

# Australia's War: 80 years ago this week

## 24 November 1941



# 23 November 1941 – North Africa

- Cunningham (photo) had lost the decisive armoured battle that was the basis of the Crusader plan.
- The suddenness and force of the shock overwhelmed him. The facts of the matter allowed only one deduction we had lost the battle and must break it off.
- Out of 450 cruiser tanks 8th army had lost already at least 300. In yesterday's battle alone the British losses had been almost 60. If Rommel pressed home his attack today against our weakened and disorganised forces we might easily lose another 60.



# 23 November 1941 – North Africa

- For Cunningham (photo) there was another disquieting implication in the morning's news. It was now revealed how little control or indeed knowledge 8th army headquarters had of the forward operations. One of the most terrifying of emotions is a sense of impotence in the presence of unfolding disaster, and awareness that events are slipping beyond the limits of one's technique.
- Cunningham now sent an urgent request to the commander-in-chief, General Auchinleck to fly up at once to discuss the situation; or in plain terms to decide whether the offensive should go on or whether the 8th army should regroup for defence.
- All now depended on the commander-in-chief.
- Some strange events occurred to keep the army in place until he arrived. Tents and caravans at 8th army headquarters took an astonishing time to be struck. Telephone lines were cut so that orders to retire or cease advancing, should they be issued, could not be received.
- More tidings of disaster now came in: of the state of the fourth armoured brigade's disorganisation and of the annihilation of the 5th South African brigade by German armour.



# 23 November 1941 – North Africa

- In the evening Auchinleck (photo) arrived.
- He heard Cunningham set out the facts of defeat and draw the logical conclusion that prompt disengagement while some armour remained was the only course that might save the army and Egypt.
- But Auchinleck's opinion was different from Cunningham's.
- "I thought Rommel was probably in as bad shape as we were, especially with Tobruk unvanquished behind him, and I ordered the offensive to continue.
- I certainly gambled [in fact by going on we might have lost all] and Cunningham might very well have been proved to be right and I wrong!"



# 24 November 1941 - Indian Ocean

- At 8.30 a.m. on the 24th November, Aquitania, bound from Singapore to Sydney, rescued twenty-six Germans from a raft in a position some hundred and thirty miles west of Carnarvon.
- From their accounts, Aquitania's captain gathered that the Germans' ship had been in action with a cruiser.
- He did not report immediately by wireless because he considered that the cruiser would herself have already reported, and he did not wish therefore to break wireless silence.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Sydney, NSW. The troopship Aquitania sailing through Sydney Heads on her return trip carrying troops returning home from the Middle East. C May 41.

# 24 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- The morning of 24 November all high power wireless stations in Australia were instructed to call Sydney continuously. There was no response.
- An air search carried out that day by R.A.A.F. aircraft from Pearce, Western Australia, produced no positive result.
- The Commander-in-Chief, China, was then informed that Sydney was thirty-six hours overdue, and replied that she had handed over Zealandia to Durban off Sunda Strait at noon on the 17th.
- The Commander-in-Chief, Netherlands Navy, Admiral Helfrich, was thereupon requested by the Naval Board to carry out an air search south from Java; but within two hours of the despatch of that request came news.
- Shortly after 6 p.m. on the 24th the British tanker Trocas reported by wireless that she had picked up a raft carrying 25 German naval men in a position approximately 120 miles W.N.W. of Carnarvon.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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FREMANTLE, WA. 1941-10-31. THE BRITISH TANKER TROCAS. ON 1941-11-24 SHE PICKED UP SURVIVORS OF THE GERMAN AUXILIARY CRUISER KORMORAN.

# 24 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Six merchant ships in the area, Pan Europe, Saidja, Herstein, Sunetta, Centaur and Hermion, were instructed to pass through the position of the raft found by Trocas and keep a lookout for other survivors.
- Four auxiliary naval vessels, Yandra, Heros, Olive Cam and Wyrallah, were sailed from Fremantle to meet Trocas and then search the area.
- Aircraft were relocated from Pearce to Carnarvon to search from there, and two R.A.A.F. Catalina flying-boats were transferred from North Eastern Area to cover a wide ocean reconnaissance.
- Later on the 24th wireless stations were instructed to cease calling Sydney.
- It seemed clear that she had been in action, and the discovery by Trocas defined a search area that was closely and widely covered, by air from Australia and Java; by sea by merchant vessels and the naval vessels from Fremantle, and the Dutch cruiser Tromp which left Sunda Strait on the 25th to follow Sydney's track to 20 degrees south and then search towards Surabaya on the chance of the cruiser, damaged, making for that port.



# 24 November 1941 – Mediterranean

- The German cargo ships Maritza (2,910 GRT, 1936) and Procida (1,842 GRT, 1927) were shelled and sunk in the Mediterranean Sea 100 nautical miles west of Crete by HMS Lively and HMS Penelope. There were no survivors.
- The Italian salvage vessel Hercules (631 GRT, 1910) was torpedoed and sunk in Heraklion harbour, Greece by the submarine HMS Triumph. There were two killed and three wounded.
- The Italian cargo ship Unione (216 GRT) was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean at (41°06'N 10°02'E) by HNLMS O-21.



# 24 November 1941 – North Africa

- Rommel on the 24th gathered the bulk of his tanks and sent them swiftly down the Trigh el Abd towards Bir Sheferzen to destroy Eighth Army dumps and cut lines of communication leading north to the Trigh Capuzzo.
- Advanced and rear headquarters of XXX Corps were overrun and at 4 p.m. that day the German thrust crossed the wire barrier south of Bir Sheferzen and swung north-east to attack British supply columns.
- In a few hours the whole battle area was thrown into confusion, and air support was urgently demanded to check the enemy.
- As Rommel was using a large percentage of captured British vehicles and both enemy and Eighth Army columns were moving eastwards at full speed it was singularly difficult either on the ground or in the air to determine which were hostile; and bombing that day did not appreciably interfere with enemy movement.



Erwin Rommel with the German 15th Panzer Division in Libya, 24 Nov 1941; note Hanomag Kfz. 15 and SdKfz. 221/222 vehicles

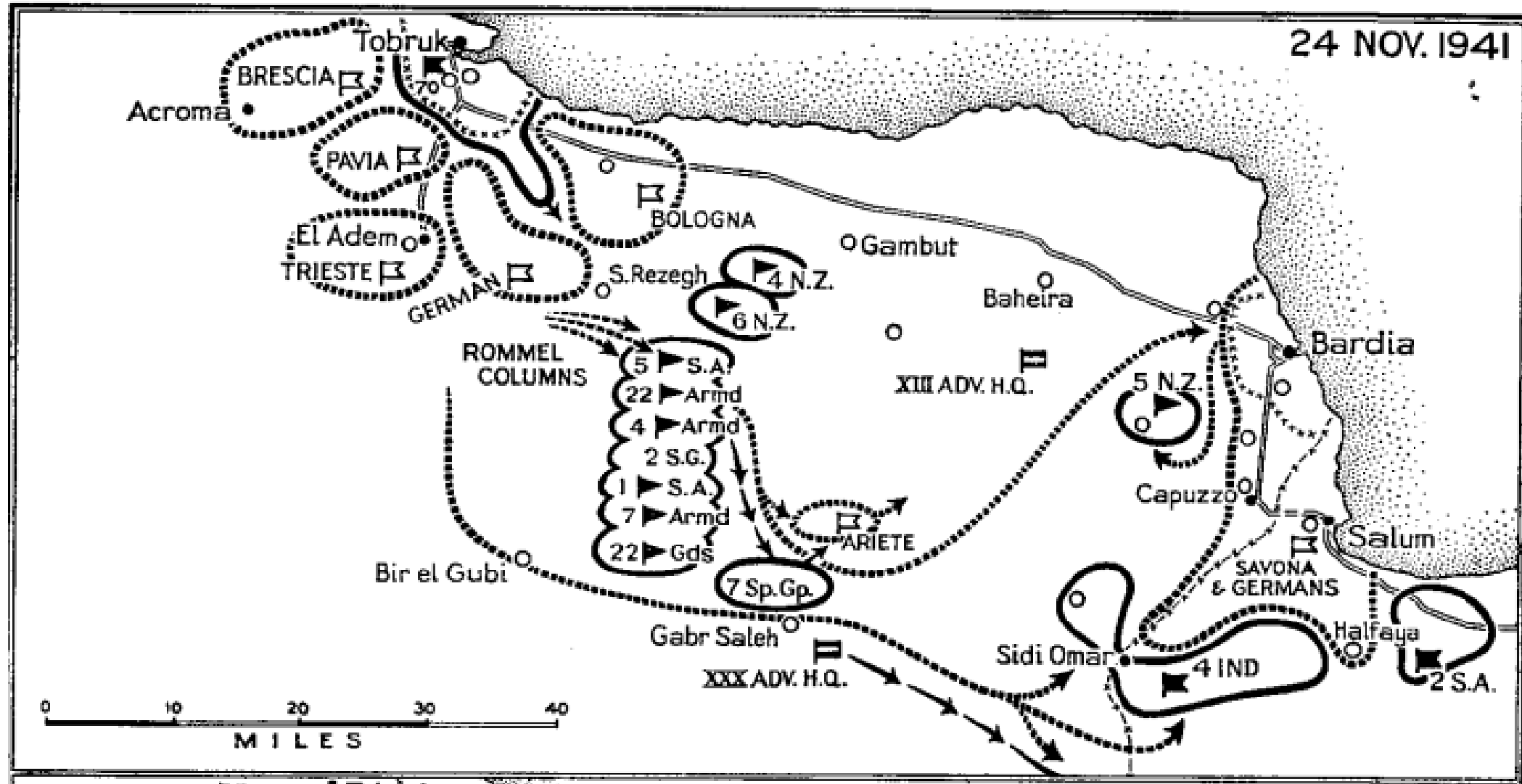
# 24 November 1941 – North Africa

- Early in the afternoon No. 2 Operational Wing escorted Maryland bombers attacking El Adem where the raid had originated.
- During the actual stampede No. 3 was called on only to intercept six enemy aircraft reported to be approaching LG-122 at Maddalena to which by nightfall all forward R.A.F. squadrons had been recalled, the latecomers landing on a flare - path improvised with hurricane lamps.
- In all some 175 aircraft congregated at Maddalena and the German column swept by on its drive into Egypt only ten miles to the northwards thus missing an incomparable opportunity of wrecking R.A.F. fighter strength.



RAF Maryland Mark II of No. 39 Squadron RAF, undergoes servicing on a landing ground in the Western Desert as another aircraft returns from a reconnaissance flight.

# 24 November 1941 – North Africa



# 24 November 1941 – North Africa

- On the 24th Auchinleck handed Cunningham a directive setting out in detail Auchinleck's reading of the situation and his orders for continued battle.
- His conclusion reaffirmed his decision of the night before:
- "You will therefore continue to attack the enemy relentlessly using all your resources even to the last tank."



# 24 November 1941 – North Africa

- On the night of the 24th November the two 2/13th companies on the Wadi Sehel were relieved by troops from the Polish Brigade and joined the rest of the battalion at Pilastrino. No significance was attached to the reunion and for two days the men had little to do except ponder sceptically the reports of an offensive that seemed to have become bogged down.



*(Australian War Memorial)*

Australians and Poles at Tobruk.

# 24 November 1941 - Atlantic

- The Danae-class light cruiser HMS Dunedin (6 \* 6inch guns, 1919) was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic Ocean off Recife, Brazil (near 3°S 26°W) by U-124 with the loss of 419 of her 486 crew.
- 250 survived the sinking, but only 72 were still living when rescued by Nishmaha (United States) on 27 November, with 5 more deaths after rescue.
- In 1931 Dunedin had provided assistance to the town of Napier, New Zealand, after the Hawkes Bay earthquake, in a task force with the sloop Veronica and the cruiser Diomed.



The Dunedin turning into Gardens Reach on the Brisbane River. South Brisbane wharves in background. Date not stated. Original is held by John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

# 25 November 1941 - Japan

- On 25 November Admiral Yamamoto (photo) issued his order to the striking force to sortie next day, to “advance into Hawaiian waters and upon the very opening of hostilities attack the main force of the United States fleet in Hawaii.” “The first air raid is planned for the dawn of X day, exact date to be given by a later order.”
- “Should the negotiations with the United States prove successful the task force shall hold itself in readiness forthwith to return or reassemble.”
- The carrier fleet, which had rendezvoused on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November at Takan Bay in the Kuriles, set off for Hawaii at 6:00 AM November 26<sup>th</sup>.



# 25 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- Barham was torpedoed off the Egyptian coast on the 25th November by a German Uboat.
- Three torpedoes struck amidships so closely together as to throw up a single massive water column. Barham quickly capsized to port and was lying on her side when a massive magazine explosion occurred about four minutes after she was torpedoed and sank her.
- The destroyer Hotspur rescued some 337 survivors, including Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, who had been blown off his bridge into the water, while the Australian destroyer Nizam rescued some 150 men.
- 862 men, approximately two thirds of her crew, were lost
- After the loss of Ark Royal and Barham the British fleet is reduced to 13 battleships and 6 aircraft carriers with a complement of only 180 aircraft.



The British battleship HMS Barham explodes as her 15 inch magazine ignites.

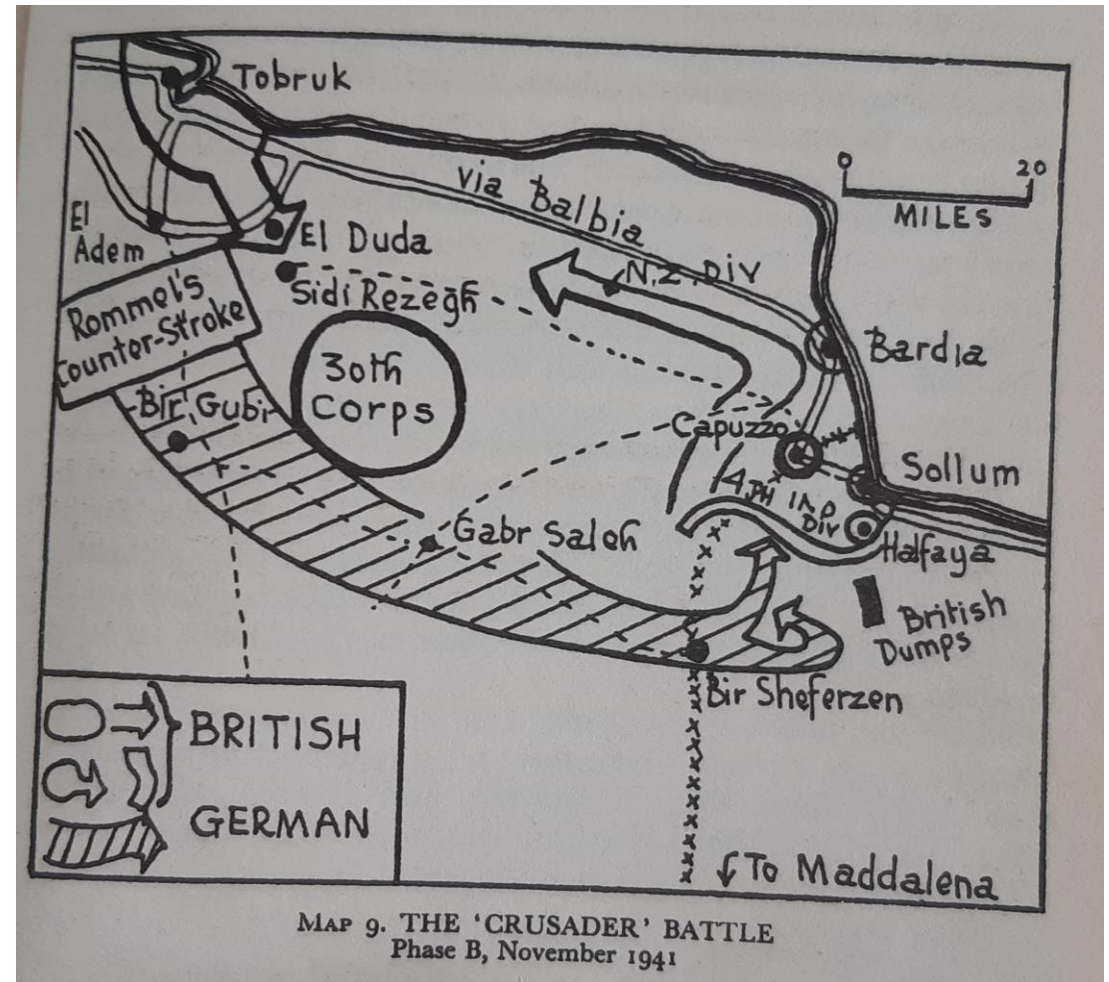
# 25 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- The Italian armed merchant cruiser **Attilo Deffenu** (3,510 GRT, 1929) was torpedoed and sunk in the Adriatic Sea off Brindisi at (40°37'N 18°27'E) by HMS Thrasher. There were no casualties.
- The German ship LVII (300 GRT) was shelled and sunk in the Aegean Sea off Cape Maleas, Greece by HMS Thunderbolt.
- The Italian Galeb-class minelayer **Zirona** (515/690 t, 1919) was bombed by British aircraft at Benghazi and beached.



# 25 November 1941 – North Africa

- On the morning of 25th November the German columns divided into compact groups both east and west of the frontier wire and damaged whatever lay in their path.
- Enemy tanks passed within five miles of No. 451 at LG-132 (Sidi Omar) and the main squadron party retired to an airfield twenty-two miles east of Maddalena although the advanced flying party remained located at Sidi Azeiz.
- Mobile columns harassed the flanks of the enemy columns which were also attacked by all available bombers and fighters.
- No. 3 was called on twice early on the 25th to perform tactical reconnaissances of enemy movements and then with No. 112 the Australians strafed at low level the main German concentration south of Sidi Omar.
- This attack appeared very successful in damaging enemy vehicles, but in the face of ground fire was relatively costly.
- One pilot crash-landed and escaped with the personnel of No. 451 evacuating Sidi Omar airfield, a second crashed and was killed, while Flying Officer Jewell was forced down between two columns of enemy transport vehicles.
- He hid in a hole but was later captured by a small detachment of Germans who asked the way to Sidi Omar. Jewell misdirected them and two hours later on the approach of New Zealand troops he seized his opportunity and leapt from the German car which went off at high speed.



# 25 November 1941 – North Africa

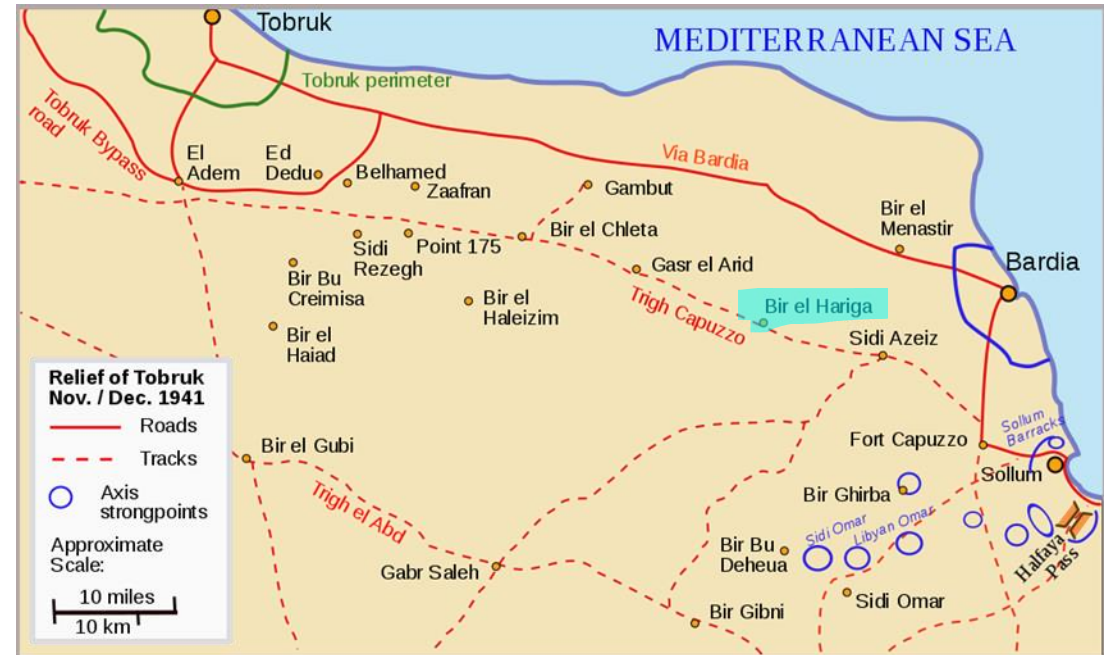
- The same afternoon Jeffrey led Nos. 3 and 112 in an offensive sweep near Sidi Rezegh.
- In the air the Germans reacted violently to an advance by the New Zealanders. When, at 3.15 p.m., No. 2 Operational Wing arrived, they found Ju-87's, with fighter escort, bombing from 6,000 feet, Me-110's, also escorted, bombing from 1,300 feet and a similar formation at 10,000 feet, with a top cover of German and Italian fighters.
- The whole enemy force amounted to about seventy aircraft. While No. 3 dived to attack the Me-110's, which had begun to scatter, No. 112 engaged the enemy fighters and, amid scenes of wild enthusiasm on the ground, ten enemy aircraft were destroyed, three probably destroyed and eight damaged.
- No. 3 naturally had greater opportunity of personal success in attacking the bombers, and their claim amounted to seven destroyed, one probable and eight damaged, for the loss of one Tomahawk.



Bf 110s in France in 1942

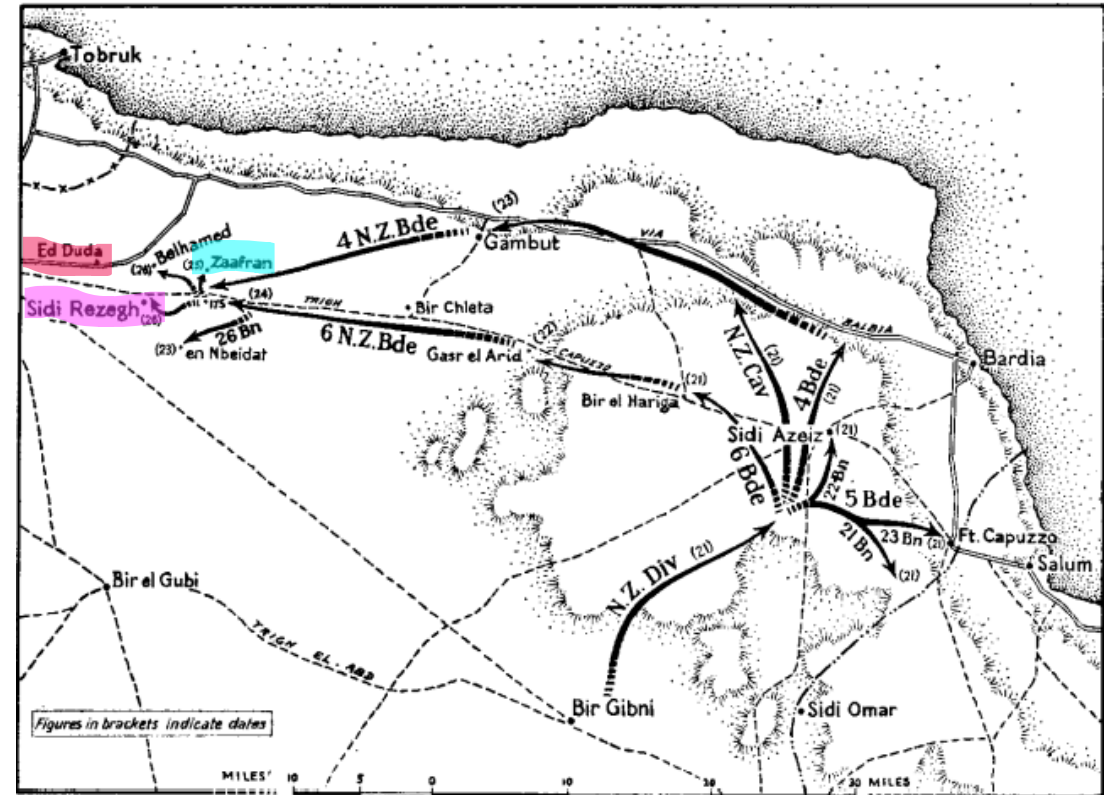
# 25 November 1941 – North Africa

- One enemy column began to thrust northwards towards XIII Corps during the afternoon of 25th November, and Hurricanes of No. 451, reporting the column's movement, were engaged on nine sorties that day.
- Despite heavy air attacks the German column pressed on and leaguered that night within five miles of **Bir el Hariga** where the headquarters of XIII Corps was established.



# 25 November 1941 – North Africa

- On the 25th the 4th New Zealand Brigade began clearing the enemy from the escarpment north of the Trigh Capuzzo on the right flank of the 6th Brigade and took Zaafran, while the 6th captured the Blockhouse and established two companies on the eastern edge of the Sidi Rezegh airfield.
- A message received early next morning (25<sup>th</sup>) directed Scobie to get ready to attack Ed Duda in conjunction with the New Zealand Division.
- Stocks of 25-pounder ammunition were low—only 554 rounds per gun—but a ship provided in response to further urgent pleas was due to reach Tobruk on the night of the 26th with 600 tons.
- Freyberg sent Godwin-Austen a message to the effect that by first light next morning (26th November) the New Zealanders would be on a line from Ed Duda to Point 178 on the southern Sidi Rezegh escarpment.



Westward advance of New Zealand Division, from 21st to 26th November

# 26 November 1941 - Canberra



- Parliament reassembled and passed the budget.
- In a valedictory speech on the evening of 26th November, Curtin (photo, left) expressed gratitude to the Leader of the Opposition for his consideration and "complete generosity" to him as a novice.
- Fadden (photo, right) reciprocated by saying that the Opposition intended to lend all possible assistance to the Government in order to achieve a maximum war effort.
- He spoke with gratification of what had been achieved in recent weeks by compromise. Anomalies which had been exposed in legislation during the debate had been referred to special committees upon which all parties were represented and the unsatisfactory provisions had been suitably amended.
- Parliament was functioning again. The Government was stable.



# 26 November 1941 - Canberra

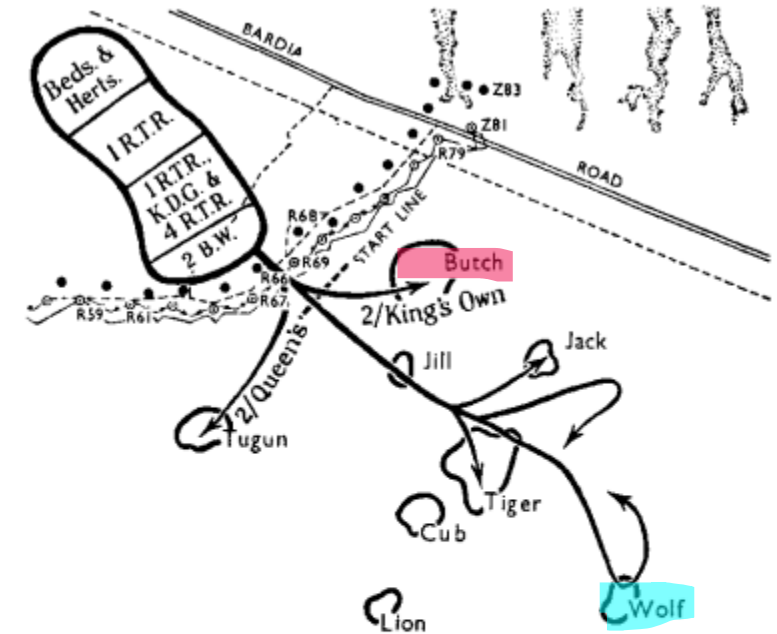
- Negotiations were proceeding between the United States and British naval authorities regarding naval cooperation in the event of war, and a naval conference at Singapore was arranged to be held as soon as Admiral Phillips arrived there.
- The Australian Government thereupon produced a formula (which was endorsed by the Advisory War Council on the 26th November) setting out the minimum it could accept in agreeing to transfer the strategic control of H.M.A. Ships to the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet.
- It was that the following necessary protection should be given to vital commitments on the Australia Station:
  - (1) Escort of Australian and New Zealand reinforcements (every 60 days);
  - (2) Escort of air trainees (every 28 days);
  - (3) Food and supplies to the Middle East and Malaya (every 36 days);
  - (4) Seaborne trade in Australian waters, as this was vital to Australia's war effort (including Tasman convoys every 20 days);
  - (5) Any other special commitment.
- The Government stipulated that the protection afforded should be not less than that which would be given by Australian naval forces if control of these had been retained by the Commonwealth.
- It was also decided that Admiral Royle, while at Singapore, should enter into no commitment until he had submitted a report on his discussions to the Commonwealth Government.



Inaugural meeting of the Advisory War Council, 28 October 1940.

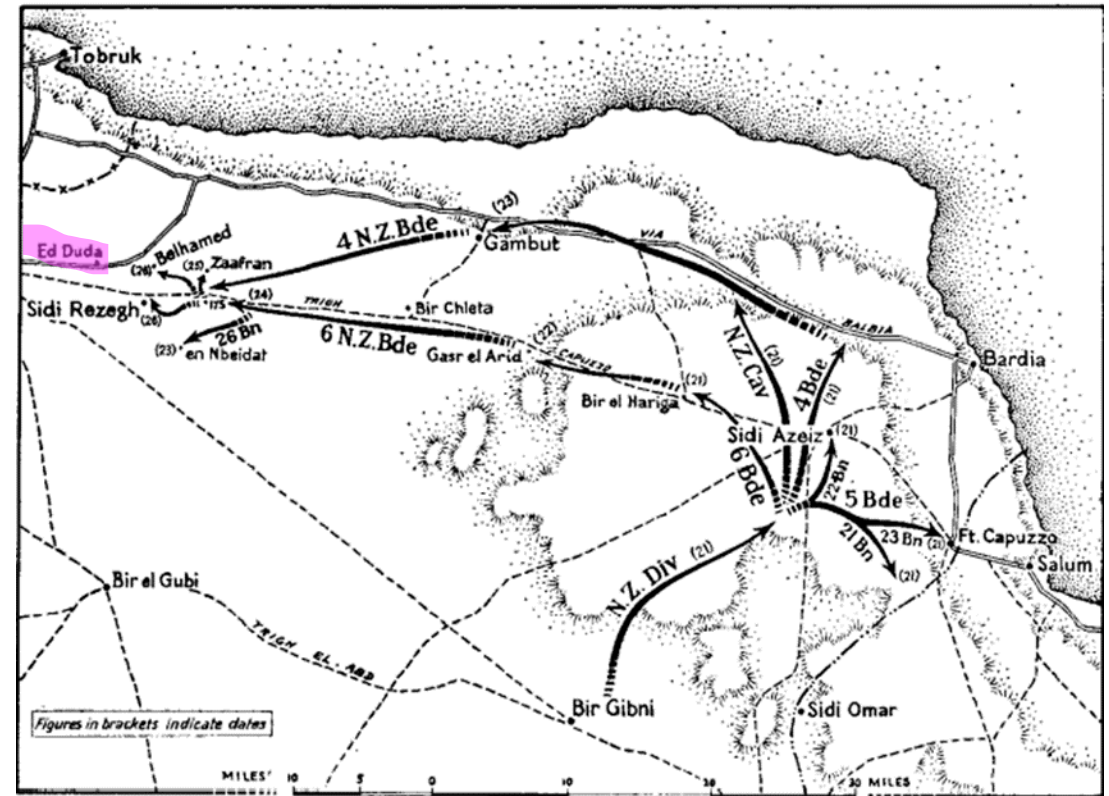
# 26 November 1941 – North Africa

- The New Zealand Division opened its attack at 9 p.m. on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Simultaneously the garrison forces launched tank and infantry operations with artillery support in the corridor to mop up enemy pockets at Butch (on the east of the corridor near the perimeter) and at Wolf.
- Operations by a company of the 2/Leicester and a squadron of the 7th Royal Tanks in the wrecked plane area were partly successful, capturing two out of five sangars but the attack on Wolf by a company of the 2/Yorks and Lancs and the 4th Royal Tanks encountered much opposition; 150 prisoners were taken but the enemy strongly counter-attacked and recaptured part of the locality.
- About 7 a.m. (26<sup>th</sup>) next morning a second British attack recaptured Wolf and many prisoners were taken, but about 300 enemy escaped up the escarpment.
- About 11 a.m. on 26th November the long awaited code word for the attack on Ed Duda was passed through Tobruk. It seems that the decision to mount the attack was Scobie's own and was made after interception of two messages from the New Zealand Division to XIII Corps, the first stating that the 6th New Zealand Brigade had captured Sidi Rezegh and was on the way to Ed Duda. Zero hour was fixed at five minutes after midday.



# 26 November 1941 – North Africa

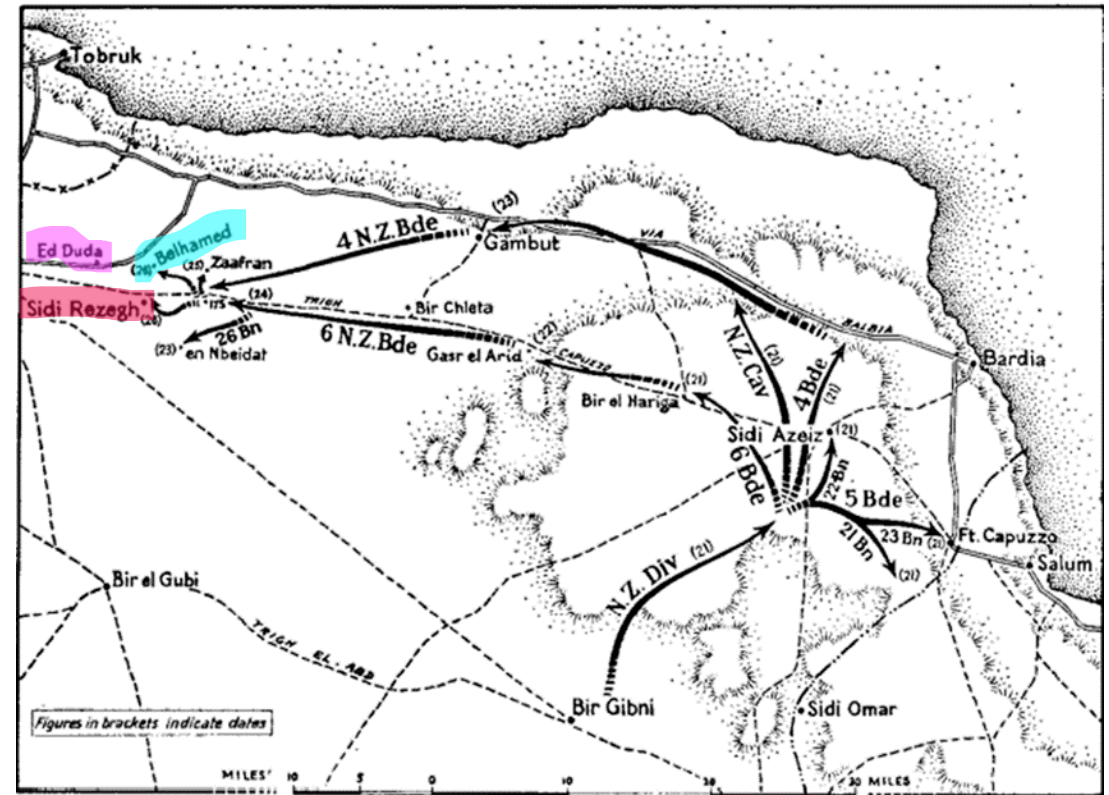
- Matildas of the 4th Royal Tanks, followed by the 1st Royal Tanks (cruisers and light tanks) and supported by the 1st R.H.A. charged across the four or five miles of flat desert separating the start-line from Ed Duda and climbed to the top of that feature; but as they went over the rise to descend to the by-pass road they found themselves facing enemy guns firing point-blank.
- The closer guns were silenced by the Besa machine-guns mounted on the tanks and the 1st R.H.A. did their best to neutralise others.
- About 45 minutes later Brigadier Willison called forward the 1/Essex. Led by their carrier platoon, they "made a fine spectacle". The advance was carried out across the plain without interruption until the leading troops were about 200 yards from the near edge of the escarpment, where they were heavily bombed.
- This bombardment destroyed half the Carrier Platoon, about one platoon of "D" Company, killing the Company Commander and the Carrier Officer, and inflicting about 35 other casualties. This did not check the advance, and all companies, on reaching the escarpment, debussed according to plan and went forward rapidly to seize their respective objectives.
- At this time the whole Tank Brigade had withdrawn to the left flank, and was formed up ready to support the battalion if required.
- The Essex soon dug themselves in for all round defence. Several local German counter-attacks were made before dusk and repulsed with the capture of about 70 prisoners.



Westward advance of New Zealand Division, from 21st to 26th November

# 26 November 1941 – North Africa

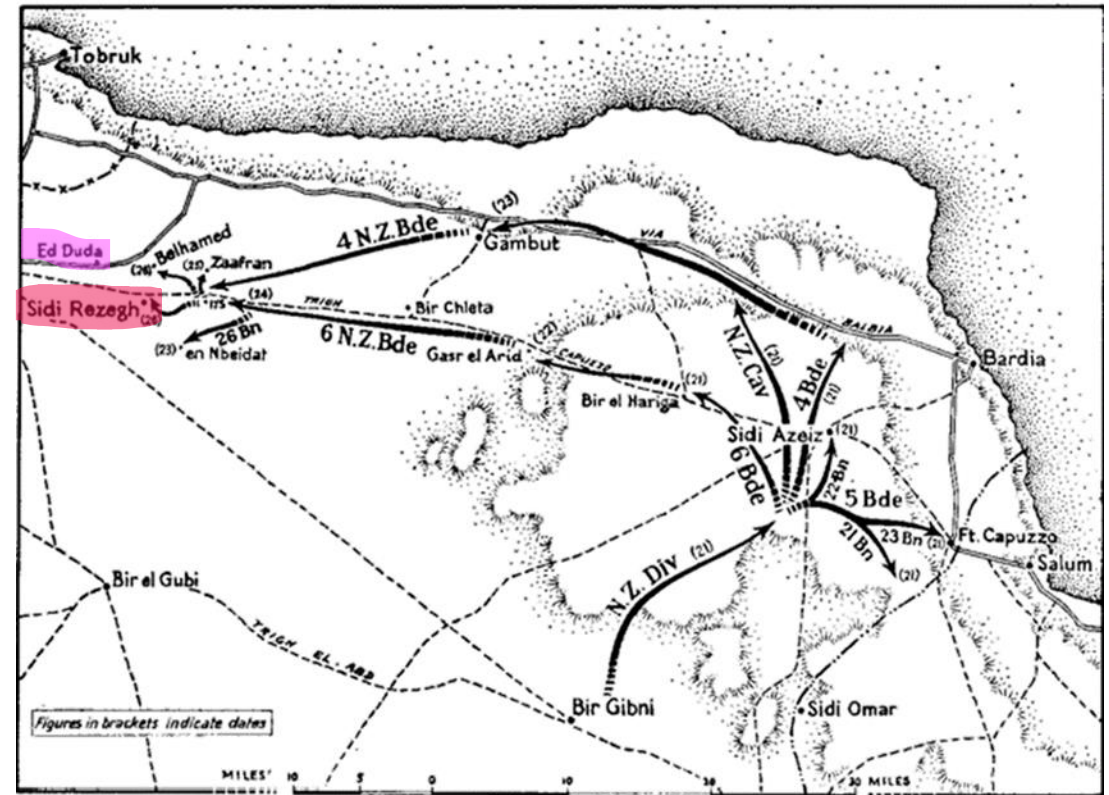
- Freyberg's plan had provided for a night attack on the 25th-26th by the 4th and 6th New Zealand Brigades to capture Belhamed and Sidi Rezegh, after which a force was to be pushed through to seize Ed Duda.
- Even with their best will and utmost effort Freyberg's battalions could not be ready by 9 p.m., the zero hour he had prescribed. They got away to a late and ragged start.
- The 4th Brigade meeting less opposition than expected overran Belhamed, which was not strongly held.
- The 6th Brigade had a confused and troublesome night. The plan was to establish a firm base on the Sidi Rezegh escarpment above the Trigh Capuzzo from which a force of two battalions (the 21st and 26th) with supporting arms would descend to the "Trigh" en route to Ed Duda.
- The 24th and depleted 25th Battalions managed to establish themselves in a defensive "box" on the plateau above the escarpment south-west of the Sidi Rezegh mosque, but the route of the Ed Duda force to the Trigh Capuzzo had not been cleared of enemy and confusion attended efforts to get it lined up and started before dawn. So with Freyberg's approval the advance to Ed Duda was cancelled.



Westward advance of New Zealand Division, from 21st to 26th November

# 26 November 1941 – North Africa

- Dawn on the 26th found the New Zealanders at **Sidi Rezegh** disorganised and exposed to the close fire of an enemy ensconced on most of the ground of vantage but although many detachments had soon to be extricated and others were lost the New Zealanders clung throughout the day to their foothold west of the airfield and south-west of the mosque.
- When Freyberg was told that a force from Tobruk had taken **Ed Duda**, he ordered his 4th Brigade (Brigadier Inglis) to effect a junction with the garrison force and his 6th Brigade (Brigadier Barrowclough) to complete the capture of Sidi Rezegh.
- A composite squadron of tanks of the 44th Royal Tanks set off for Ed Duda at 9.30 p.m.; fifteen minutes later the 19th Infantry Battalion followed, accompanied by 6 more tanks.
- The leading tanks approached Ed Duda just before midnight firing green Very lights for recognition. The infantry battalion arrived about an hour later after some light skirmishing on the way.
- The weary, overtried battalions of Barrowclough's brigade, in bitter bullet and bayonet night fighting, slaughtered or winkled out most of the remaining enemy pockets on the Sidi Rezegh escarpment.
- But one German strongpoint remained on the escarpment, to the east of the mosque; another German locality lay midway between Belhamed and Sidi Rezegh.



Westward advance of New Zealand Division, from 21st to 26th November

# 26 November 1941 – North Africa

- In the afternoon general Arthur Smith, chief of staff of the Middle East Command, arrived by air at 8<sup>th</sup> Army HQ with Major General Neil Ritchie (photo), lately deputy chief of staff, who was to replace Cunningham.
- Smith handed Cunningham a letter from Auchinleck to the effect that he had most reluctantly decided to relieve him of his command because he had begun to think defensively.
- When Cunningham's personal gear was ready he and Smith climbed on board the aircraft and flew back to the luxury and peace of the Delta.



# 26 November 1941 – North Africa

- The next day (26<sup>th</sup>) it (the German column) advanced to within a mile of Bir el Hariga but then withdrew to the south-east to lie between Sidi Azeiz and Capuzzo.
- The R.A.F. maintained a heavy assault on German forces, but No. 3's share was relatively small, although on a wing sweep during the morning of the 26th one Messerschmitt 109 was shot down by Sergeant Cameron (photo left with Wing Commander Jeffrey).
- At Sidi Azeiz the advanced party of No. 451 was taken into the armed camp established by the 5th New Zealand Brigade, the pilots sleeping beside their machines.



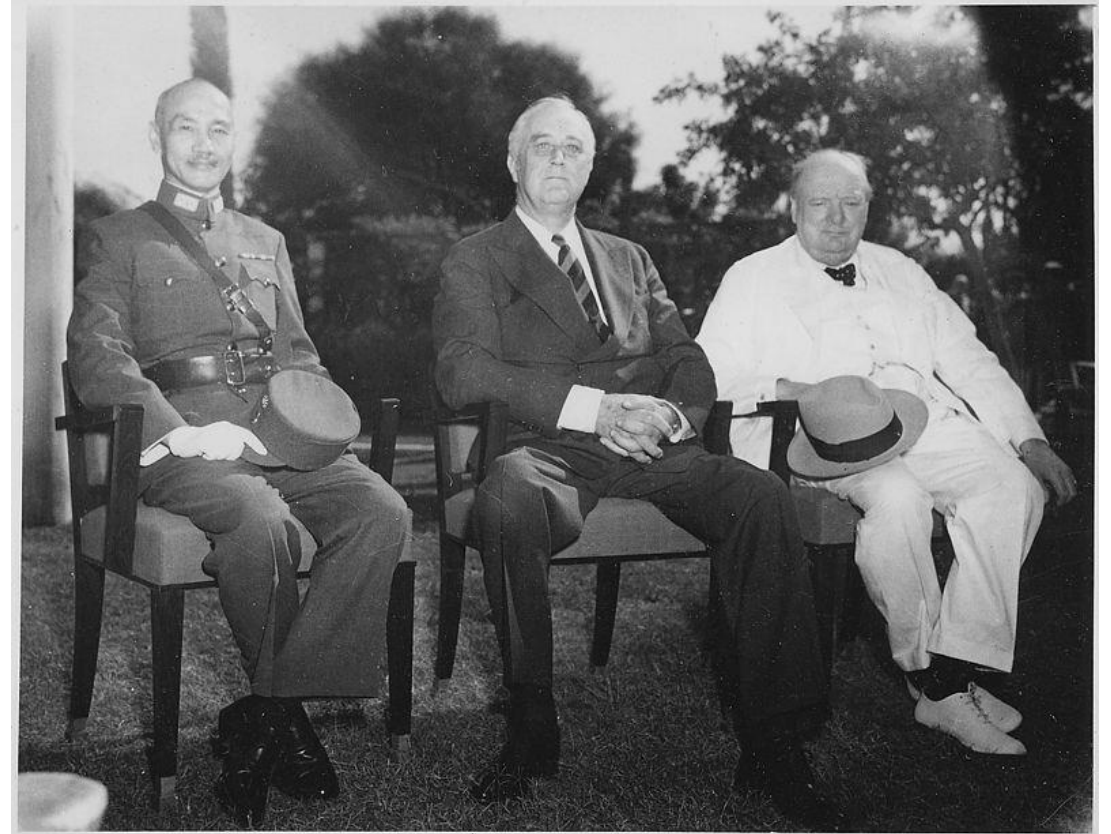
# 26 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- Fierce fighting by the Tobruk garrison had produced an acute shortage of ammunition.
- To relieve this situation Parramatta (photo) was sailed from Alexandria on the 25th in company with the destroyer Avon Vale, escorting the fully laden ammunition ship Hanne (1,360 tons) to Tobruk.
- The merchant ships used on this convoy run were small, slow, and in many cases non-British. Escort-to-convoy communication had often to be made by megaphone, which meant the dangerous procedure of the two ships slowing down right alongside one another.
- It happened on this occasion. At midnight on the 26th November the convoy was just to the north - east of Tobruk. The night was dark with frequent showers. A heavy sea was running . Hanne was not clear as to her route into Tobruk, and Parramatta closed her to communicate by megaphone.



# 26 November 1941 - US Japan Negotiations

- The talk in Washington of a modus vivendi had greatly scared China, who feared that any form of Japanese-American settlement would mean that she would lose the American support she had received in the past and any hope of armed American support if the Japanese attack on her should be intensified.
- A protest by Chiang Kai-shek direct to Roosevelt (reinforced by similar protest to Churchill) had the effect of causing Hull to make fresh proposals to Nomura on 26 November, demanding complete Japanese withdrawal from both Indochina and China.



Chiang with Roosevelt and Churchill in Cairo, Egypt, November 1943.

# 27 November 1941 – Bass Strait

- Not until Aquitania passed Wilson's Promontory at 1.20 p.m. on the 27th and was able to pass a visual signal, did the Naval Board learn that she had met the raft and had prisoners on board.



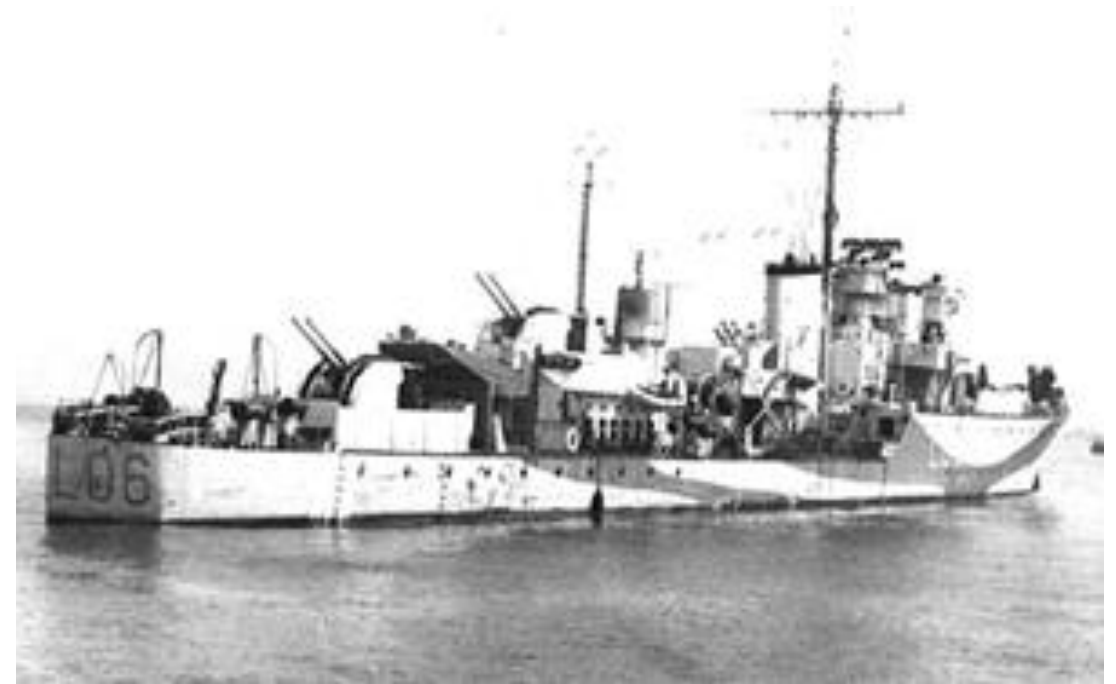
# 27 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- At twenty-five minutes to one in the morning of the 27th Parramatta and Hanne lay close alongside one another, making about three knots. Avon Vale was some distance away.
- A torpedo struck Parramatta amidships at twenty-five minutes to one, and there was an almost simultaneous explosion, probably the magazine, under the quarterdeck, so that survivors believed that two torpedoes had struck and exploded.
- The ship was instantly crippled, lighting failed, and she rolled over to starboard and sank within a few minutes. Walker (photo) was last seen on the bridge, where he gave the order to abandon ship.
- Few other than those on deck got away. For a while thirty or so (including two officers) clung to a float drifting among the debris. There was much wreckage floating, including the ship's stern which reappeared and floated for some time.



# 27 November 1941 - Mediterranean

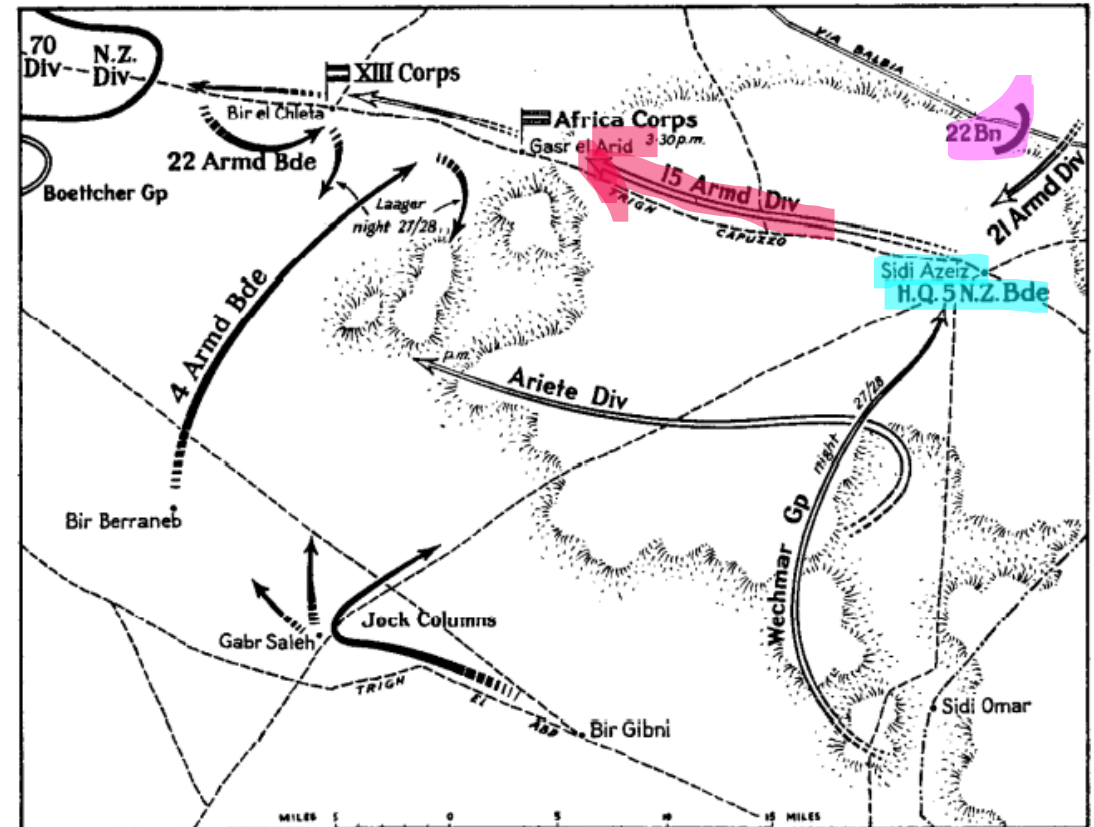
- Those on the float could hear shouts from around them in the darkness. Shortly a black shape was sighted some distance off. Some thought it the submarine, others the Avon Vale.
- Two men, Signalman Stewart and Stoker Greenfield decided to take the chance and swim to it. A three-quarter-mile swim brought them to Avon Vale at 3.5 a.m. on the 27th.
- The destroyer, which did everything possible to pick up survivors from the debris-cluttered sea in the darkness, had already picked up nineteen survivors. Stewart and Greenfield were the last two she was able to find. Nothing more was seen of those who remained with the float.
- Hanne, with her cargo of ammunition, was safely delivered at Tobruk by Avon Vale.
- Three Parramatta ratings reached the shore between Tobruk and Bardia, and were found there by advancing British troops. In all, twenty-four ratings survived the sinking out of the ship's complement of 160.



HMS Avon Vale. 6 \* 4 inch guns in twin mountings, 25 knots, commissioned 1941.

# 27 November 1941 – North Africa

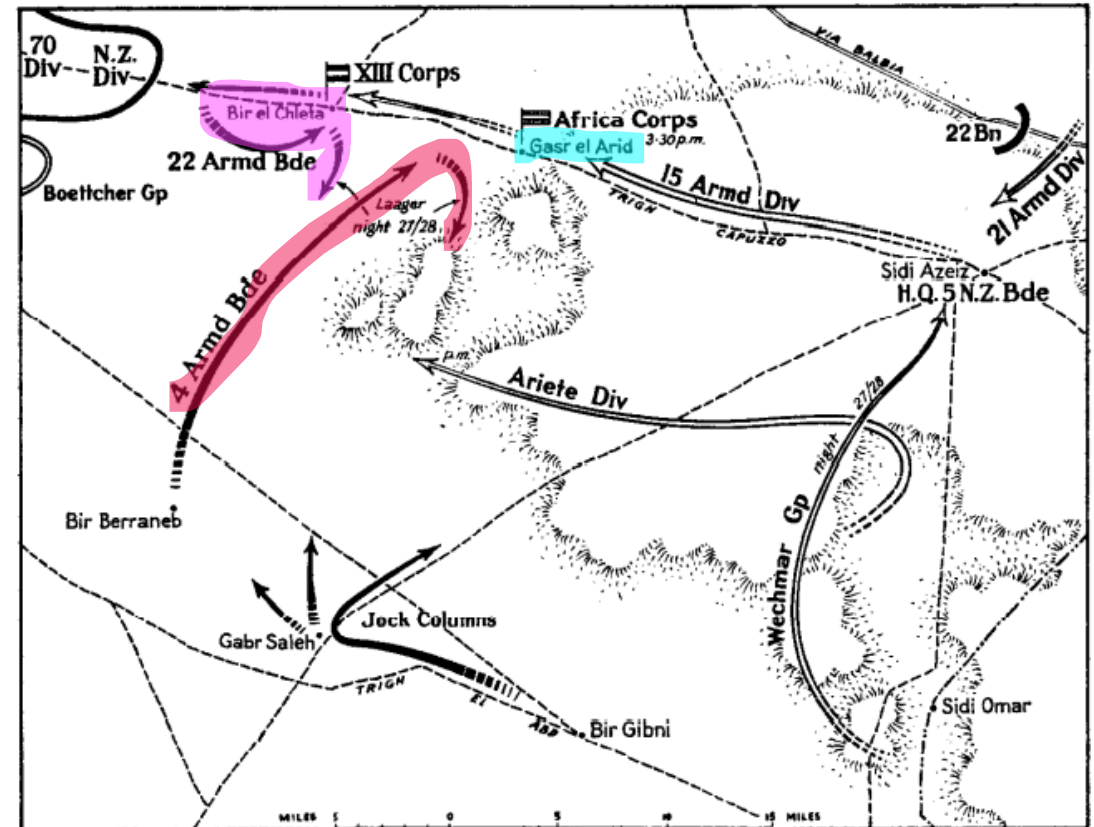
- Soon after daylight on the 27th the 8th Armoured Regiment overran the headquarters of the 5th New Zealand Brigade at Sidi Azeiz.
- The main body of the 15th Armoured Division then made its best time westwards along the Trigh Capuzzo; on this course, if its progress was not contested, it would take in rear first the rear headquarters of the XXX Corps and then the headquarters of the XIII Corps, the New Zealand Division and the 1st Army Tank Brigade.
- The 21st Armoured Division, issuing from Bardia by the main coast road, had bumped into the 22nd New Zealand Battalion at Menastir. The New Zealanders held on, forcing the German formation to lose valuable time.



Movements of armoured formations, 27th November

# 27 November 1941 – North Africa

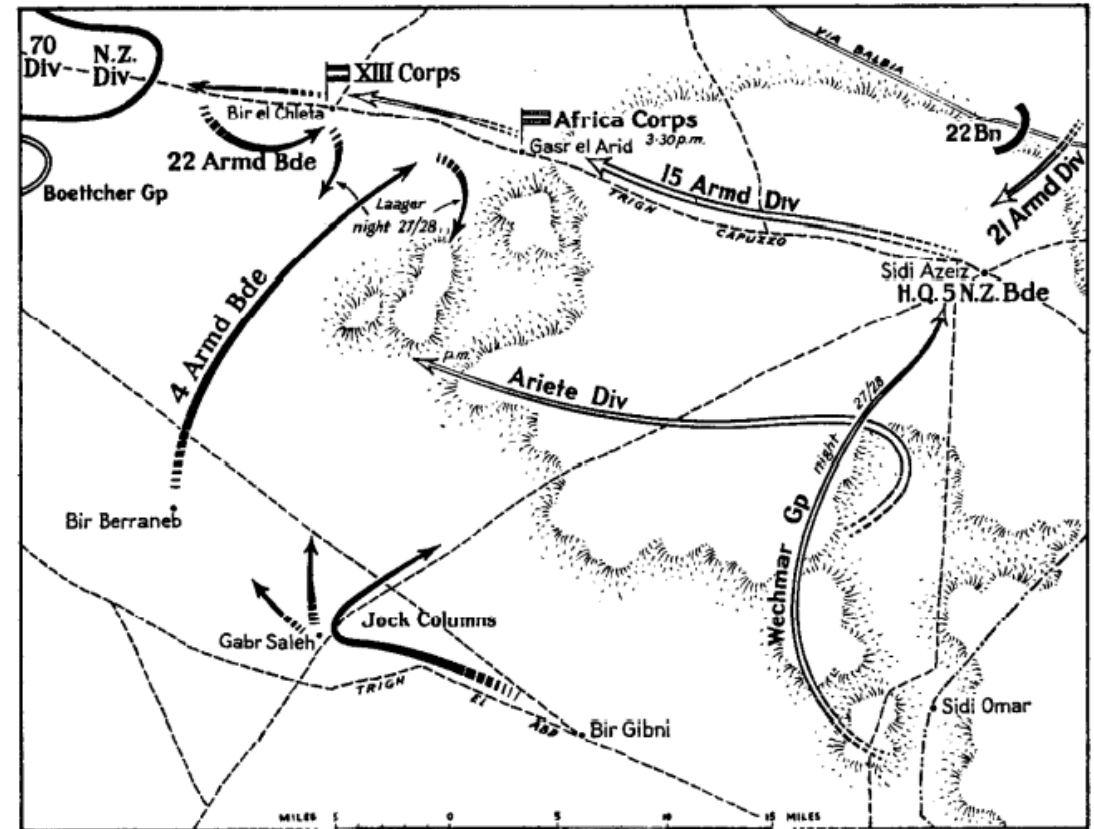
- The 7th Armoured Division, left to its own devices, had substantially reconstituted its strength by battlefield recoveries, workshop returns and new deliveries.
- The 22nd Armoured Brigade, which had been protecting the New Zealand Division's inland flank, had more than 40 British cruiser tanks, the 4th Armoured some 77 Stuarts.
- Gott had been forewarned of the German armoured divisions' westward moves by the intercept service. When he was told about noon by scouting armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards that a column was approaching **Gasr el Arid**, he ordered the 22nd Armoured Brigade to "stop the head" and the 4th Armoured Brigade to attack the flank.
- The 22nd Armoured Brigade intercepted and blocked the German 15th Armoured Division near **Bir el Chleta** about 1.30 p.m. In numbers of tanks the two formations were about equally matched but the British with only one battery of 25-pounders and one of 2-pounders were out-gunned.
- Later in the afternoon the **stronger 4th Armoured Brigade** joined in, giving the British equality in gun-power and superiority in tanks, and the R.A.F. intervened effectively with several bombing strikes.



Movements of armoured formations, 27th November

# 27 November 1941 – North Africa

- The battle honours were about even, but the British armour thwarted the German commander's attempt to get a foothold on the escarpment overlooking the Trigh Capuzzo from which he could attack the British forces opening up the Trigh route to Ed Duda.
- When it became too dark for another chukker, however, the British armoured brigades, having virtually won the day, quitted the ground and returned to their congenial leaguers.
- The oft-repeated injunctions "Attack", "Pursue", "Destroy" contained nothing about fighting for a tactical advantage. The Germans pushed on after dark to seize and secure the pass up the escarpment at Bir Sciafsciuf.



Movements of armoured formations, 27th November

# 27 November 1941 – North Africa

- The expected attack came early on the morning of the 27th and part of No. 451's maintenance party was overrun and captured, but the four Hurricanes took off in the dark without any kind of flare path in an attempt to observe and report progress to the New Zealand troops.
- Two officers, 10 airmen and 4 attached army rankers were captured and taken to Bardia. Major A. D. Molloy and Captain A. P. Fleming of 1 (Aust) Air Support Control were also captured but effected a daring escape after being held for several days.

# 27 November 1941 - US Japan Negotiations

- On 27th November a message from Japan's Foreign Minister, to the Washington embassy was intercepted which stated that the negotiations would be ruptured.
- "I do not wish you to give the impression that the negotiations are broken off," said Togo (photo). "Merely say to them that you are awaiting instructions."

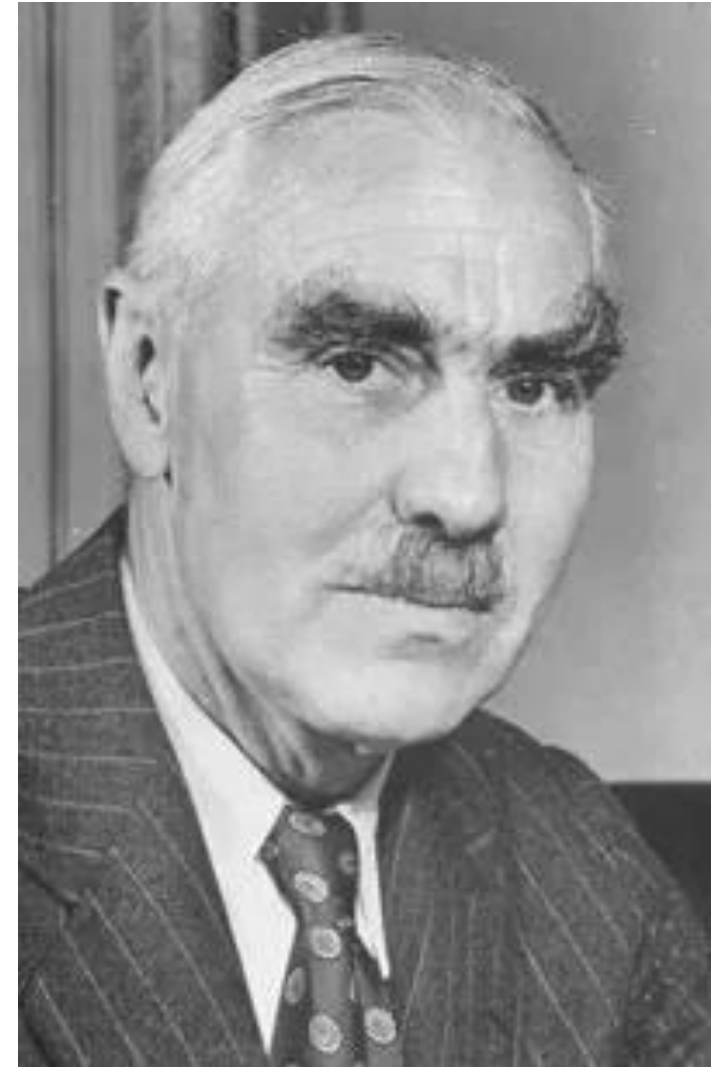


# 27 November 1941 - Washington

- On 27 November 1941 the War Department sent the following message to Army commanders in the Philippines, Hawaii and Western Defence Command:
- Negotiations with Japan appear to be terminated to all practical purposes with only the barest possibilities that the Japanese government might come back and offer to continue. Japanese future action unpredictable but hostile action possible at any moment. If hostilities cannot, repeat cannot, be avoided the United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act. This policy should not, repeat not, be construed as restricting you to a course of action that might jeopardize your defence. Prior to hostile Japanese action you are directed to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary but these measures should be carried out so as not, repeat not, to alarm civil population or disclose intent. Report measures taken. Should hostilities occur you will carry out the tasks assigned in RAINBOW 5 so far as they pertain to Japan. Limit dissemination of this highly secret information to minimum essential officers.

# Earlier Warnings

- The US Ambassador in Tokyo, Mr Grew (photo), had cabled Secretary of State Hull on 27th January 1941 that there was talk in Tokyo that a surprise mass attack on Pearl Harbour was planned by the Japanese military forces in case of "trouble" between Japan and the United States.
- This was passed on to the War and Navy Departments.



# Earlier Warnings

- On 7th February 1941 General Marshall, Chief of Staff US Army, had written to General Short, Commanding General Hawaiian Department,
- “My impression of the Hawaiian problem is that if no serious harm is done us during the first six hours of known hostilities, thereafter the existing defences would discourage an enemy against the hazard of an attack.
- The risk of sabotage, and the risk involved in a surprise raid by air and submarine, constitute the real perils of the situation.”



Army Chief of Staff Marshall with Secretary of War Henry Stimson

# Earlier Warnings

- And on 5th March 1941 General Marshall had written to General Short, “I would appreciate
- your early review of the situation in the Hawaiian Department with regard to defence from air attack. The establishment of a satisfactory system of coordinating all means available to this end is a matter of first priority.”



Army Chief of Staff Marshall with Secretary of War Henry Stimson

# Earlier Warnings

- Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, had taken a personal interest in expediting the delivery of air defence radar to Hawaii and required reports on its installation and testing.
- In July 1941 SCR – 270-B mobile radar sets had begun arriving on Oahu, Hawaii.
- The Signal Corp started assembling them and learning how to operate them. It was planned to install six sets around Oahu, capable of detecting planes at a distance of 130 miles.



SCR-270 radar set installed at Opana, Oahu.

# 27 November 1941 - Hawaii

- The standard operating procedures of the army Hawaiian Department outlined three levels of alert:
  - the first required defense against acts of sabotage and uprising within the islands;
  - the second called for security against attacks from hostile subsurface, surface, and air forces, in addition to defense against acts of sabotage; and
  - the third provided for occupation of all field positions by all units, in preparation for the maximum defense of Hawaii.
- Within half an hour of receipt of the warning from the War Department, and after consulting only with his chief of staff, General Short, commander of the army Hawaiian Department, ordered Alert No. 1 into operation and notified the War Department of his action.
  - Aircraft were concentrated in hangars or in open spaces nearby, and extra guards were placed about the aircraft and military installations.
  - Aircraft were defueled, with an allowance of four hours' notice to make them ready for flight.
  - Ammunition not needed for immediate training was boxed and stored in central locations difficult for an enemy to reach and destroy.



# 27 November 1941 - Hawaii

- Earthen bunkers had been built all around Wheeler field where 125 fighters could be dispersed and protected against air attack. Colonel Flood the base commander asked if he could keep the fighters dispersed but General Short disapproved the request.
- The air warning system was not manned under alert No 1. The radar units operated for training purposes from 04.00 to 07.00 every day, under the control of the Signal Corps. The aircraft plotters manned the Information Center during that time to record reports from the radars but no director or aircraft controller was on duty.



P-36 aircraft lined up at Wheeler Field

# 27 November 1941 - Washington

- On 27<sup>th</sup> November Admiral Stark signalled the commanders of the Pacific and Asiatic fleets:
- “This dispatch is to be considered a war warning. Negotiations with Japan looking towards stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased. An aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days. The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organisation of naval task forces indicates an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsular or possibly Borneo. Execute appropriate defensive deployment preparatory to carrying out the tasks assigned in WPL 46.”

# 27 November 1941 - Hawaii

- The Navy (which had over 60 long-range PBY Flying Boats) accepted the responsibility for long -range reconnaissance in the Hawaii area.
- Admiral Kimmel, CinC Pacific Fleet, had decided that he needed the flying boats to provide long-range coverage in the areas where he planned to operate the fleet during war. If used to patrol the Hawaiian area, he reasoned, they would deteriorate and not be available when the actual war began.



Consolidated PBY Catalina

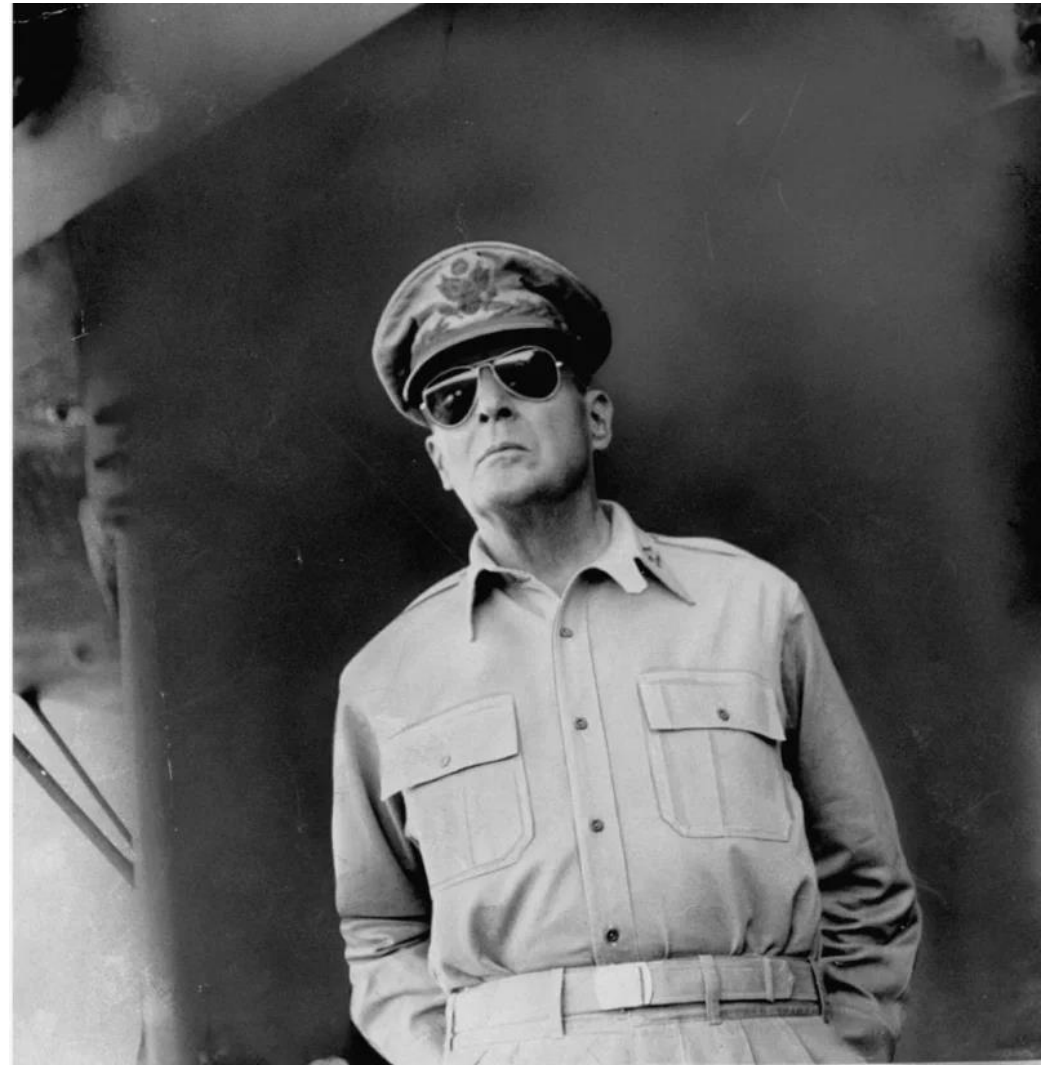
# 27 November 1941 - Hawaii

- Admiral Kimmel (photo) then took a calculated risk, based on the belief that the nearest Japanese possessions capable of supporting a full scale attack on Hawaii were located south of the islands, and began using a minimum number of flying boats for anti-submarine patrol only in that direction.
- Arrangements between the Navy and Army called for the Navy to go to the Air Force for assistance if the Navy was unable to provide the reconnaissance coverage necessary. The Navy never exercised this option, since it believed that an attack on Hawaii could not occur without some warning.



# 28 November 1941 - Philippines

- On 28 November, General MacArthur (photo), Commanding General US Army Far East, reported that everything was being put in readiness for a successful defense, measures having been taken, among other things, to extend and intensify reconnaissance patrols.
- Within twenty-four hours thereafter, Army forces in the Philippines were placed upon war alert, all leaves were cancelled, and two infantry divisions were dispatched to positions around Lingayen Gulf and two more to positions along the Batangas coast.



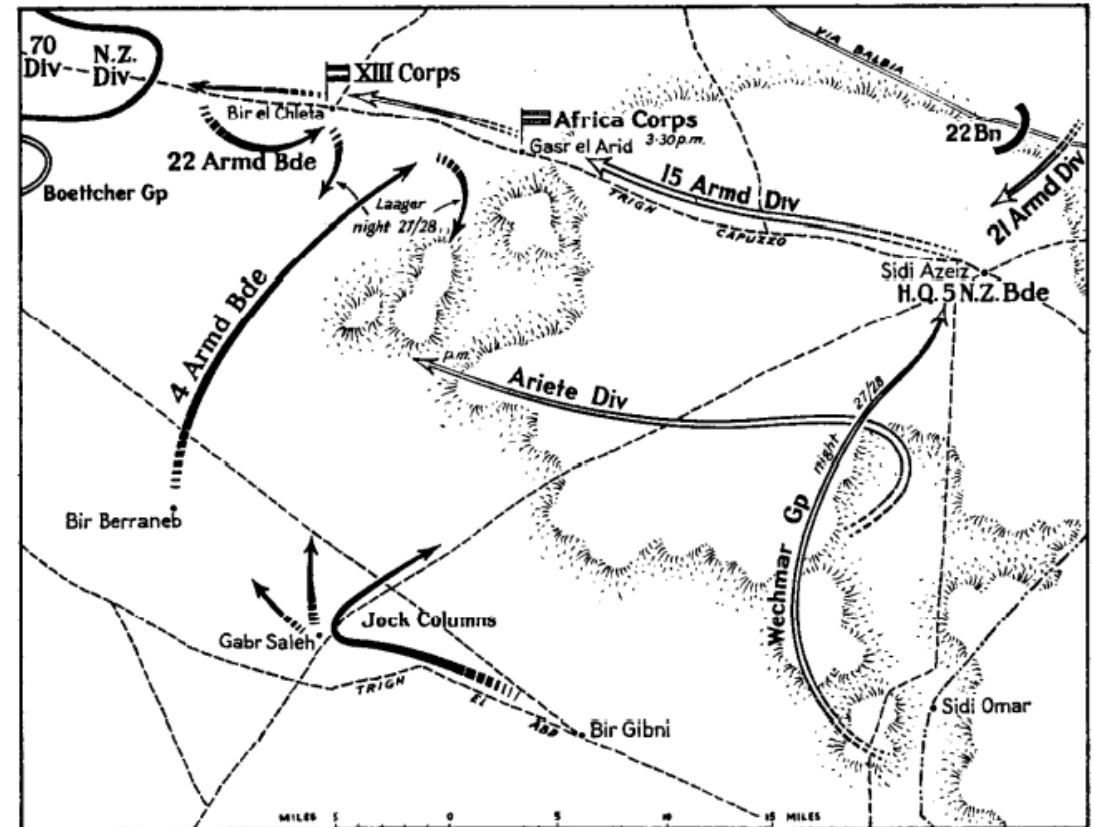
# 28 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- The Italian cargo ship *Priaruggia* (1,196 GRT) was bombed and sunk at Benghazi, Libya by Royal Air Force aircraft.
- The Type VIIC submarine U-95 (757/857 t, 1940) was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean Sea east of Gibraltar at (36°21'N 3°27'W) by HNLMS O-21 with the loss of 35 of her 47 crew.



# 28 November 1941 – North Africa

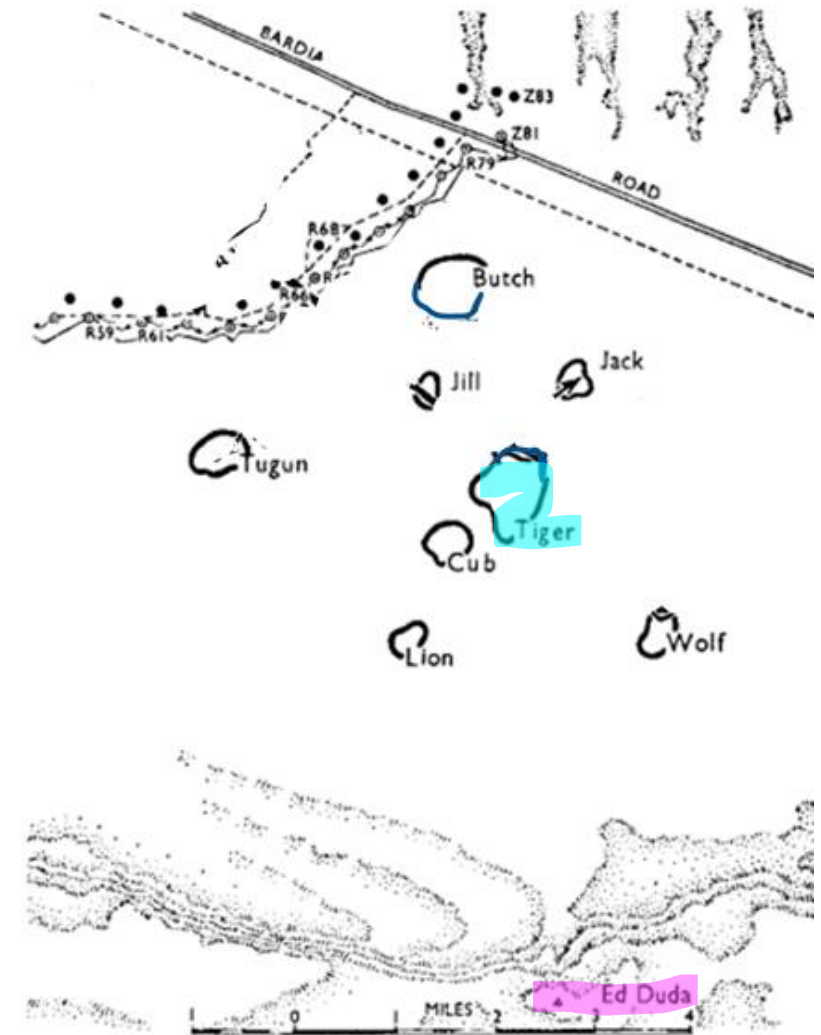
- On the 28th the New Zealanders in the Belhamed-Sidi Rezegh-Ed Duda triangle operated to mop up the two German localities near the Trigh Capuzzo that were still troubling them.
- A German attack from the second escarpment was launched on the 24th Battalion and, by various ruses, achieved surprise and substantial success. Subsequent counter-attacks by tanks of the 8th Royal Tank Regiment did not fully restore the situation.
- The garrison's delayed operation to break through to the Bardia Road was launched starting with the capture of Freddie and Walter, two posts in a chain of strong-points developed for the protection of the German by-pass road; but Freddie "proved a hard nut". Some of the tanks of the assault force got onto the top of Freddie and about 300 prisoners, mostly German, were taken. But five tanks were lost (mainly on mines), the exploitation operations were cancelled and towards dusk the assault infantry were withdrawn.
- After the cruisers had been sent off to support the attack against Freddie and the Matildas had accompanied the 19th New Zealand Battalion to Belhamed, the 1/Essex had been left practically unsupported at Ed Duda.
- The 7th Armoured Division spent a futile day in unprofitable skirmishing with the 15th Armoured Division but unknowingly secured some advantage to the New Zealand Division by enticing the German formation southwards. Some elements of the German division overran the New Zealand main dressing station in the afternoon but allowed it to continue functioning.
- By nightfall the 21st Armoured Division had closed up on the headquarters area of the New Zealand Division and the XIII Corps. Godwin-Austen and Freyberg decided to move their headquarters into Tobruk that night.



Movements of armoured formations, 27th November

# 28 November 1941 – North Africa

- Just before 6 p.m. Scobie gave instructions that the 16th Brigade would move the 2/13th Battalion to **Ed Duda** (the 2/13th having no transport of its own).
- Scobie told Burrows that the primary purpose of the battalion's move was to strengthen the defence of Ed Duda ; the battalion was not to be employed without Scobie's authority, except in an emergency.
- I can remember, when that conference was over, the General's last words to us as we were standing there, before he turned to go away. "Whatever happens we must hold Ed Duda. Ed Duda must be held."
- The convoy moved out, shielded by armoured cars in front and on the flank. Most of the men later commented on the strangeness of the emotions they experienced as they were driven out through the imprisoning wire into his territory, as though something that had unconsciously weighed on the mind had been lifted and an unbelievable freedom had suddenly become real.
- The convoy halted at **Tiger** where the 32nd Army Tank Brigade had a headquarters. Here a warning was received that the 2/13th Battalion was to support an attack next morning on Sidi Rezegh by Willison's armoured brigade and a New Zealand battalion, for which orders would be given after the battalion reached Ed Duda.



# 28 November 1941 – North Africa

- On 28th November No. 3 escorted Blenheims to bomb a German column driving west from Gasr el Arid and the next day the Tomahawks swept the Sidi Rezegh area, though without result.

# 29 November 1941 - COIC

Most secret  
sources

5. SOUTH CHINA, FORMOSA, HAINAN - Japanese Fleet Movements -  
Third Fleet units are believed to be moving in the direction of Takao (Formosa) and Bako (Pescadores).  
(a) It appears that the Seventh Cruiser Division and the 3rd Destroyer Squadron are in advance unit and may be en route for South China;  
(b) The Combined Air Force has assembled in Takao and portion of it seems already to have moved on to Hainan Island (See next Para.).  
(c) It seems that the Second Base Force is transporting Air Force equipment to Formosa.  
(d) The South China Fleet, the French Indo-China Force, and the Naval Stations at Sama (Hainan), Bako (Pescadores) and Takao (Formosa) have all been active in connection with the above movements.

Comment - These movements are consistent with an impending move against Southern China or Thailand. The Third Fleet and Seventh Cruiser Squadron are both known to have been in the South China area.

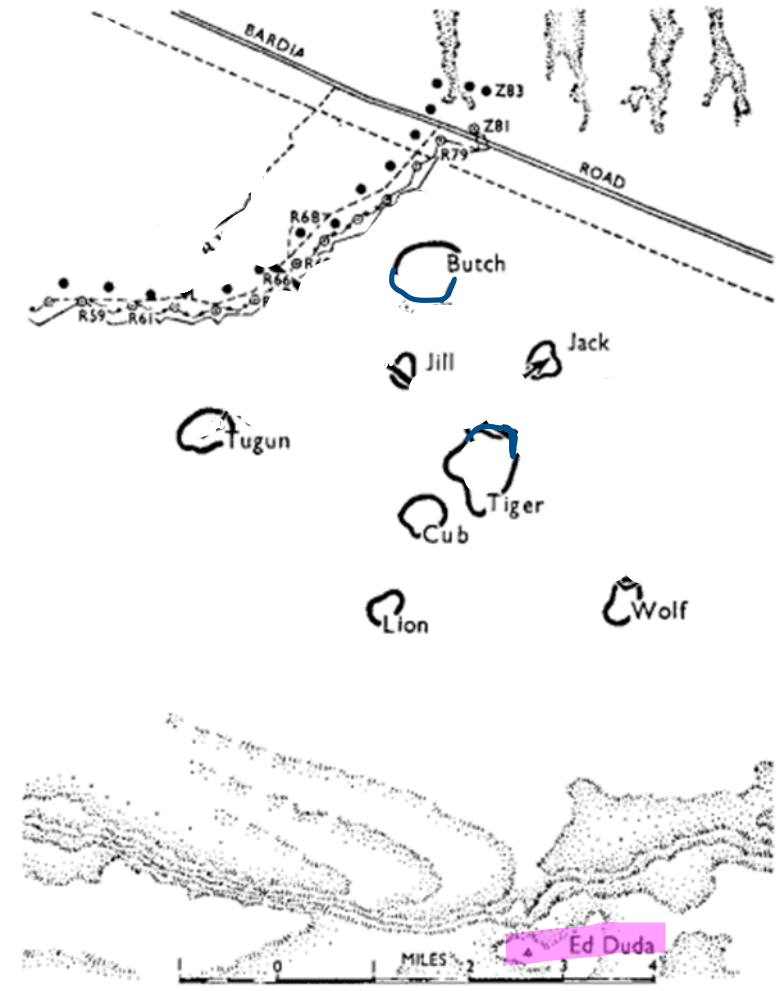
# 29 November 1941 - COIC

C/S Singapore  
1007Z/25

6. INDO-CHINA - Japanese Preparations Towards War
- (a) Six aerodromes in South F.I.C. Are reported ready for use;
  - (b) There has been a noticeable movement of aircraft to F.I.C. and Hainan, the strength at present being approx 200 in each place.
  - (c) The Japanese have requested the use of four additional landing grounds in North F.I.C. with permission to effect improvements;
  - (d) There has been abnormal transport activity at Saigon, and, it seems, also at Haiphong.
- In addition it is estimated that 10,000 men, some in tropical kit, have been withdrawn from Central China during the week, but there is no indication as to their destination. Withdrawals of Military Landing Craft from Central China since 1/10 now total 330.
- It is suggested by C.O.I.S. that the arrival of aircraft indicates the near-completion or preparations for operations based on Indo-China should Japanese policy so require.

# 29 November 1941 – North Africa

- The battalion reached **Ed Duda** soon after midnight. The men were taken by guides to areas they were to occupy on Ed Duda's eastern slopes.
- The night was too cold for most to sleep. The besieged garrison's link through Ed Duda with the British forces operating outside seemed very real that night as long British and New Zealand convoys from headquarters and administrative units, emerging from the desert, came up the by-pass road, turned off at Ed Duda and proceeded into Tobruk.
- At 4 a.m. it was ascertained that the commanding officer and half of the 19th New Zealand Battalion were not available and a plan was made for the 2/13th to make the attack and moreover to establish itself on the ground to be taken. Burrows emphasised the need for daylight reconnaissance before attempting the attack and the 1st R.H.A. guns would have to be moved forward before the attack could be supported, so it was decided that it could not begin before 11 a.m.
- Just before dawn heavier artillery than the Australians had become accustomed to began to bombard the slopes on which the light of dawn had disclosed the 2/13th companies not properly dug in, with murderous effect.



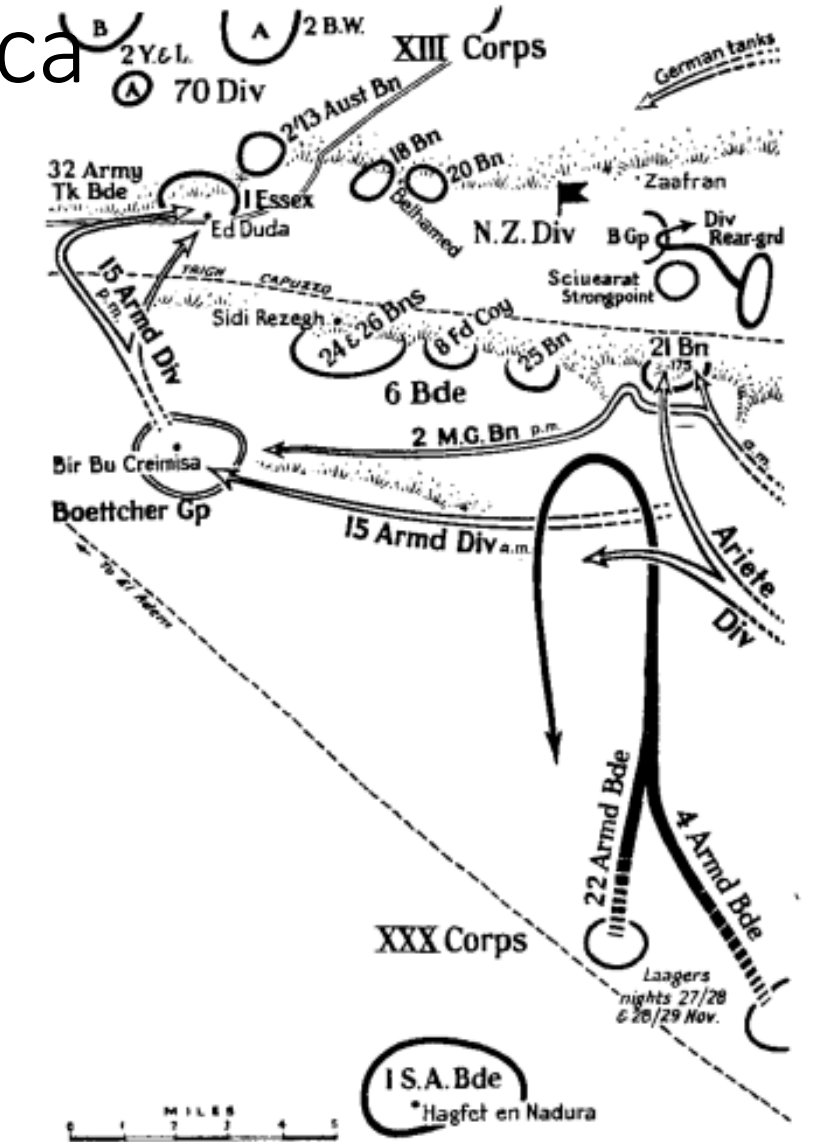
# 29 November 1941 – North Africa

- About 7.30 a.m. Burrows (photo) reconnoitred the route to Sidi Rezegh in a light tank. The battalion's task looked a forbidding one; the objective seemed far away, the approaches to it bare and flat, with no cover.
- Soon, however, it was learnt that the 2/13th was not to make the attack. About 10 a.m. company commanders were told that the attack would not take place for four hours and would then be carried out by the 19th New Zealand Battalion, the 2/13th Battalion to be "in support".
- Soon after the changed orders had been conveyed to company commanders, observers on the escarpment saw vehicles and tanks moving on the ridge to be attacked. These began to advance towards Ed Duda. The squadron of Matildas moved out to meet them and the enemy drew back.
- Enemy activity at Sidi Rezegh continued and about 11.30 a.m. a large mobile force including tanks was seen descending the Sidi Rezegh ridge more than a mile to the west of the feature the 2/13th had earlier been planning to capture.
- Simultaneously warnings were being received from Eighth Army HQ that the enemy was planning to attack the New Zealand Division from all sides.



# 29 November 1941 – North Africa

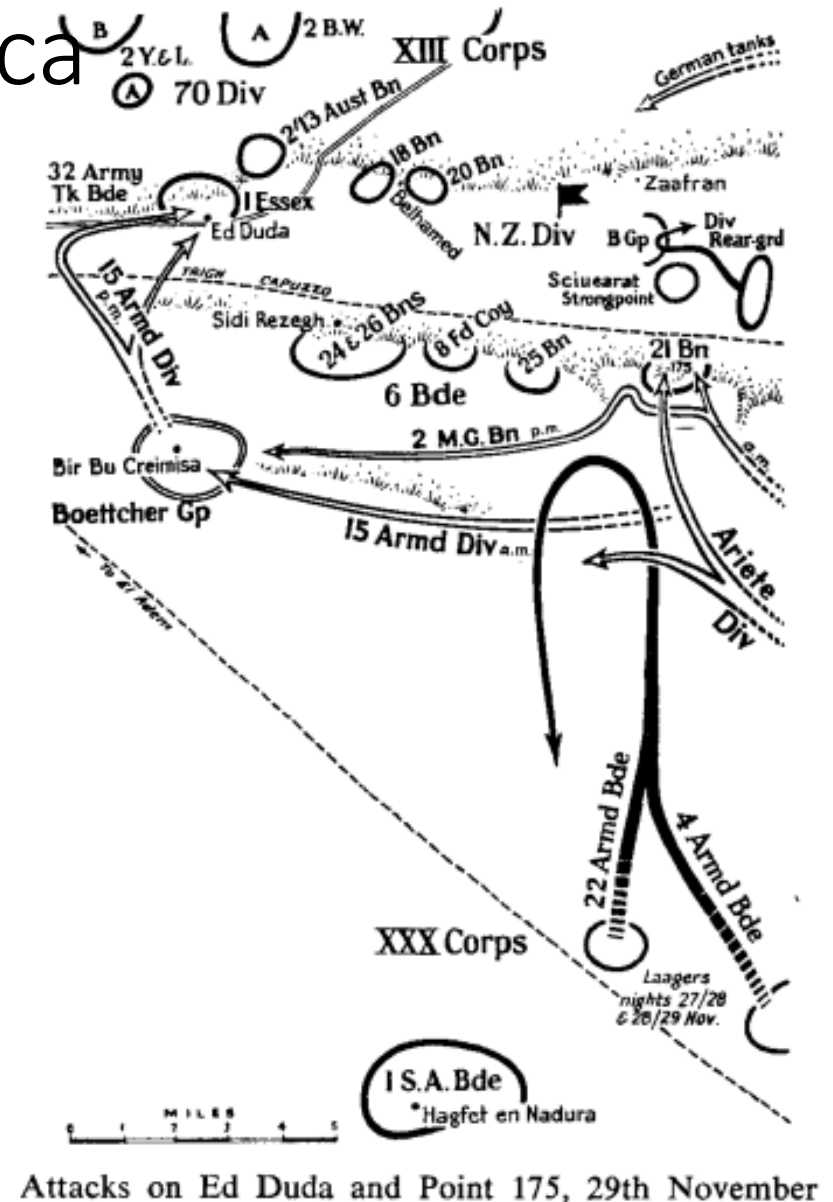
- General Von Ravenstein, commanding 21<sup>st</sup> Panzer Div, was captured by the New Zealanders in the morning near Point 175 and the 21st did nothing effective for the rest of the day.
- The 15th Panzer Division drove west to Bir bu Creimisa on the escarpment to the south of Sidi Rezegh, then north-west to Bir Salem. This was the movement seen and reported from the Ed Duda escarpment just before midday.
- Rommel himself was at Bir bu Creimisa and had taken charge. The plan was to cut the New Zealand Division off from Tobruk and from the east. The 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer was to capture Ed Duda and to drive eastwards by the northern edge of Belhamed. It was hoped that the 21st Armoured Division would make a westward thrust by the northern edge of Zaafran to meet the 15th and that the Ariete Division would capture the eastern edge of Sidi Rezegh.
- About 1 p.m. the 15th Armoured Division began forming up to attack Ed Duda from the west.
- Captain Salt of the 1st R.H.A broadcast a running description of their deployment and approach. The first German assault on the westernmost positions of the 1/Essex was thrown back by the infantry and anti-tank gunners. Colonel O'Carroll of the 4th Royal Tank Regiment ordered all tanks to the top of Ed Duda and those at hand went with him; about eight, including some acting as armoured command posts for the 1st R.H.A., went on to the main feature.
- For a time the German tanks stood off and bombarded the pits and sangars of the Essex infantry, neutralised their machine and anti-tank guns and cleared the minefields with patrols. Captain Salt's tank was hit and he was killed. Major Goschen's tank was also knocked out; Captain Armitage rescued him and his crew. This disorganised the artillery support, and about 4.30 p.m. the enemy started closing in from the west. The German tanks, twenty of them, fanned out and formed a line right across the middle of the Essex position.



Attacks on Ed Duda and Point 175, 29th November

# 29 November 1941 – North Africa

- About nightfall the possibility of a counter-attack by the 2/13th Battalion was discussed. Burrows indicated that he was prepared to attack infantry but not tanks. It was conceded that 2/13th would not be expected to attack against tanks without tank support.
- The 2/13th Battalion was to counter-attack at Ed Duda with two companies and provide one company to protect the 1st R.H.A's gun area near Belhamed. The rest of the battalion was to be organised to hold the escarpment where the battalion was then situated.
- "B" Company (Captain Graham) and "C" Company (Captain Walsoe) were detailed for the counter-attack.
- Enemy tanks could be identified through binoculars on the objective some 500 yards away.
- So, while in the desert not far to the south Gott's armoured brigades again spent an untroubled night in a leaguer off the battlefield, Willison's tanks, which had been in the thick of the fight for nine days, came forward to try conclusions with the main tank force of the Africa Corps.
- Eight Matilda tanks approached the Ed Duda escarpment from low ground in front and fought the German tanks skyline above. The contest provided a most spectacular fireworks display. Streams of small-arms tracer fire, which seemed to issue from holes in the hill, and fiery marbles spat out by automatic cannon converged on the British tanks' hulls and ricocheted from them like splashing molten metal. Some tanks and vehicles on both sides caught fire.
- The British tanks outnumbered by about three to one continued to engage, but the worrying question was whether all or most had been immobilised. Soon it was answered when some were seen to advance a short distance. The German tanks, after having appeared to have the upper hand, withdrew and did not come back.



# 29 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- The Italian tanker Berbera (2,093 GRT) was bombed and sunk at Navarino, Greece by Royal Air Force aircraft.
- The Italian tanker Superga (6,154 GRT) was torpedoed by the submarine Shch-211 (Soviet Navy) south of Varna, Bulgaria at (43°00'N 27°53'E). She was beached to avoid sinking.



# 29 November 1941 - Pacific

- The Pensacola convoy was loaded to capacity with materiel and troops for the Philippines. In addition to the A-24s, the vessels carried 18 P-40s and 340 motor vehicles, four dozen 75-mm. guns, more than 3,500,000 rounds of ammunition, over 600 tons of bombs, and 9,000 drums of aviation fuel.
- 2,500 men of the AAF, including the ground echelon of the 7th Bombardment Group, and some 2,000 additional troops, including 2 regiments of field artillery, were on board.
- Directed to take a southwest course instead of the normal course through the Japanese-mandated islands, the convoy had swung south on leaving Honolulu on 29 November.



A24

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- By the 30th November six boats and a raft had been found, either at sea or ashore near Carnarvon.
- They carried a total of 285 German officers and ratings (not including twenty-six taken on to Sydney in the transport Aquitania) and two Chinese.
- They were survivors from the raider Kormoran, which was sunk on the 19th November after being in action with H.M.A.S. Sydney.
- From Sydney herself no word was ever received, and only one small shell-torn float was found as tangible evidence of her loss, in spite of wide and thorough searching. The story of her last action was pieced together through exhaustive interrogation of Kormoran's survivors.



*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

Survivors from Kormoran .

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Just before 4 p.m. on Wednesday, 19th November 1941, the German raider Kormoran was off the Western Australian coast, approximately 150 miles south-west of Carnarvon. There was a slight sea and visibility was extreme. Nightfall was some three hours distant.
- Kormoran was steering N.N.E. at 11 knots. At 3.55 p.m. the lookout reported a sighting fine on the port bow. It was at first thought to be a sail, but was soon identified as a warship.
- At 4 p.m. Detmers (photo)—Kormoran's captain—sent his crew to action stations, altered course to W.S.W. into the sun, and ordered full speed—about 15 knots, which the temporary breakdown of one engine limited to 14 knots for about half an hour.
- The warship, now identified as a Perth class cruiser, steering southwards and some ten miles distant, altered towards and overhauled on a slightly converging course on Kormoran's starboard quarter. She made the letters NNJ continuously on her search - light. To this Kormoran made no reply.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

053869

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- When about seven miles distant, Sydney signalled to Kormoran by searchlight to hoist her signal letters. Detmers hoped to avoid action by passing Kormoran off as a Dutch vessel. He therefore showed Dutch colours, and hoisted the flag signal PKQI for Straat Malakka on the triadic stay between the foremast and funnel. So placed it was difficult to read, and Sydney repeatedly signalled: "Hoist your signal letters clear." Ahlbach, Kormoran's yeoman of signals, drew the halliards to the starboard side to make the flags more visible to Sydney.
- In the early stages Kormoran ranged Sydney on a 3-metre rangefinder, but when the cruiser, overhauling on the starboard quarter and showing a narrow silhouette, had approached to within five miles, this was discontinued for reasons of disguise, and a small rangefinder was used.
- At 5 p.m., to further the deception, Kormoran broadcast a "suspicious ship" message in the name of Straat Malakka. This was picked up, faint and in mutilated form, by the tug Uco, and by Geraldton wireless station, at 6 p.m. Western Australian time (eight hours ahead of Greenwich, so that sending and receiving times tally, Kormoran's time being only seven hours ahead). In the mutilated portion read by Geraldton only the time and part of a position were readable, and there was no indication that it was a distress message.
- When, after ten minutes, there was no repetition, Geraldton broadcast all ships asking if there was anything to report. No reply was received. Apparently no significance was therefore attached to the original message, of which the Naval Board did not learn until the 27th November.

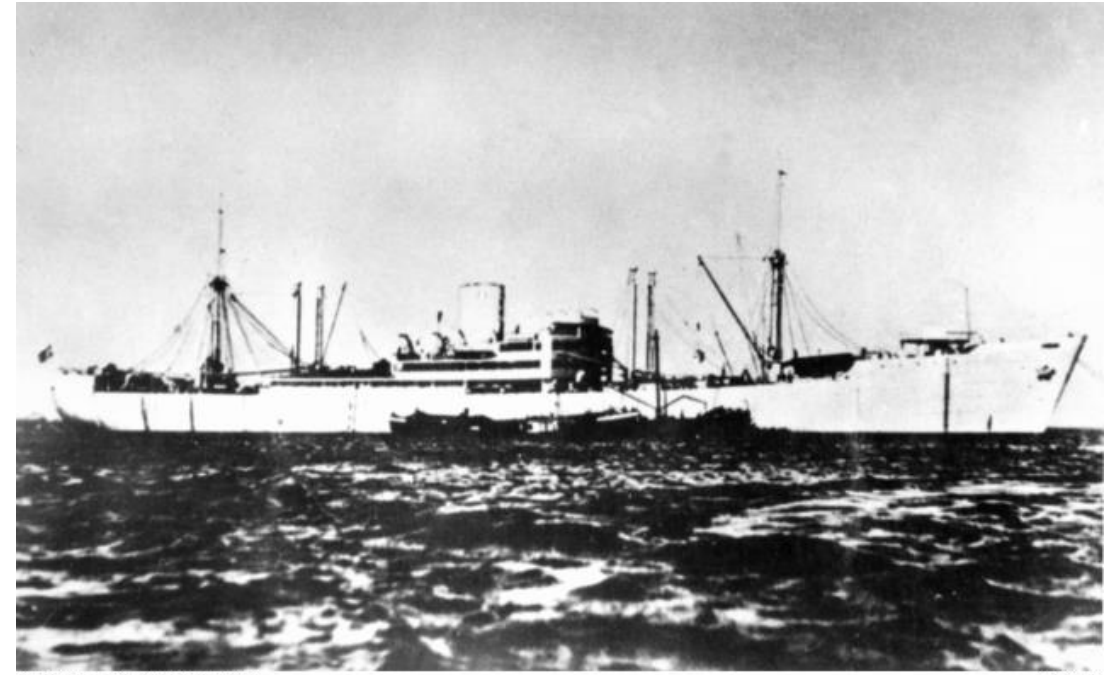
# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

128097

C.1940. DUTCH MERCHANT SHIP STRAAT MALAKKA



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

053867

KIEL, GERMANY. THE GERMAN AUXILIARY CRUISER "KORMORAN", FORMERLY THE HAMBURG-AMERIKA LINE MS "STEIERMARK", TAKING ON STORES FROM A LIGHTER IN THE HARBOUR

Straat Malakka compared with Kormoran

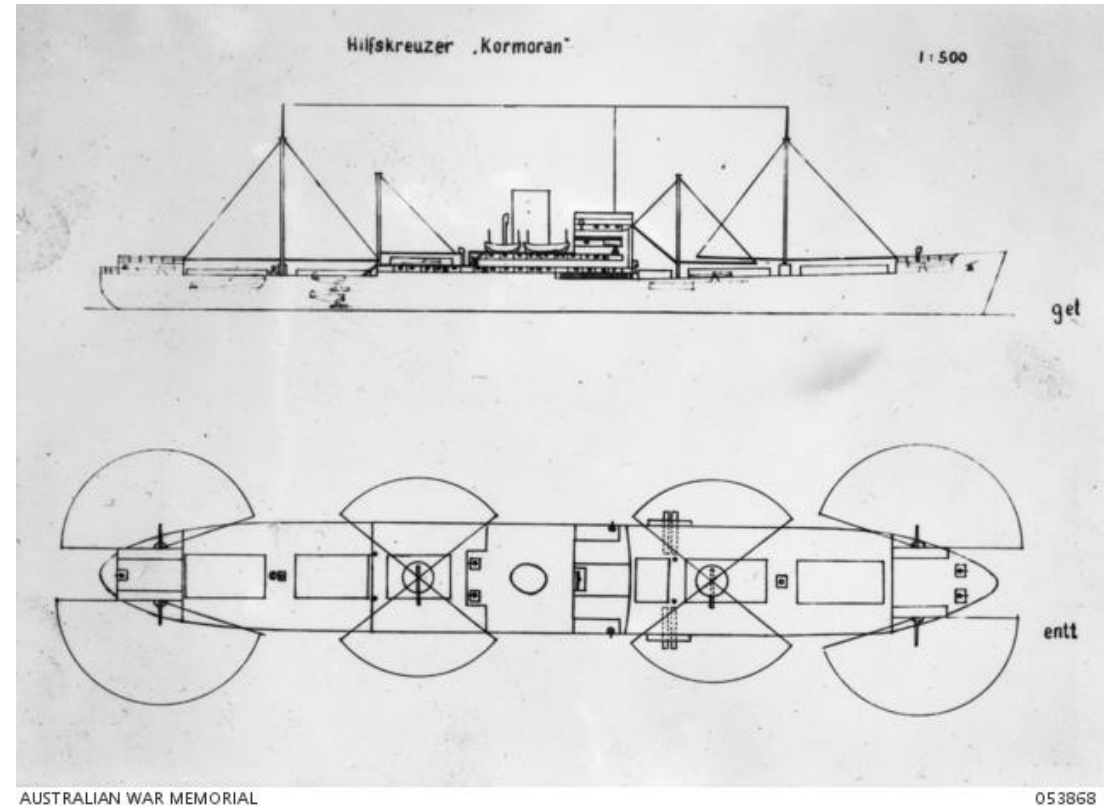
# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Soon after 5.15 p.m. Sydney had drawn almost abeam of Kormoran to starboard, less than a mile distant. Both ships were steering approximately W.S.W. at about 15 knots. The cruiser was at action stations with all guns and torpedo tubes bearing. Her aircraft was on the catapult with, apparently, the engine running. She signalled, both by flags and light: "Where bound?" Kormoran replied: "Batavia."
- Sydney made a two-flag hoist, the letters IK, which the raider could not interpret. They were in fact (and their being quoted correctly under interrogation is corroboration of the German story) the centre letters of Straat Malakka's secret identification signal, which was unknown to the Germans.
- They made no reply.



# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Sydney then made by light the signal : "Show your secret sign." It told Detmers that he would have to fight.
- He answered immediately by dropping all disguise, striking the Dutch colours and hoisting the German, and giving the order to open fire with guns and torpedoes. It was then 5.30 p.m.
- Simultaneously with opening gun fire, Kormoran fired two torpedoes. Lieutenant Fritz Skeries, the raider's gunnery officer, directed the gunnery from the control position above the bridge.
- According to his and corroborative evidence, Kormoran's initial single gun ranging salvo at just over 1,400 yards was short. A second at 1,750 yards was over. Hits were scored, within about four seconds of opening fire, on Sydney's bridge and director tower, at a range of 1,640 yards.



Drawings of Kormoran. Lower drawing shows positions of main armament 15cm guns and arcs of fire.

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- These were followed immediately by a full salvo from Sydney which went over and failed to hit. Kormoran again scored quickly with two salvos which hit Sydney on the bridge and amidships: "Fifth shot the cruiser's aeroplane (burnt)—motor ran and then shut off—shots fired systematically—lucky shot that aeroplane was hit." The range was so short that Kormoran used her anti-aircraft machineguns and starboard 3.7-inch guns effectively against Sydney's bridge, torpedo tubes, and anti-aircraft batteries.
- For a few seconds after her initial salvo Sydney did not reply. It would seem that her "A" and "B" (forward ) turrets were put out of action (according to Skeries by Kormoran's third and fourth salvos); but after the raider's fifth or sixth salvo the cruiser's "X" turret (foremost of the two after turrets) opened fast and accurate fire, hitting Kormoran in the funnel and engine room. "Y" turret fired only two or three salvos, all of which went over.
- At about this time one of the raider's two torpedoes struck Sydney under "A" and "B" turrets. The other passed close ahead of the stricken ship, which was being repeatedly hit by shells.
- Her stem low in the water, Sydney now turned sharply towards Kormoran as though attempting to ram. As she did so, the top of "B" turret flew overboard, blown up, Skeries said, by the raider's tenth salvo.
- The cruiser passed under Kormoran's stern, heading to the southward and losing way. Kormoran, maintaining her course and speed, was now on fire in the engine room where the hits by Sydney's "X" turret had caused severe damage.

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Smoke from the fire hid Sydney from Kormoran's bridge, but the raider continued to engage with her after guns at a range lengthening to approximately 4,400 yards.
- At about 5.45 p.m. Sydney fired four torpedoes. Detmers was then turning to port to bring his broadside to bear, and as he did so Kormoran's engines began to fail. The torpedo tracks were sighted, but Kormoran just cleared them and they passed close astern. Simultaneously the raider's engines broke down completely.
- Sydney, crippled and on fire from the bridge to the after funnel, steamed slowly to the southward. Apparently her turrets were now out of action, but she continued to fire with her secondary armament, and Skeries stated: "Shots from 1-inch guns of cruiser mostly short."
- She was constantly hit by gun fire from the raider, whose forward control position was working with the port broadside in action at 5.50 p.m., when the range was about 6,600 yards. Ten minutes later, at a range of 7,700 yards, Kormoran fired one torpedo, which missed Sydney astern.
- Both ships were crippled and on fire, the raider in the engine room, now untenable; and Sydney far more extensively.
- Kormoran fired her last shot at 6.25 p.m., at a range of about 11,000 yards. In all she fired 450 rounds from her main armament, and probably some hundreds from her anti-aircraft batteries.

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- She was now in a bad way, her engines wrecked and her engine room ablaze , and with her full equipment of mines, some 200, still on board. Dusk was creeping from the eastward over a sea that was rising with a freshening breeze.
- At 6.25 p.m. Detmers ordered abandon ship, and lowered all boats and life-saving equipment. With the gathering gloom the form of Sydney disappeared from view, last seen about ten miles off, heading approximately S.S.E. Thereafter, until about 10 p.m., a distant glare in the darkness betokened her presence. Then occasional flickerings. Before midnight they, too, had gone.
- By 9 p.m. most of Kormoran's boats and rafts were lowered, filled and cast off. Almost all the officers, and enough ratings to man the guns, remained on board while the final scuttling arrangements were made. At midnight, with smoke increasing heavily on the mining deck, the scuttling charge was fired, and the last boat cast off.
- Half an hour later the mines exploded, and Kormoran sank rapidly stern first. Of her complement of 393 officers and men, 78 lost their lives, about 20 killed in action on board and the remainder drowned through the capsizing of an overloaded raft. Two of the four Chinese from Eurylochus were also lost.
- Of Sydney's total complement of 42 officers and 603 ratings, not one survived.

# 30 November 1941 – Indian Ocean

- Why Burnett, Sydney's captain, did not use his aircraft, did not keep his distance and use his superior speed and armament, did not confirm his suspicions by asking Navy Office by wireless if Straat Malakka was in the area, are questions that can never be answered.
- The action of Devonshire's captain was similar to that of Farncomb when Canberra met Coburg and Ketty Brovig the previous March.
- Yet Farncomb's report of his encounter, received in Navy Office in April 1941, was the subject of some comment and implied criticism by the Naval Staff. The expenditure of 215 rounds of 8-inch ammunition was detailed in the attached gunnery report but not mentioned in Farncomb's covering letter.
- Durnford, the Second Naval Member, who was Acting Chief of the Naval Staff in the absence in Singapore of Admiral Colvin, noted on Farncomb's letter on the 26th April: "This report discreetly makes no reference to ammunition expended. Is any further action suggested?"
- Four days later the letter was initialled by the then Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, Burnett, indicating that he had read the file, including Durnford's comment.



(A. G. Rippon)

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

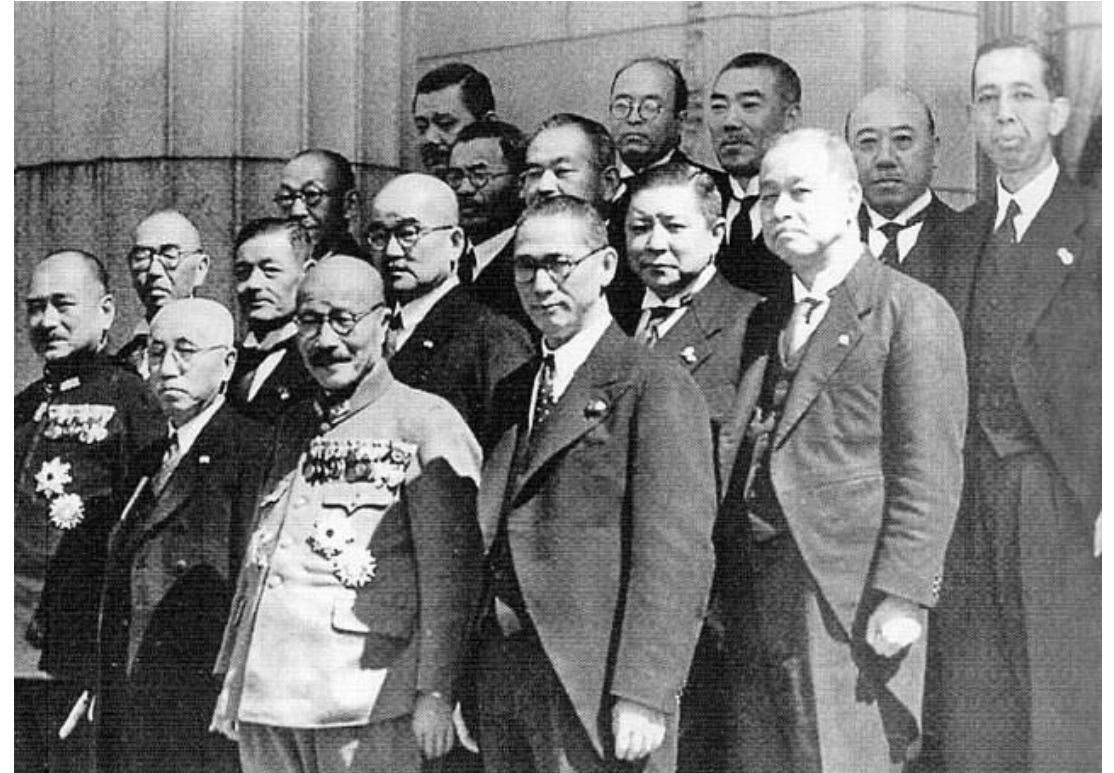
# 30 November 1941 – Melbourne

- News of the action, and of the presumed loss of Sydney, was publicly released in an official statement by the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, on the 30th November 1941. The next of kin had been informed by personal telegram three days earlier.
- Unfortunately failure to observe correct censorship procedure in which both the Naval Board in Melbourne and the Government in Canberra were equally culpable, caused leakage of information on the 25th November and gave rise to rumours which circulated throughout Australia and caused deep distress to next of kin.
- The Naval Board were responsible in the failure to inform the Chief Publicity Censor and to request an adequately worded censorship instruction as soon as doubt arose regarding Sydney on the 23rd November.
- The Government at Canberra were responsible in that on the 25th November, without informing or consulting the Naval Board, they instructed the Chief Publicity Censor to issue a censorship instruction "No reference press or radio to H.M.A.S. Sydney".
- Circulated to all newspapers and broadcasting stations through Australia, this implied that some misfortune had befallen Sydney, and started the rumours, which spread rapidly and which, in addition to the distress they caused, threw suspicion on the official statement when it was issued.
- Nor did rumour end with the issue of that statement. For many months thereafter stories of news received from survivors of Sydney in Japan, continued to emerge and circulate, causing pain and distress in a number of Australian homes.



# 30 November 1941 - Japan

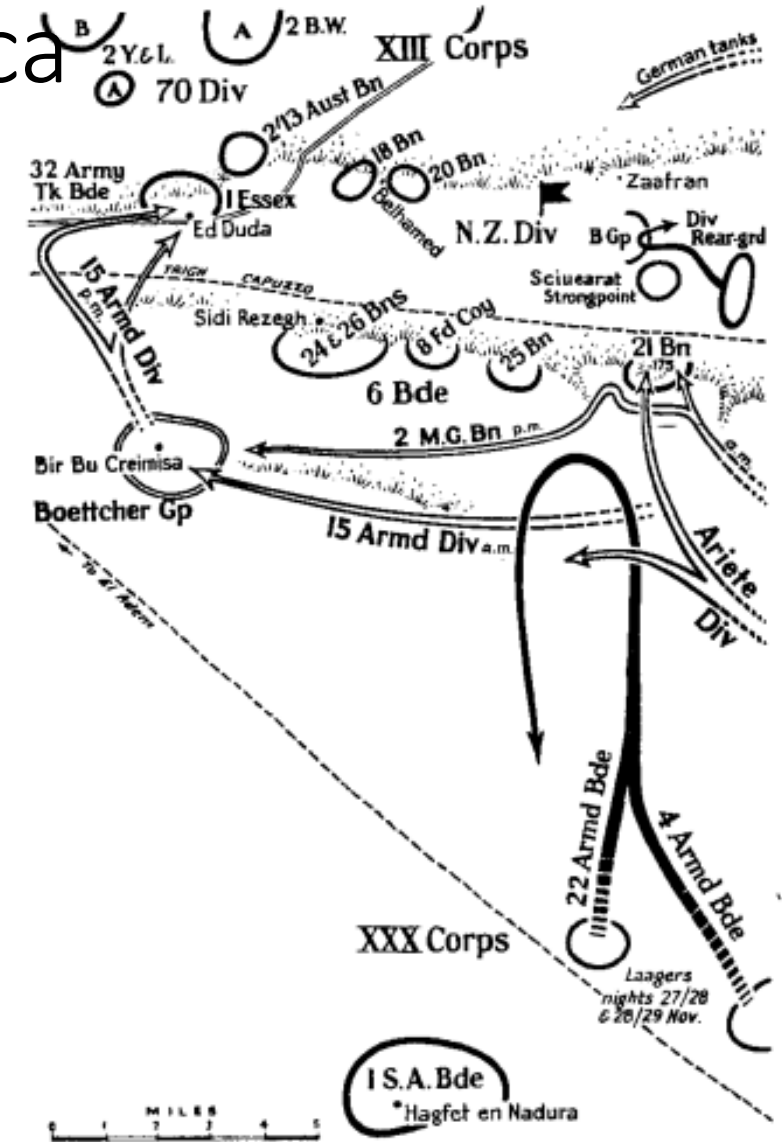
- The final war decision was made at a senior statesman's conference with the Emperor on 30 November.
- Konoye pleaded to proceed as we were with broken economic relations but without war.
- Tojo refused even to consider this alternative. "If we were to proceed with broken economic relations" he said "the final consequence would be gradual impoverishment."
- On 1 December the cabinet council met in the Imperial presence and ratified Tojo's decision to make war on America, Great Britain and the Netherlands.
- Operation plans for the three pronged attack were activated the same day and on the second the Pearl Harbour striking force was notified that the planned X day, eight December, was confirmed.
- The Pearl Harbour striking force was subject to recall.
- It was arranged that Nomura and Kurusu would present the Japanese reply to the 26 November proposals half an hour before the attack began.



Cabinet ministers of the first Tojo Cabinet, October 1941

# 30 November 1941 – North Africa

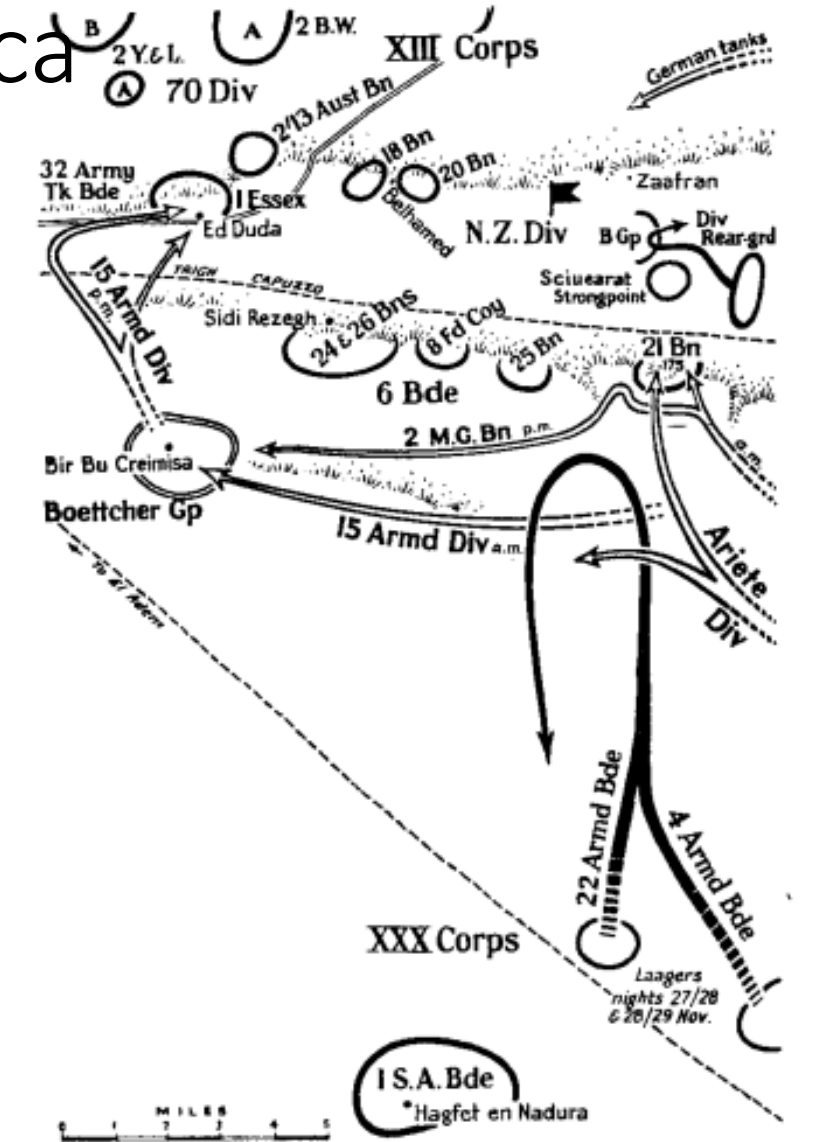
- When it appeared that the German tanks had departed Willison and Burrows decided to attack at 1.30 a.m.
- “Captain Walsoe fired a green Very flare and the attack started with two platoons of B company on the left and C company on the right. C company had first to ascertain whether the men to their front belonged to the Essex Battalion or were Germans. . . . Soon however a German was captured. Colonel Burrows moved with the men telling them to call out "The Australians are coming" when they charged. The men went forward at a steady walking pace until they sighted the enemy. There was no need to advise them to shout when they went in: shouting, yelling, coo-eing like madmen, they charged with the bayonet. The enemy seemed stupefied. There was no concerted resistance. Those who did not run either threw themselves on the ground or held up their hands. . . . As the attack progressed through the enemy's positions Germans could be heard running in front . . . calling out "Englander kommen" . . . . The advance was continued to a distance of 500 yards beyond the top of the opposing ridge, but though Germans were heard running and shouting in the distance the men were recalled, since it would have been unwise to have gone further. ...”
- The prisoners taken in the attack—almost all by the Australians — numbered 167. Only 7 Australians were wounded, two mortally.



Attacks on Ed Duda and Point 175, 29th November

# 30 November 1941 – North Africa

- When dawn came on the 30th the Australians with the Essex battalion were astonished to see a busy German bivouac on the desert flats to their front. There were bell tents, repair shops, field kitchens sending up their smoke, soldiers marching about in small groups, panzers moving about the encampment and staff cars coming and going.
- It took a little time for everybody to make sure that this apparition was not of British origin. When fire on the camp was authorised, it was quickly laid low in smoke and dust and flame by a bombardment from "A/E" Battery. The enemy artillery at once retaliated against both the 1/Essex and the 2/13th positions with heavy and punishing fire, which had to be endured for a good part of the morning.
- About 40 tanks began approaching from the west. Twelve came up to within 3,000 yards, were shelled and withdrew. At 8 a.m. about 35 medium tanks were reported to be "standing off watching"; about ten minutes later they were bombed by the R.A.F. Later two enemy tanks came forward, probably to inspect four damaged tanks which had been left on Ed Duda when the enemy had fled during the night. Harassed by the British artillery as they approached, the tanks nosed their way into Walsoe's company's positions and called on the men to surrender.
- A cat-and-mouse game then began but the two tanks suddenly made off as though sensing that they were being trapped.
- The night was devoted to mine-laying and energetic digging to improve prospects of survival.



Attacks on Ed Duda and Point 175, 29th November

# 30 November 1941 - Mediterranean

- The Italian cargo ship **Capo Faro** (3,476 GRT) was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean Sea (37°28'N 19°20'E) by British aircraft. There were 4 killed and 111 survivors.
- The Italian coastal tanker **Speranza** (445 GRT) was bombed and damaged at Benghazi, Libya by Royal Air Force aircraft. She was scuttled on 23 December.



# 30 November 1941 – North Africa

- No. 2 Operational Wing scored one of its spectacular successes on the 30th, however, when the morning offensive sweep discovered fifteen Ju-87's escorted by a force of twenty five Italian and German fighters approaching to attack the New Zealanders at Sidi Rezegh.
- The enemy jettisoned their bombs as the Australians dived to attack while No. 112 stayed up as top cover.
- In a brisk running fight No. 3 claimed eight enemy machines destroyed and twelve damaged, while No. 112 also destroyed three Italian fighters, Leu, one of the many Australians on that squadron, shooting down a G-50.
- Two Tomahawks of No. 3 returned safely but badly damaged, and Cameron was shot down after a hectic dog-fight. He managed to crash - land unhurt.



Three German Junkers Ju 87D dive bombers, Stuka.

## 30 November 1941 – North Africa

- Cameron's crashlanding was seen by Jeffrey who landed his Tomahawk aircraft in the desert and, abandoning his parachute, stowed Cameron (easily the biggest man on the squadron, affectionately known as 'Tiny') into the cockpit with him and returned to base.
- Photo - Sergeant A. C. Cameron, left, and Wing Commander P. Jeffrey, of 3 Squadron RAAF.



# 30 November 1941 - London

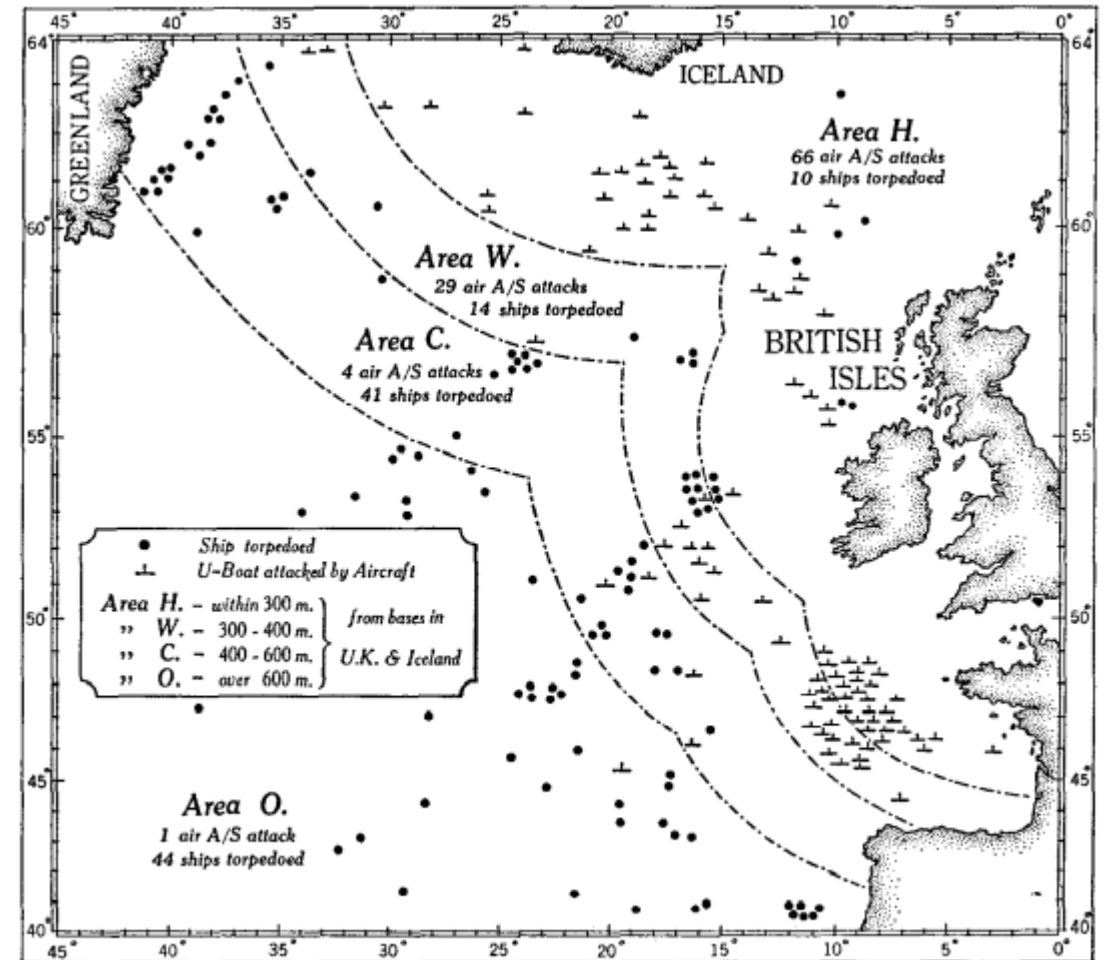
- On 30 November Australia was informed by the Dominions Office of various indications that Japan was about to attack Thailand and seize strategical points in the Kra Isthmus and that, in Washington, Halifax, the British Ambassador, was to ask the United States Government for its views on action to forestall the Japanese.
- Later in the day they were told of a Netherlands East Indies report of a Japanese concentration at Palau.



Lord Halifax with Winston Churchill

# 30 November 1941 - Britain

- Bad weather and rough seas at the end of October began to interfere with operations from Pembroke Dock, and these conditions prevailed throughout November to such a degree that only on eleven days were flying-boats able to operate.
- As a result of bad weather and diversions for transport operations only twelve routine anti-submarine patrols were flown, and these were now located west of 11 degrees west in an attempt to find U-boats surfacing in an area they considered remote from air control.
- With so few patrols, however, the chances of sighting the enemy were small and the Sunderland patrols revealed nothing.



The effect of anti-U-boat air effort in the Western Approaches: June-December 1941.

# 30 November 1941 - Britain

- Although experienced pilots were repeatedly withdrawn No. 457 grew to maturity during this phase, and with the arrival of 110 R.A.A.F. ground staff in October and November 1941 became almost entirely an Australian squadron.



# 30 November 1941 - Washington

- On 30th November President Roosevelt had before him an intercept from Tokyo to Berlin telling the Japanese ambassador to warn Hitler that
- “there is extreme danger that war may suddenly break out between the Anglo Saxon nations and Japan, this may come quicker than anyone dreams”.



- Thanks for your attention.