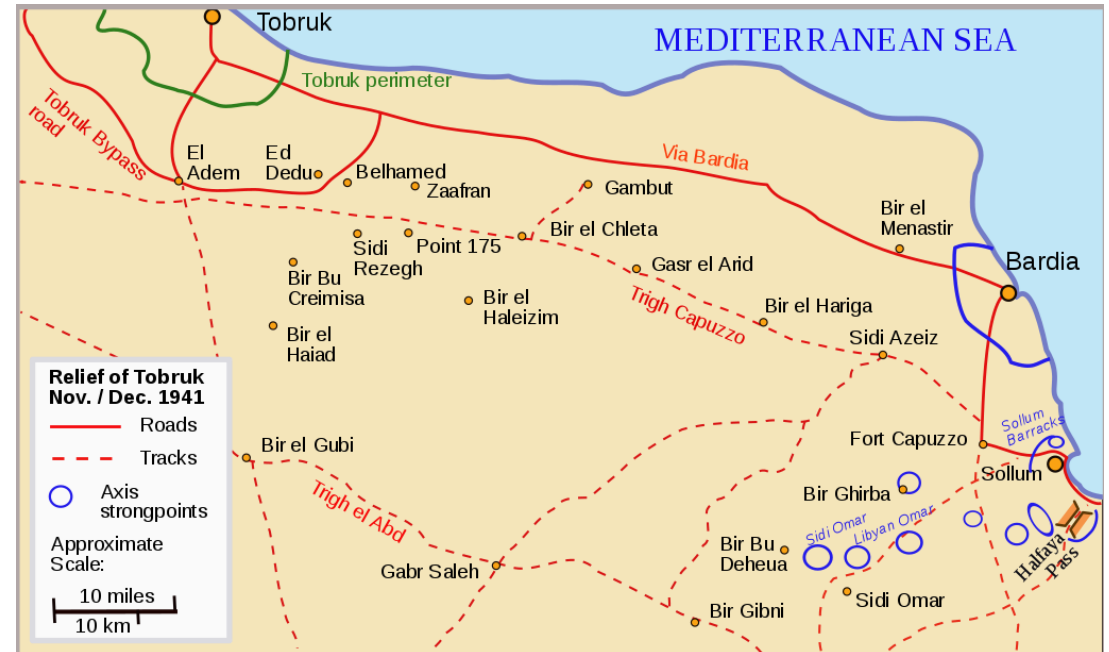
18 November 1941 – North Africa

- Air support was provided by up to 724 combat aeroplanes of the Commonwealth air forces in the Middle East and Malta, with direct support under the command of Air Headquarters Western Desert.
- They were not the best or the most modern aircraft. Most of the fighters were Hurricanes and Tomahawks. Most of the bombers were Blenheims and Marylands.



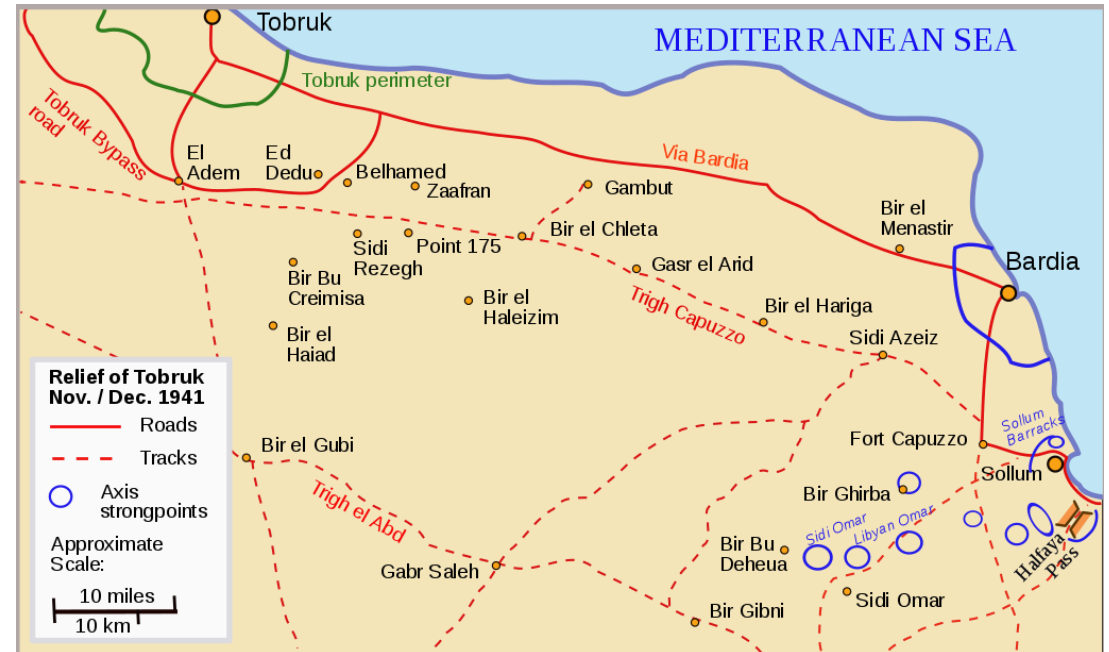
18 November 1941 – North Africa

- Fortune favoured the Eighth Army at the outset, for a very heavy rainstorm swept Cyrenaica during the night of 17th-18th November. This left enemy airfields water-logged.
- The RAF gave full support during that day, taking advantage of the absence of enemy air opposition to bomb the advanced landing grounds, while long-range fighters visited the rear airfields strafing any targets they could find.
- Shortrange fighters policed the whole battlefield, No. 2 Operational Wing covering the XXX Corps' advance on 18th November without meeting the enemy.



18 November 1941 – North Africa

- The plan was to engage the Afrika Korps with the 7th Armoured Division while the South African Division covered their left flank.
- Meanwhile, on their right, XIII Corps, supported by 4th Armoured Brigade (detached from 7th Armoured Division), would make a clockwise flanking advance west of Sidi Omar. They would then hold the positions threatening the rear of the line of Axis defensive strongpoints, which ran east from Sidi Omar to the coast at Halfaya.
- Central to the plan was the destruction of the Axis armour by 7th Armoured Division to allow the relatively lightly armoured XIII Corps to advance north to Bardia on the coast while XXX Corps continued north-west to Tobruk and link with a breakout by the 70th Division.



At first, all went well. The 7th Armoured Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division advanced north-west towards Tobruk with 22nd Armoured Brigade to their left. XIII Corps and the New Zealand Division made its flanking advance with 4th Armoured Brigade on its left and 7th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Indian Division on its right flank at Sidi Omar. On the first day, no resistance was encountered as the Eighth.

18 November 1941 – North Africa

- The Polish Brigade's Intelligence summary remarked:
- The day of 18 of November was marked by exceptional inactivity of the enemy and own troops. Artillery shelling almost nil. . . . During the day a sort of truce was established, each side trying to remove the effects of the rain and subsequent floods. After dark the normal conditions became re-established.
- The code word "Tug" meaning "Don't attack" was received from the XXX Corps on the 18th.



(Australian War Memorial)

Australians fraternising with Poles at Tobruk .

18 November 1941 - Mediterranean

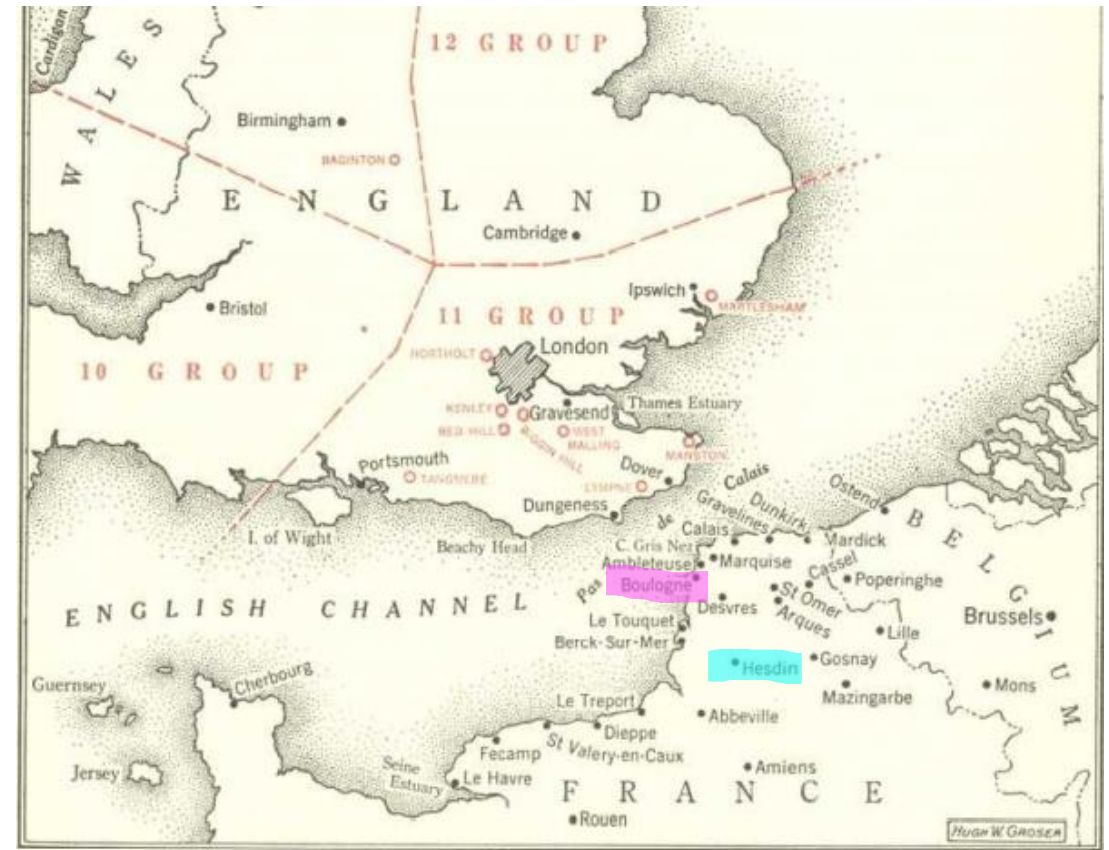
- That day Yarra (Senior Officer) and Parramatta left Alexandria escorting a slow convoy to Tobruk. The weather was wild, and apart from attempted enemy interference by aircraft and submarine, the voyage was made difficult by one ship of the convoy breaking down repeatedly and, at one stage, being taken in tow by Parramatta. The task was completed successfully, however, and the two sloops returned to Alexandria on the 23rd.



HMAS Parramatta (U44) was a Grimsby class sloop of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Built during the late 1930s. 3 * 4 inch guns, 16 knots.

18 November 1941 – English Channel

- The Circus on 6 November was the last major operation of 1941 engaged in by No. 452.
- Coordination of bombers and fighters in bad weather had become progressively more difficult, and Ramrod and Roadstead operations, in which Hurricane bombers acted as striking power, replaced the Circuses.
- Even these were infrequent as weather severely limited flying, the Australians joining in only two: the first on 18th November against an alcohol distillery at Hesdin and the other on 27th November against shipping at Boulogne.



Fighter Command: Australian activities, 1941.

19 November 1941 - Australia

- A floating mine, which was sighted off Montague Island in November 1941, was picked up by the auxiliary minesweeper Uki, (1923 ; commnd RAN 1939), 545 tons, one 12-pdr gun, 9 kts, landed on her deck, and brought to port.

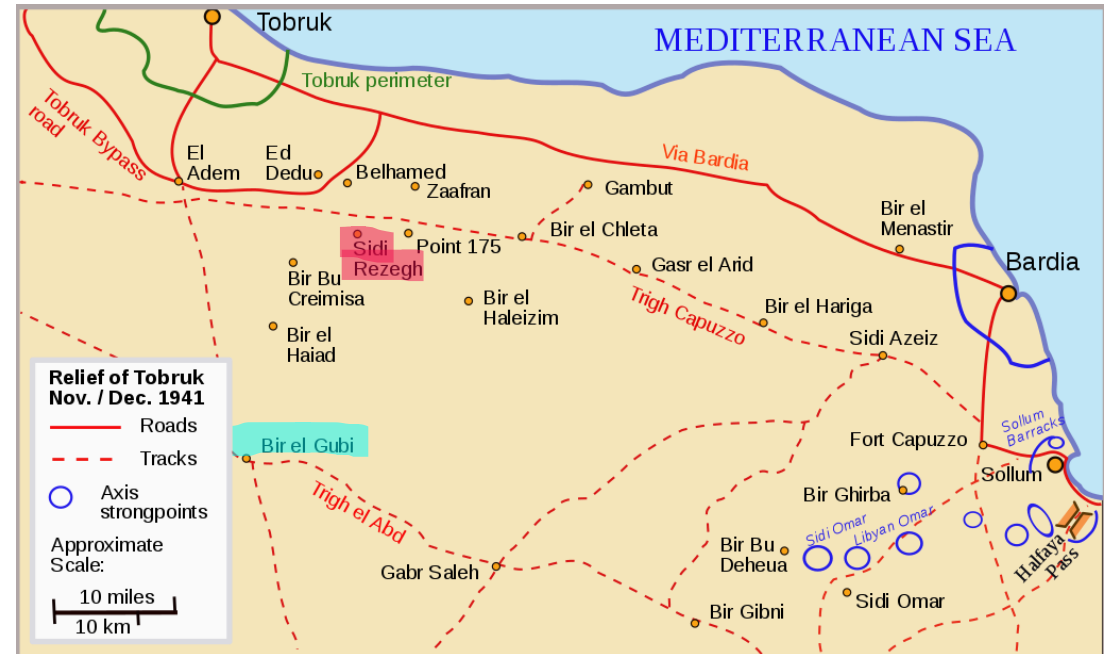


(R.A.N. Historical Section)

German Mine on Deck of H.M.A.S. Uki, 19th November 1941, off Montague Island.

19 November 1941 – North Africa

- On the morning of 19 November, in an action at **Bir el Gubi**, the advance of the 22nd Armoured Brigade was blunted by the Ariete Italian Armoured Division, which knocked out many British tanks at the start of the battle.
- In the centre of the division, 7th Armoured Brigade and the 7th Support Group raced forward almost to within sight of Tobruk and took **Sidi Rezegh** airfield.
- On the right flank, 4th Armoured Brigade came into contact that evening with a force of 60 tanks supported by 88 mm gun batteries and anti-tank units from 21st Panzer Division, which had been moving south from Gambut, and became heavily engaged.



19 November 1941 – North Africa

- Two wing sweeps followed on the 19th as it was expected that enemy aircraft would resume operations if their airfields dried out.
- The sweeps themselves were not opposed but Flight Lieutenant Fischer, forced to return early with engine trouble, was intercepted in the frontier area by four Messerschmitts.
- He turned to join battle and destroyed one enemy machine before he himself was shot down. The enemy pilots continued to attack his aircraft on the ground but Fischer escaped with shrapnel wounds only.
- This action was fought near LG-132 to which No. 451 had just moved, and the Messerschmitts now proceeded to attack the dispersed Hurricanes, damaging three of them.
- This squadron had flown five tactical reconnaissance sorties over the Omars, Capuzzo and Gambut areas during these two days, reporting enemy movements westward along the Trigh Capuzzo; one aircraft had given timely warning to 4th Indian Division of the presence of enemy tanks.
- On 18th November, a Hurricane had been shot down over Sidi Omar but the pilot, Lieutenant Andrew, returned next day on foot.
- No. 451 also made three flights from Tobruk over the Acroma-El Adem area to estimate possible dangers from that region which might interfere with the garrison's proposed breakout towards Bu Amud.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P00456.001
MILDURA, VIC. 1942-06-16. FIVE RAAF PILOTS WHO WON THE DFC.
LEFT TO RIGHT TRUSCOTT, JEFFREY, RAWLINSON, FISCHER AND
WAWN. TRUSCOTT AND WAWN WERE DOING A CONVERSION
COURSE TO KITTYHAWKS AT NO. 2 (FIGHTER) OPERATIONAL TRAINING
UNIT, MILDURA, AFTER THEIR RETURN FROM THE UK WHERE THEY
WERE FLYING SPITFIRES.

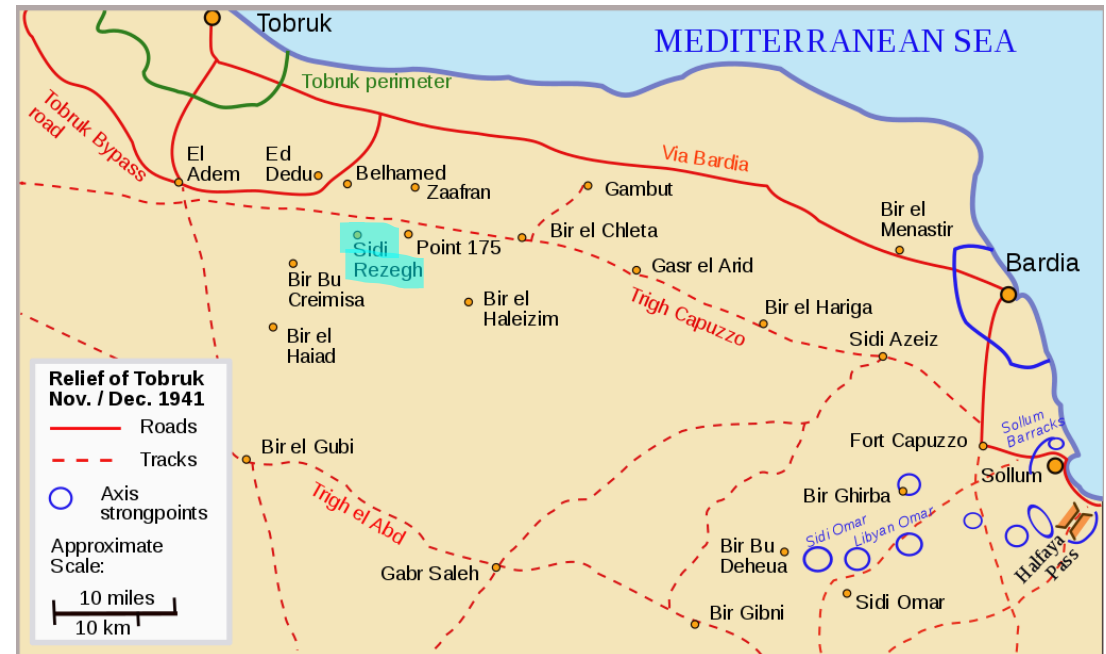
20 November 1941 - Philippines

- The 27th Bombardment Group arrived in the Philippines on 20 November, but was still awaiting the arrival of its 52 Douglas A24 aircraft, which were en route in a convoy of seven vessels escorted by the USS Pensacola.
- The 21st and 34th fighter Squadrons also arrived in the Philippines in late November but were awaiting the assembly of their aircraft.
- Photo: The A24 was the navy's SBD (pictured) with the arrestor hook omitted.



20 November 1941 – North Africa

- On 20 November, 22nd Armoured Brigade fought a second engagement with the Ariete Division and 7th Armoured repulsed an infantry counterattack by the 90th Light and Bologna Divisions **at Sidi Rezegh**.
- 4th Armoured fought a second engagement with 21st Panzer and pit the speed of their Stuart tanks against the heavier German guns.
- The Eighth Army was fortunate that 15th Panzer Division had been ordered to Sidi Azeiz, where there was no British armour to engage. However, 4th Armoured soon started to receive intelligence that the two German Panzer divisions were linking up.
- In his original battle plan, Cunningham had hoped for that so that he could bring his own larger tank force to bear and defeat the Afrika Korps armour. By attaching 4th Armoured Brigade to XIII Corps, allowing 22nd Armoured Brigade to be sidetracked fighting the Ariete Division and letting 7th Armoured Brigade forge towards Tobruk, his armoured force had become hopelessly dispersed.
- 22nd Armoured Brigade were therefore disengaged from the Ariete and ordered to move east and support 4th Armoured Brigade. Infantry and artillery elements of 1st South African Division were to hold the Ariete, and 4th Armoured were released from their role of defending XIII Corps' flank.
- In the afternoon of 20 November, 4th Armoured were engaged with 15th Panzer Division (21st Panzer having temporarily withdrawn for lack of fuel and ammunition). It was too late in the day for a decisive action, but 4th Armoured lost some 40 tanks and had been down to less than two-thirds their original strength of 164 tanks.
- 22nd Armoured arrived at dusk, too late to have an impact, and during the night of 20 November, Rommel pulled all his tanks north-west for an attack on Sidi Rezegh.



20 November 1941 – North Africa

- The code word XXX Corps sent that afternoon was not "Tug" but "Pop": the sortie was to be made tomorrow. Through the Tobruk telephone network other code words were passed to set in train all required action.

20 November 1941 - Washington

On the 20th November the Japanese envoys handed to Hull a six - point proposal for a temporary agreement or modus vivendi, but it was not significantly different from the 6th August proposals.



The American Chiefs of Staff, General Marshall and Admiral Stark, needed, and asked their Government for, time. Convoys of troops to reinforce the Philippines were at sea in the Pacific.



21 November 1941 - COIC

C.O.I.S.
0946Z/18

6. Preparations @ C.O.I.S. Singapore states that information received during the past week is mainly confined to reports of preparations for bases and lines of communication in Southern F.I.C. being accelerated and expanded. Similar preparations in Tongking have either been completed or temporarily suspended.

There has been no considerable arrival of troops reported in Indo-China.

Japanese preparations in F.I.C. are apparently designed to cover alternative plans of attack either against China or Thailand, although it is as yet impossible to assess the relative ~~max~~ probability.

It seems likely that the Japanese themselves are still undecided pending the outcome of the latest Washington negotiations, and anxiety is apparent in Tokio for an early and favourable outcome of these talks.

21 November 1941 - Fremantle

- Sydney did not arrive at Fremantle on the 20th, and the District Naval Officer, Western Australia, reported accordingly to the Naval Board at 11 a.m. the following day.
- The arrival of Zealandia at Singapore was reported as some hours later than had been anticipated in Navy Office, and it was assumed that Sydney would be correspondingly late returning to Fremantle.



HMAS Sydney prewar photo.

20 - 21 November 1941 – North Africa

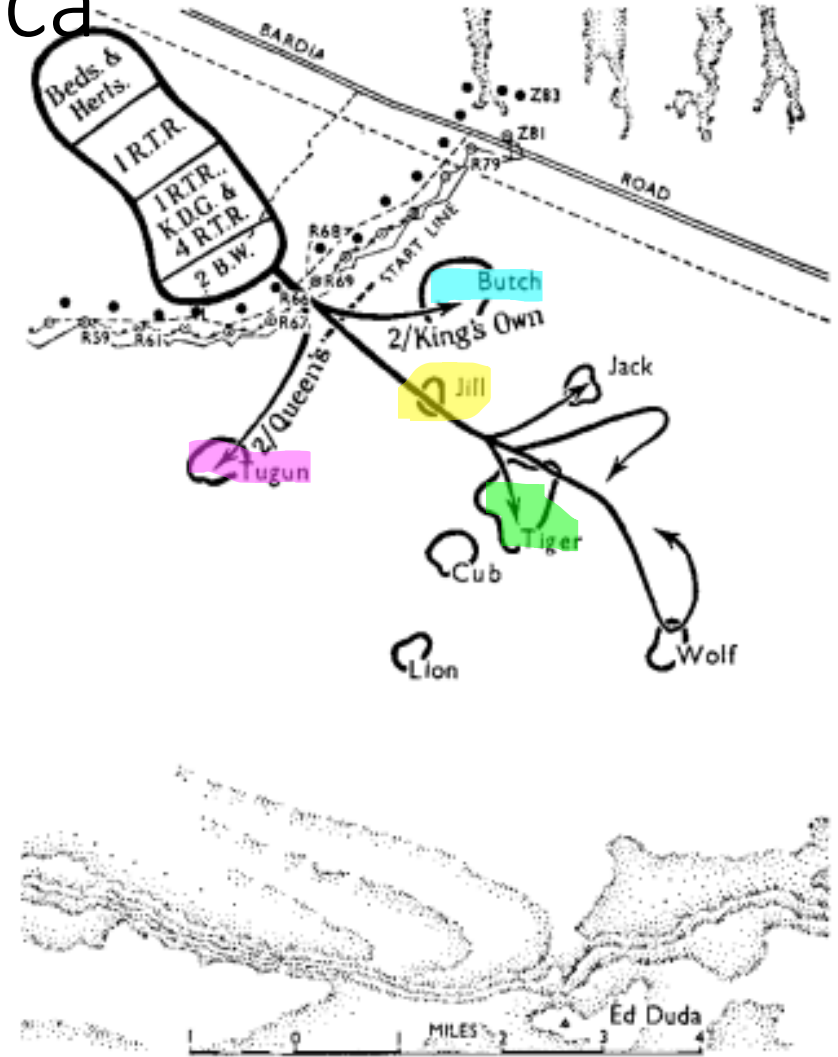
- On 20th November No. 3 flew twenty-two sorties as escort to bombers attacking targets on the battlefield and also joined with No. 112 Squadron in a successful sweep over the 7th Armoured Division, during which each squadron claimed two Me-110 aircraft destroyed.
- Operating alone on the following day No. 112 scored a further success when Sergeant Leu, Sergeant Carson and Flying Officer Jeffries between them destroyed two CR-42's near El Adem.
- No. 3 flew two uneventful sweeps on 21st November.
- These fighter sweeps became more vital as enemy air activity increased, because although it had been hoped to benefit from newly-installed radar facilities at Tobruk and Sidi Barrani, in practice these failed to give adequate early warning of enemy aircraft.
- Sergeant Leu – Jackeroo of Beaudesert, born Nelson, B.C. Canada 1915.
- Sergeant Carson – Bank clerk of Brisbane, born Childers 1920.



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

21 November 1941 – North Africa

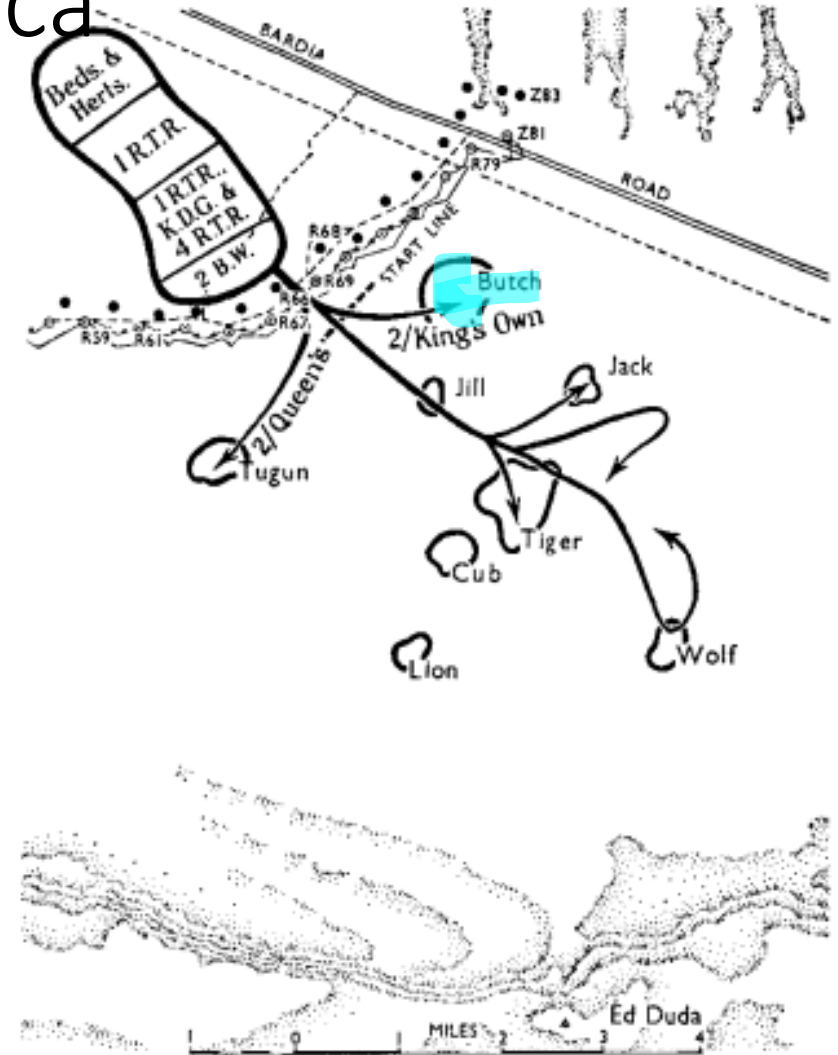
- The Tobruk garrison's great assault began with diversionary operations in the early hours of 21st November.
- The Polish Brigade's operation, with a patrol of one officer and 12 men of the 2/13th participating, went to plan, woke up everybody, deceived nobody and attracted a satisfactory if not lavish volume of retaliatory fire.
- The sally force's difficult forming-up outside the perimeter was achieved without interference from the enemy; the roar of supporting gunfire and enemy counter-bombardment from the 23rd Brigade's false strike drowned the clatter of its assembly.
- Zero hour for the infantry to advance in the main attack by the Tobruk force was 6.30 a.m. On the left of the sally port and not far out was Butch, which had to be neutralised or the route to Tiger would be murderously enfiladed. It was to be taken by the 2/King's Own.
- The centre strike, by the 2/Black Watch, was to be directed at Tiger through the smaller outpost Jill.
- The left prong was to reach out to Tugun, far to the left flank—an operation assigned to the 2/Queen's.



The break-out, 21st November

21 November 1941 – North Africa

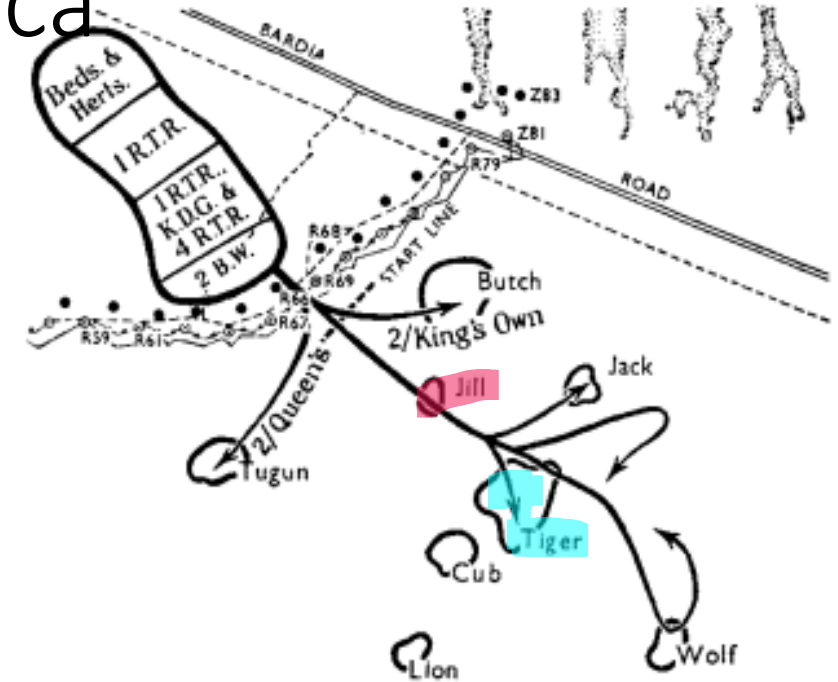
- At 6.20 a.m. a bombardment of **Butch** began. Within 10 minutes the 2/King's Own supported by a squadron of the 7th Royal Tank Regiment (19 Matildas) announced its capture. They reported that the enemy, of whom there were 30 dead, were German and they sent back 10 live ones to prove it. And it soon became evident that this was no isolated pocket. A region thought to lie along the boundary of two Italian divisions and expected to be defended mainly by cross-fire from a few strong-points proved to be a German defensive area held in some density by unyielding and determined defenders.
- Most of these had moved in six days before. Moreover the localities called by code names and delineated in the plans accompanying the operation orders proved to be parts of a more extensive, unmapped and well concealed defensive system, interlaced with unmarked minefields.
- At 6.30 a.m the infantrymen of the 2/Black Watch's assault companies stood up. The tanks were not there. The time required to get them over the bridges crossing the anti-tank ditch had been underestimated. The infantry commanders decided to press on alone, making best use of what protection the timed artillery program would provide.



The break-out, 21st November

21 November 1941 – North Africa

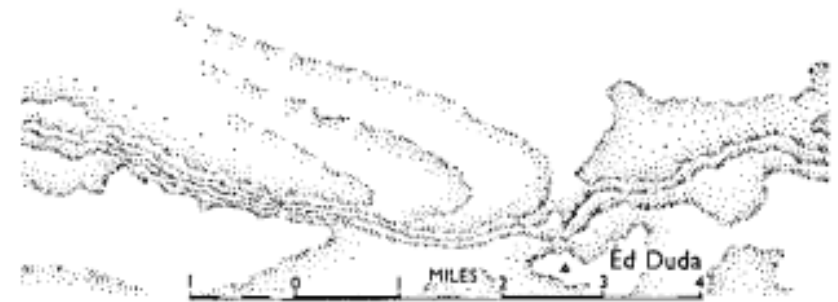
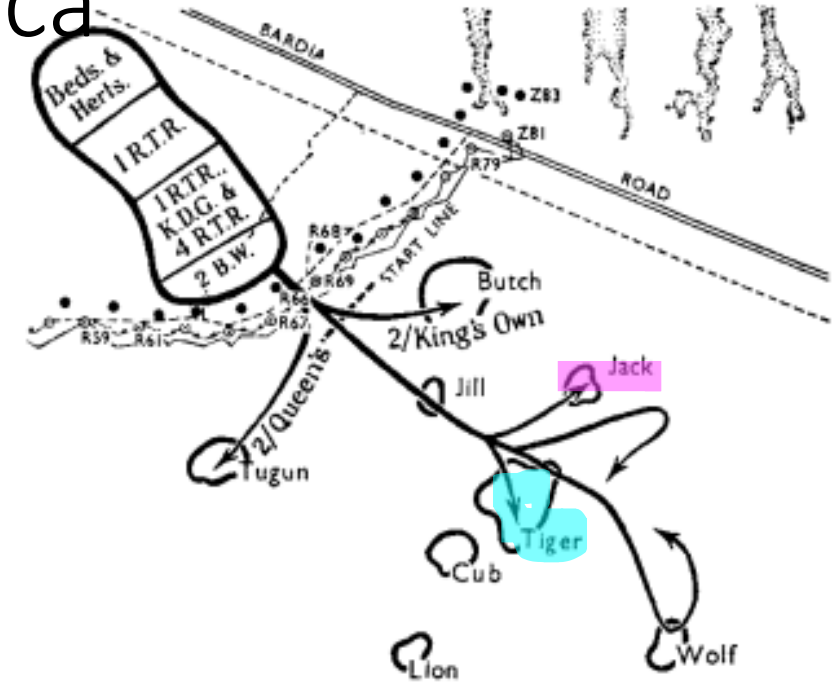
- **Jill**, treated in the plan as a small detached post to be easily smothered in the advance of the leading company, proved a strong locality. Each effort of the Black Watch to get forward was murderously cut down until the lately arrived infantry tanks came across from Butch with a company of the 2/King's Own following.
- When Jill had been overrun, "there was nothing left [of the leading company of the 2/Black Watch] to carry on to Tiger".
- When the tanks of the 4th RTR were assembled on the battlefield, they were unable to proceed because of a minefield to the west and north of **Tiger**. They were told to make "merry hell", which they did, with a resounding accompaniment from the guns of "A/E" Battery.
- The defence seemed momentarily neutralised and Captain Armitage, who had nosed his armoured command post forward, reported at 8.30 a.m. that he was "on the back of Tiger", which comprised 1,000 yards of infantry positions dug flush with the ground. The Black Watch were too extended, however, to make the concerted rush needed to exploit a fleeting opportunity, but continued to probe forward to the stirring but melancholy skirling of pipes.



The break-out, 21st November

21 November 1941 – North Africa

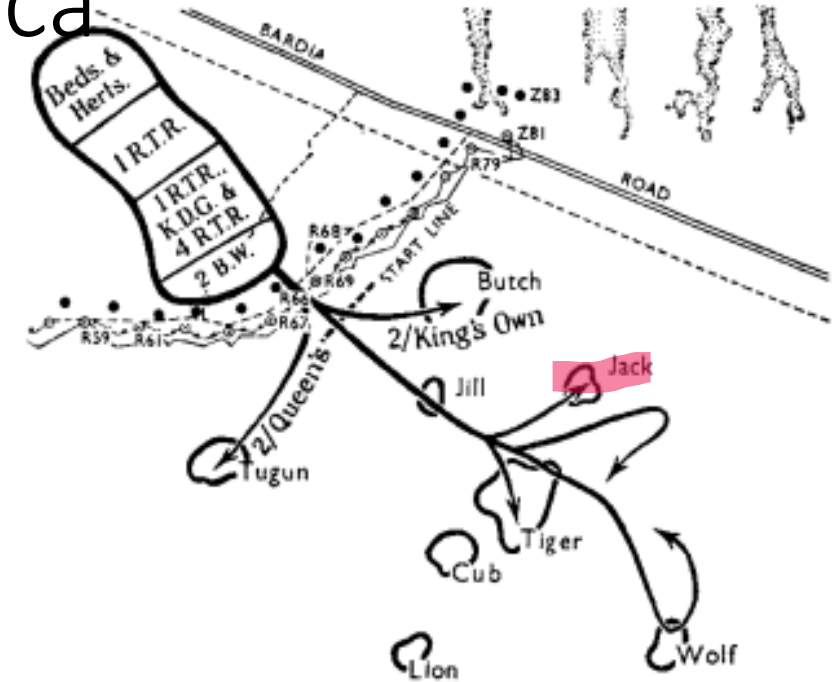
- Brave work was then done by sappers and men of the King's Dragoon Guards in clearing minefields.
- At last a sufficient gap was made and, while "C" Squadron of the 4th Royal Tanks under the brilliant if unorthodox leadership of Major Goschen of "B/O" Battery attacked centres of supporting defensive fire to the east, the tanks of "B" Squadron surged through the gap and right through **Tiger**.
- Then, about three hours after the attack had started, the 200 men still remaining of the Black Watch charged forward and captured their objective at the point of the bayonet.
- Yet there was still work for the Black Watch to do. Machinegun hail beat down intermittently directed from **Jack** to the north-east.
- A weak company was collected and with tanks of the 4th RTR assaulted and took the place.
- When Captain Jones of the 104th R.H.A. reported there a little later to establish an artillery command post, he found only a handful of men, sent for reinforcements and personally took charge until a company of the 1/Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire arrived.



The break-out, 21st November

21 November 1941 – North Africa

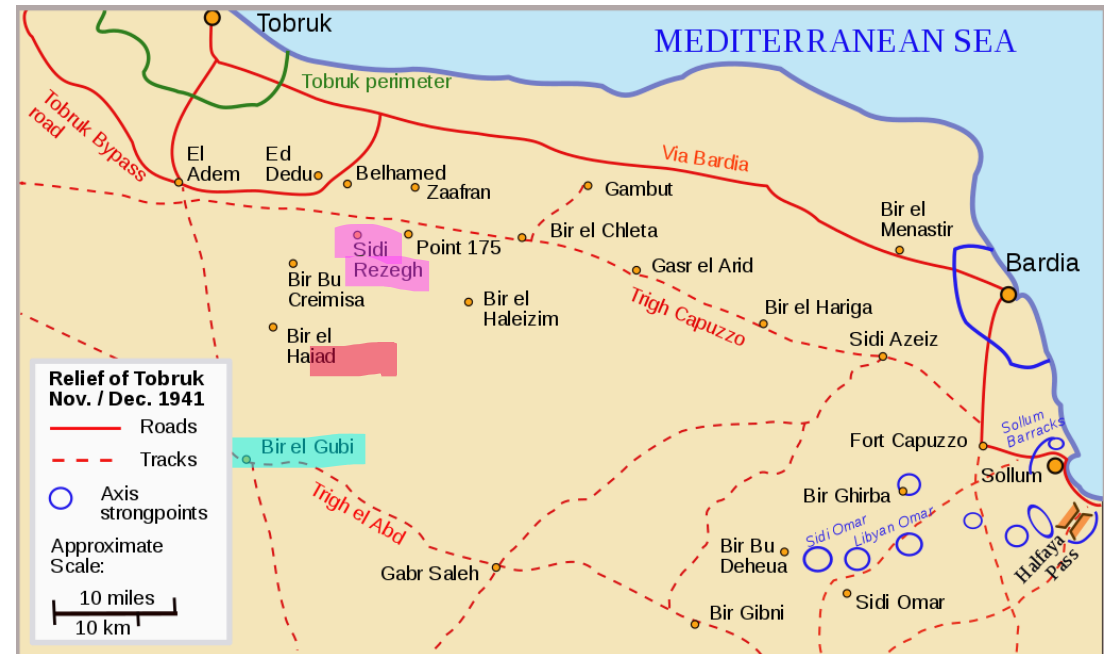
- **Jack** was found to be a German battalion headquarters. Captured documents showed that the sortie force had struck at the heart of the infantry of Rommel's assault force, who were all set to go and expected to attack the next day. The 70th Division's attack had driven a wedge between the Africa zbV Division on the left and the Bologna Division on the right.
- There was also evidence that the enemy had been forewarned. The warning, it now appears, had emanated from Rommel himself, which suggests that his excellent intercept service may have gathered some clue as to what was afoot.
- It had been a day of great achievement. A wedge three miles deep had been driven through one of the strongest sections of the encircling defences.
- To secure the corridor against sniping and cross-fire, further operations would be required, but it was already possible for garrison forces to debouch into the open desert, whatever perils might lie beyond.
- Five hundred and fifty German prisoners and 527 Italians had been taken, but at great cost. In the 2/Black Watch alone, there were 200 dead.



The break-out, 21st November

21 November 1941 – North Africa

- 7th Armoured had planned its attack northward to Tobruk to start at 08.30 on 21 November, but at 07.45, patrols reported the arrival from the south-east of a mass of enemy armour of some 200 tanks in all.
- 7th Armoured Brigade, together with a battery of field artillery, turned to meet the threat and left the four companies of infantry and the artillery of the Support Group to carry out the attack to the north in anticipation of being reinforced by 5th South African Infantry Brigade.
- It had been detached from the 1st South African Division at Bir el Gubi, which faced the Ariete Division, and was heading north to join them.
- Without armoured support, the northward attack by the Support Group failed. By the end of the day, 7th Armoured Brigade had lost half (28 of its 60) of its tanks and been relying mainly on the artillery of the Support Group to hold the enemy at arm's length.
- The South African brigade was dug in south-east of Bir el Haiad but, the German armour was between them and Sidi Rezegh.
- However, by the evening of 21 November, 4th Armoured was 8 miles (13 km) south east of Sidi Rezegh and 22nd Armoured Brigade were in contact with the German armour at Bir el Haiad, some 12 miles (19 km) south-west of Sidi Rezegh.



21 November 1941 – Middle East

- General Morshead toured Syria early in November and on his return went to the Delta.
- At Alexandria he met Brigadier Murray and elements of the division (other than the 2/13th Battalion) that had been left in Tobruk after the cancellation of the last relief convoy and had just been brought out.
- He then went to Kenya for a month's leave.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

021478

CAIRO. 1941-11-21. GENERAL SIKORSKI DECORATING GENERAL MORSHEAD WITH THE POLISH ORDER OF VIRTUTI MILITARI FOR GALLANTRY. MORSHEAD COMMANDED TOBRUK WHERE POLISH TROOPS FOUGHT ALONGSIDE AUSTRALIANS.

21 November 1941 - Washington

- By 21 November a growing tension in relations with Japan and the prospective growth of military aviation in the Philippines had resulted in a revision of the basic war plan RAINBOW No. 5.
- The plan had previously visualized only defensive operations by Army forces and the Asiatic Fleet.
- Augmentation of the Army air garrison in the Philippines had now modified that concept so that the revised plan provided for offensive air operations in furtherance of the strategic defensive, along with operations in direct defense of the Philippine Islands as an air and naval base.
- In the event of hostilities, the defending air forces were to carry out “air raids against Japanese forces and installations within tactical operating radius of available bases.”



21 November 1941 - San Francisco

- The ground echelon of the 7th Bombardment Group (H) sailed from San Francisco for the Philippines on 21 November, while the air echelon, including that of the 88th Reconnaissance Squadron, was scheduled to proceed by flights of nine aircraft each in late November or early December.



B17E 41-2408 (pictured later) was one of these 88th Recon aircraft.

22 November 1941 – North Africa

- On 22 November No. 3 engaged in an air battle which did much to determine the subsequent course of events.
- During the morning the Australians were escorting Blenheim bombers near Bir el Gubi when at least fifteen Messerschmitts attacked as the bombers were making their run.
- The ensuing fight resolved itself into a contest between the superior speed of the Messerschmitt and the manoeuvrability of the Tomahawk and went slightly in favour of the former, two Germans and three Australians being shot down.
- The same afternoon unencumbered with bombers, Nos. 3 and 112 met twenty Messerschmitts to the south-east of El Adem and a straightforward air battle for fighter superiority developed.
- The Germans again had the advantage of speed, climb and ceiling, so after some preliminary and wary manoeuvring, both formations fell into defensive circles, with the Germans above the Tomahawks.
- The circles flew round and round, individuals pulling out as opportunity offered to attack any of the opposing circle momentarily unprotected, but in effect a deadlock ensued as neither side could break the other.
- The evening closed in until it was hardly possible to see the enemy, and finally the Germans, who were farthest from their bases, flew off westwards, and the Tomahawks landed at adjacent landing grounds returning to their own base the next morning.



LIBYA. 1941-12. A TOMAHAWK FIGHTER PLANE OF NO. 3 SQUADRON, RAAF, RETURNING TO ITS BASE.

22 November 1941 – North Africa

- The wing destroyed three Messerschmitts and damaged several more; but from No. 3 alone six pilots were shot down although Wing Commander Jeffrey and Sergeant Simes subsequently rejoined their unit, which, having lost nine aircraft in these two engagements, was unable to operate further until 24th November.
- No. 112, of whose nine pilots engaged six were Australian, lost only one aircraft, but here again the pilots found it necessary to spend the night on advanced landing grounds.
- Only Pilot Officer Bartle, who was credited with one Messerschmitt, flew directly to his base.
- Sergeant Burney, the airman temporarily missing, force-landed near enemy armoured vehicles but escaped in the dusk and reached the 4th Indian Division after walking thirty miles across the desert.
- Sergeant Simes – Grocer of Tenterfield, born Tenterfield 1919. KIA 9 Jan 1942.
- Pilot Officer Bartle – Stock and station agent of Mt Hawthorn, WA, born Coolgardie 1917.
- Sergeant Burney – Sharebroker's clerk of Croydon NSW, born Croydon 1915. KIA 30 May 1942.



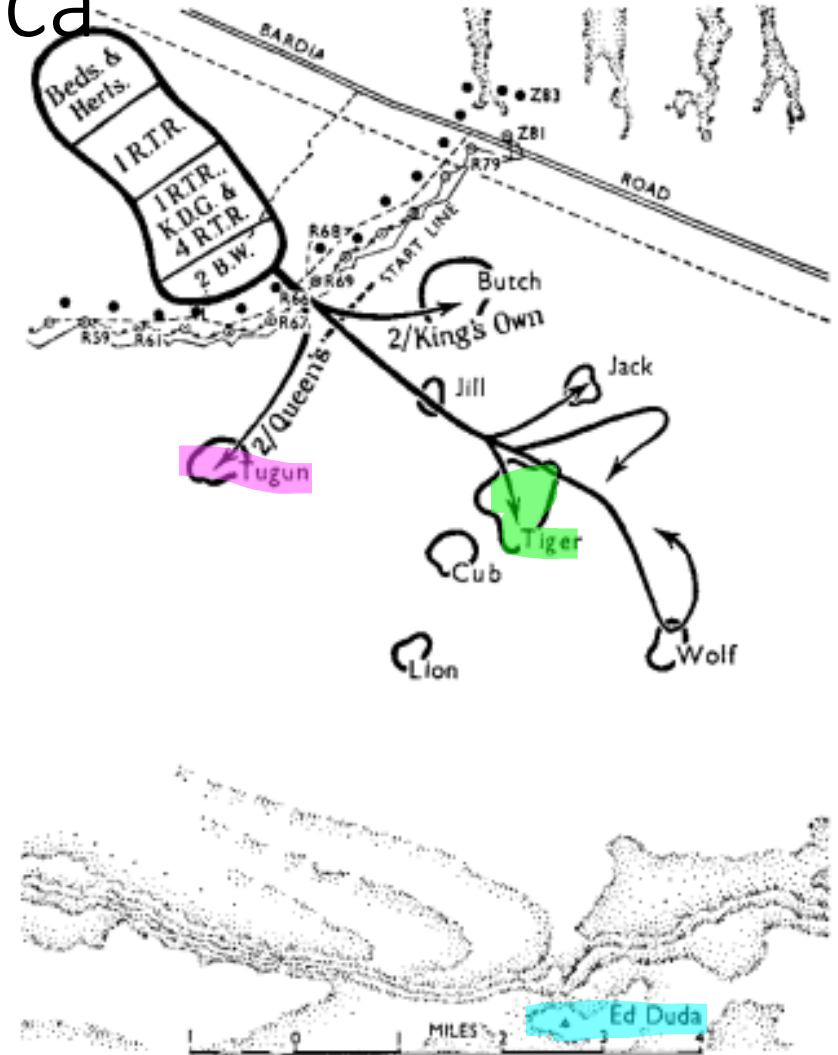
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

023119

MSUS, LIBYA. 1942-01-08. SERGEANT RON SIMES OF NO. 3 SQUADRON, RAAF WHO HAD SHOT DOWN THREE ENEMY PLANES. He was killed in action the next day.

22 November 1941 – North Africa

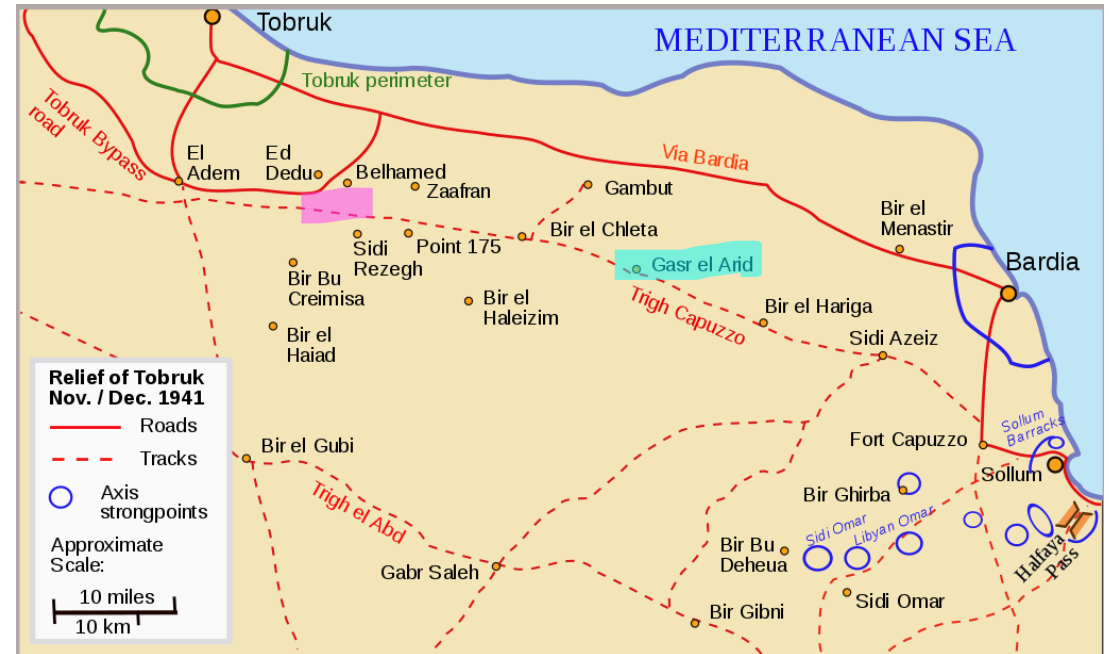
- Two messages were sent to Scobie on the 22nd, the first calling on him to attack Ed Duda to relieve a critical situation at Sidi Rezegh, the second agreeing to a deferment of the attack because the situation was improving.
- He decided to consolidate his outlet, mop up enemy remnants close to the corridor, extend his hold by capturing neighbouring strongpoints and maintain continuous pressure in the hope that the Eighth Army would link up.
- On the afternoon of the 22nd the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment with the 32nd Army Tank Brigade and 1st R.H.A. in support took the strongpoint **Lion**, to the right of **Tiger** and left a 7,000 yd gap between the corridor and **Ed Duda**, but efforts to clear the **Tugun** and Dalby Square strong points were repelled.
- In the fighting on the 22nd, Tugun's defenders brought down devastating fire and reduced the strength in one attacking British company to merely 33 all ranks.



The break-out, 21st November

22 November 1941 – North Africa

- Overnight, Rommel once again split his forces. 21st Panzer took up a defensive position alongside the Afrika Division between Sidi Rezegh and Tobruk, and 15th Panzer moved 15 miles (24 km) west to Gasr el Arid to prepare for a battle of manoeuvre.
- That presented an opportunity for a breakthrough to Tobruk with the whole of 7th Armoured Division concentrated and facing only the weakened 21st Panzer. However, XXX Corps Commander Willoughby Norrie, aware that 7th Armoured division was down to 200 tanks, decided on caution.
- In the early afternoon, Rommel instead attacked Sidi Rezegh with 21st Panzer and captured the airfield. Fighting was desperate. For his actions during both days of fighting, Brigadier Jock Campbell, who commanded 7th Support Group, was awarded the Victoria Cross.
- However, 21st Panzer, despite being considerably weaker in armour, proved superior in its combined arms tactics and pushed 7th Armoured Division back with a further 50 tanks lost (mainly from 22nd Brigade).
- The South African Division's 5th Brigade had become engaged to the south of the airfield.
- An attempt to recapture it failed, and the Axis counteroffensive began to gain momentum.



22 November 1941 – North Africa

- The 4th armoured brigade with 100 Stuart light tanks was the only large British tank force left.
- Now in the bad luck of war its headquarters was overrun by 15th Panzer division as it plunged through the confusion and darkness.
- In the flaring light of burning tanks the Germans captured most of their headquarters personnel and the wireless links.
- They had smashed the brains of the brigade and for 24 hours its hundred tanks were out of the battle.



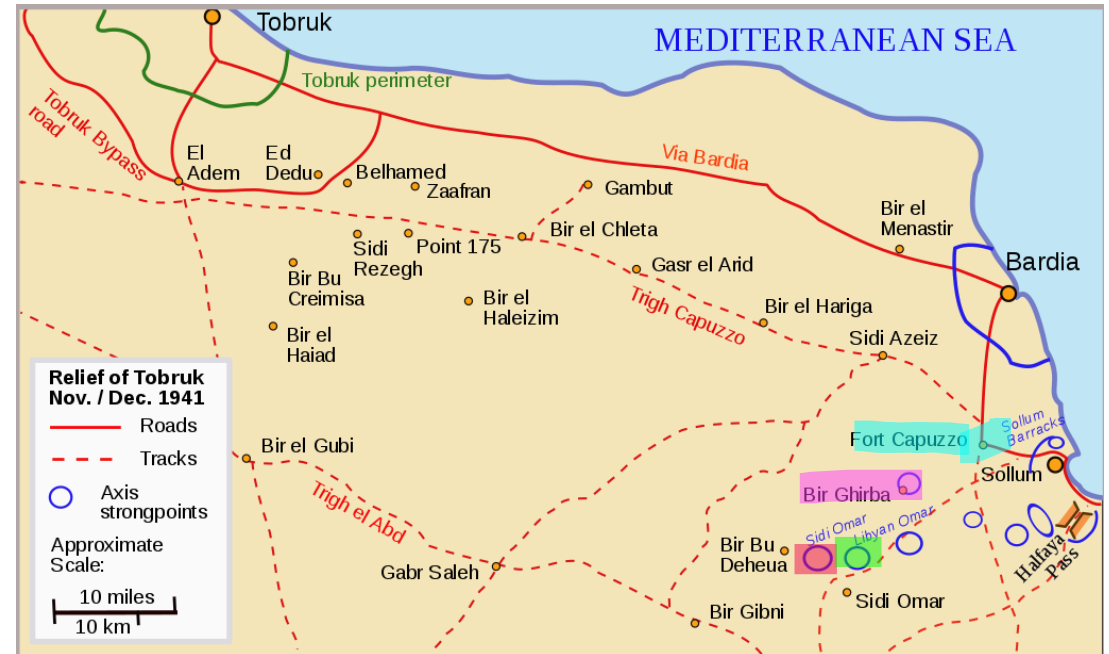
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

021565

TEL-EL-KEBIR, EGYPT. 1941-11. A LINE OF NEW AMERICAN STUART M3 LIGHT TANKS AT THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY BASE ORDNANCE DEPOT.

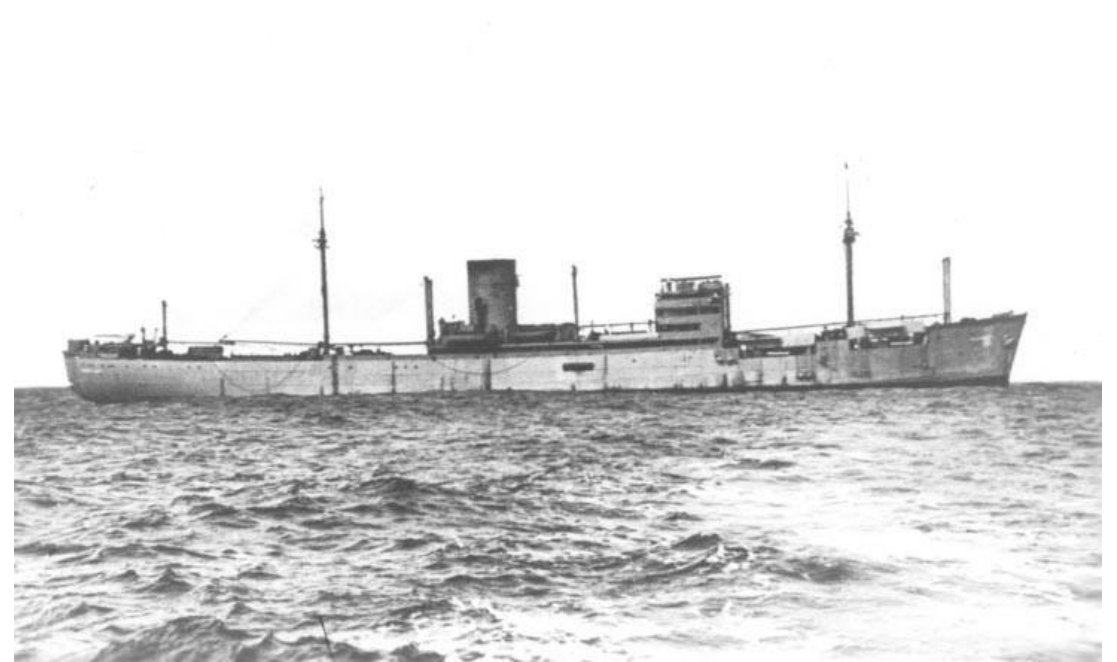
22 November 1941 – North Africa

- On the XIII Corps front on 22 November, the 5th New Zealand Brigade advanced north-east to capture **Fort Capuzzo** on the main Sollum–Bardia road.
- The Brigade attacked **Bir Ghirba**, south of Fort Capuzzo and the headquarters of the Savona Division but was repulsed.
- To the south, the 7th Indian Brigade captured **Sidi Omar** and most of the **Libyan Omar strongpoints**, which were the two westernmost strong points of the Axis border defences.
- Losses in its supporting tank units caused a delay in attacks on the other strong points until replacements had arrived.



22 November 1941 - Atlantic

- On 22 November HMS Devonshire met the raider Atlantis in the South Atlantic.
- Atlantis, whose actions caused the deepest suspicions, claimed to be the Dutch Polyphemus, "and the possibility", said the report of the encounter, "of the suspicious movements and incoherent signals being due to our language and procedure had to be taken into account."
- From what little was known of the movements of Polyphemus it was not impossible for her to be in the area."
- In this doubt, Devonshire kept her distance at high speed and wirelessly the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, asking if Polyphemus could be genuine. She had to wait for nearly an hour for a reply which came with dramatic suddenness: "No. Repetition No."
- Devonshire at once opened fire at 15,000 yards, and Atlantis was destroyed "helpless, outranged and outgunned so far as Devonshire was concerned".
- Only seven of the crew were lost. Survivors were rescued by U-126.



Atlantis, 6 * 15cm guns, 2 * 6 cylinder diesels, 17.5 knots. Atlantis travelled more than 161,000 km in 602 days, and sank or captured 22 ships with a combined tonnage of 144,384.

22 November 1941 - Washington

- On 22nd November US codebreakers deciphered an intercepted radio message from Tokyo to its Washington embassy, sent on the same day advising that the deadline for negotiations could be extended to the 29th November as long as there were real hopes of a successful outcome.



US functional replica of the Japanese Diplomatic Purple cipher.

23 November 1941 - Melbourne

- When Sydney had not returned by the 23rd November, she was instructed by the Naval Board to report by signal.
- There was no reply.



(A. G. Rippon)

Captain Burnett on Bridge of H.M.A.S. Sydney.

23 November 1941 - Mediterranean

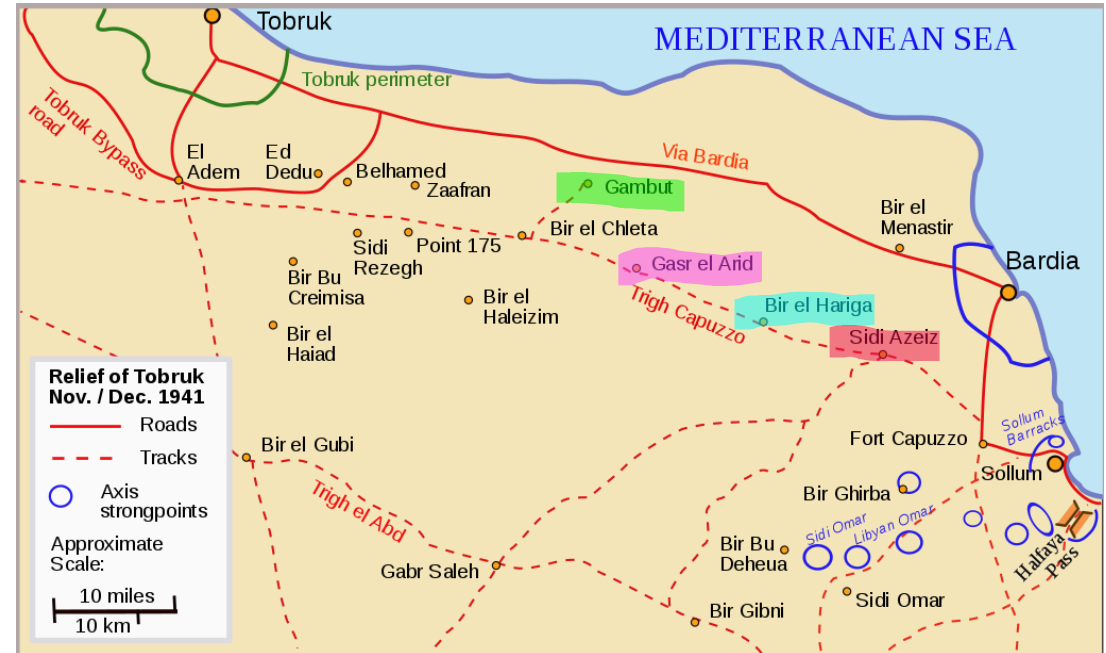
- The British landing ship infantry HMS Glenroy was torpedoed and damaged in the Mediterranean at (31°40'N 26°28'E) by enemy aircraft. She was beached at Mersa Matruh, Egypt. Refloated on 27 November and towed to Alexandria.



HMS Glenroy © IWM FL 13481

23 November 1941 – North Africa

- On 23rd November, when the headquarters of XIII Corps moved forward to Bir el Hariga, the advanced party of No. 451 Squadron set out for Gasr el Arid.
- Unfortunately the enemy was still active between Marsa el Cheteita and Gambut, and the army liaison officer with all his codes was captured, though the main party, delayed by a puncture, had meanwhile fallen in with New Zealand troops and was safely diverted to Sidi Azeiz.
- The loss of these army-cooperation codes was exacerbated when advanced corps headquarters became separated from No. 451 and communication was possible only by radio, although a new emergency code was prepared which worked for immediate needs.
- The aircrews at Sidi Omar didn't know what had happened and when four Hurricanes flew to Gasr el Arid at first light on 24th they found it unoccupied but were met by hostile fire in the vicinity.
- Later that morning Williams again flew to Gasr el Arid, and, finding the position unchanged, landed in the desert near the headquarters of XIII Corps to discover the reason.
- He was then able to lead his squadron to Sidi Azeiz and operations were resumed from there.



23 November 1941 – North Africa

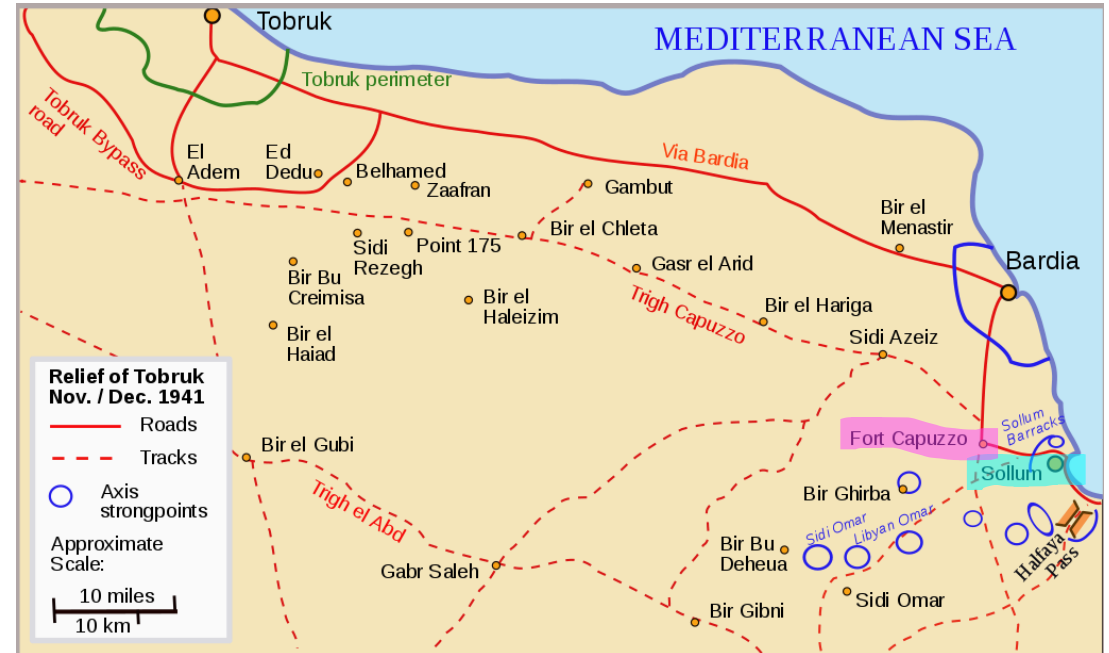
- On 23 November Rommel gathered his two panzer divisions in an attack with the Ariete Armoured Division to cut off and to destroy the rest of XXX Corps.
- In the pocket were the remains of 7th Armoured Division, 5th South African Infantry Brigade and elements of the recently arrived 6th NZ Brigade.
- By the end of the day, the 5th South African Brigade had been destroyed.
- What remained of the defending force broke out of the pocket and headed south towards Bir el Gubi.
- From 19 to 23 November, around 350 British tanks were destroyed and 150 severely damaged.
- Axis losses were also considerable, with the Afrika Korps down to 40 operational tanks.



The aftermath of the Sidi Rezegh battle, with several knocked-out Panzer IIIs.

23 November 1941 – North Africa

- On 23 November, the 5th New Zealand Brigade continued its advance south-east, down the main road from **Fort Capuzzo** towards **Sollum**, and cut off the Axis positions from Sidi Omar to Sollum and Halfaya from Bardia and its supply route.



23 November 1941 – North Africa

- The New Zealand Division (less the 5th Brigade) which with the 1st Army Tank Brigade (less one regiment) was advancing towards Tobruk by the Trigh Capuzzo route was too occupied with its own problems to be over-troubled by the disasters that had overtaken the 7th Armoured Division and 5th South African Brigade.
- The 6th brigade arrived at Bir el Chleta, some 15 miles (24 km) east of Sidi Rezagh, at first light on 23 November. It stumbled on the Afrika Korps headquarters and captured most of its staff (General Crüwell was absent). As a result no supplies reached either panzer division that day.
- On the 23rd the 25th New Zealand Battalion and part of the 24th and of the 8th Royal Tank Regiment (47 Valentines), were involved in heavy fighting with the German 361st Africa Regiment in the 6th New Zealand Brigade's attack on Point 175, the capture of which was gallantly completed next day.



A Valentine in North Africa, carrying infantry from a Scottish regiment

23 November 1941 – North Africa

- At 6:30 in the morning of the 23rd November Cunningham took off in his personal aircraft to visit Godwin Austen at 13 corps
- He explained to Godwin Austen 13th corps, now to include the South Africans and the Tobruk Garrison must be responsible for operations to relieve the fortress.
- Cunningham then flew back to his HQ at Maddalena.
- Reports of yesterday's defeat had at last reached 8th Army.
- Cunningham read for himself that 7th Armoured Brigade, which had began the battle with 129 tanks had not a single runner, that 22nd Armoured Brigade (originally 158 tanks) had only 30 and that nothing was known of 4th armoured brigade whose headquarters and being destroyed.
- He had in fact lost the decisive armoured battle that was the basis of the Crusader plan.



Desert Victory,

- The 8th Army's push against and the driving back of Rommel through the desert.
- Macdonald, David, Army Film and Photographic Unit and RAF Film Production Unit
- 61 min 23 sec
- Winner of the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1943.
- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C188882>

- Thanks for your attention.
- As usual there will be no lecture on the first Tuesday in November.