

CHAPTER 10

THE MIDDLE EAST

THE campaigns in Greece and Crete, and their outcome, made a considerable impression in Australia, the effects of which were felt widely elsewhere. Since Australian and New Zealand troops were engaged on a proportionately large scale, and casualty lists were long, it was natural that events in the Eastern Mediterranean during April and May 1941 should be viewed out of their perspective by a contemporary observer in Australia. This was sensed by the Australians fighting overseas who, fortified by their confidence in each other and by their measure of the enemy they fought, saw the situation more truly.¹

In Australia, newspaper criticism of the strategy and of the conduct of the war in the Eastern Mediterranean, coupled with political discussions whether the Advisory War Council should have been consulted on the participation of Australian troops in Greece, received wide publicity which was cabled overseas and (helped by enemy propaganda) gave rise abroad to misconceptions as to Australia's attitude towards the war. The Australian Ministers in the United States (Mr Casey) and Japan (Sir John Latham) both protested to the Government regarding the effect this was having in those countries.² On receipt of these protests, and as the result of a request from Mr Fadden³ (Acting Prime Minister in the absence

¹ After the evacuation of Greece, a rating in *Stuart* wrote to his parents: ". . . As you can guess by the news, we are being kept extremely busy; in fact on the go all the time. Just at present the news seems pretty black, and no doubt more so to you at home than it does to us on the spot. The withdrawal from Greece was rather depressing, but of course unavoidable. Our army put up a magnificent fight there, the Australians and New Zealanders playing a very big part. We've had a lot of our boys on board, and what a magnificent lot of chaps they are. They were still confident that, given equal terms, they would wipe the Huns from the face of the earth. . . . Anyway we are still smiling and full of confidence and will, of course, beat them in the end. And although the people in Australia may be disappointed at the result of the campaign, they can, indeed, feel very proud of the way our boys fought."

Writing to his mother after Crete, an Australian soldier said: ". . . With regard to the evacuation itself, we marched by night and lay low by day, fifty odd miles through rocky valleys to the sea. The march was hot, and the trek from well to well difficult, because the snow fed streams are no longer running. Most of the men lost were lost from bombing and machine-gunning; and many were left on the beach. Once again the AIF is saying from the depths of its heart, thank God for the Navy, who have twice saved our lives and succoured us into safety. . . . For the present, all we ask is a little security and a period of rest to draw ourselves together again up to our full strength and stature. There will be many grieving at home, more acutely than we are here. But in war, inevitably men must give their lives, and though life may appear to have been lost in vain, it is not so. . . . The Navy, as in Greece, behaved quietly, efficiently, and perfectly. It is extraordinary, but I have been in two evacuations now, when the Hun is on your tail and any waiting is nerve-wracking, but when you take your foot off the land and place it in the landing craft, you feel totally safe—we're right now, the Navy's got us. . . . If you ever have the chance to do anything for the Navy, do it; also the Maoris, who volunteered to fight the rearguard action to let the rest of us get away."

² "I would most strongly represent that so far as U.S. opinion is concerned the news being telegraphed here from Australia is most unfortunate. U.S. has little Australian background knowledge and extension in form that it reaches domestic America is encouraging speculation as to whether 'Australia is about to pull out of war'. I need hardly say any news capable of interpretation here that a British country might withdraw full participation in the war or even limit its effort will greatly strengthen and encourage isolationist sentiment here which now organising drive with Lindbergh as spearhead. German radio propaganda has seized on this and is capitalising on it." Casey to Government, 24 Apr 1941.

"[Japanese] press particularly vernacular gives great prominence this morning to reports of important political crisis in Australia on account of events in Greece using such headlines as 'British Empire crumbling to pieces', 'Australian Prime Minister severely critical of Britain's war policy'." Latham to Government, 25 Apr 1941.

³ Rt Hon Sir Arthur Fadden, KCMG. MHR since 1936. Min for Air 1940; Prime Minister Aug-Oct 1941; Treasurer 1940-41 and since 1949. Of Townsville and Brisbane; b. Ingham, Qld, 13 Apr 1895.

overseas of Mr Menzies), the Leader of the Opposition (Mr Curtin) immediately issued a statement denying any dissension, and stating that his political party was definitely behind the Government in Australia's war effort.

Mr Curtin was not, however, in agreement with the Government's adherence to British strategy in the Mediterranean. In the Advisory War Council on the 8th May he suggested that consideration should be given to "the vacation of the Mediterranean before the British Fleet was hemmed in there", and that from the point of view of Australia's defence the defence of India was of greater importance than the defence of Egypt. He returned to the subject in the Advisory War Council a month later when, on the 5th June, he questioned whether "it would not be better to scrap the African Empire, close the Suez Canal and endeavour to hold Palestine. The effect of air power on naval power had greatly modified the effectiveness of our fleet in the Mediterranean."

Mr Menzies (who had by this time returned to Australia) pointed out the consequences of such action. Axis control of north and north-west Africa would greatly add to Britain's difficulties in maintaining her Atlantic lines of communication, and "there would be nothing to prevent the Germans putting any forces they desired into Egypt and going on to the Persian Gulf, and ultimately to India". Mr Menzies might have added that the very name "Alexandria" should have reminded one of this possibility; it was from that city that its founder, in 33 B.C., started his march which led him through the Middle East to India.⁴

Britain's abandonment of the "African Empire" might well have been fatal to her. The Middle East, the world's richest source of oil and the continental gateway to India, was the vital area. Germany and Italy had friends there anxious to welcome them, but Turkey and Russia lay athwart the land bridge which was their only way in. On the other hand Britain, with control of the sea in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (whose two great arms, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, extend deeply into the Middle East) had ready access there. Abandonment of the "African Empire" would have reversed the situation, opened the Middle East to Germany and Italy and closed it to Britain. Not only would the Africa-dominated Red Sea (and consequently Eastern Mediterranean) have become untenable to British ships, but the whole of the Indian Ocean communications would have been jeopardised, and the road cleared for an eventual link up there between the western Axis partners and the Japanese. The German naval staff saw the situation

⁴ In 1798, in circumstances not dissimilar from those of 1941, the defence of Egypt in relation to that of India was exercising British thought. On 13 Jun of that year Pitt's Secretary for War, Mr Henry Dundas, writing to Lord Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, suggested that Napoleon might march to Aleppo and copy Alexander "by following the River Euphrates and the Tigris, and descending to the Persian Gulph, and thence proceeding along the coast to the Indies." Arnold Wilson, *The Persian Gulf* (1928), p. 1.

On 29 Jun 1798, Nelson wrote to St Vincent explaining his reason for thinking that the French fleet had gone to Alexandria: ". . . for, strange as it may appear at first sight, an enterprising Enemy, if they have the force or consent of the Pacha of Egypt, may with great ease get an Army to the Red Sea, and if they have concerted a plan with Tippoo Sahib, to have vessels at Suez, three weeks, at this season, is a common passage to the Malabar Coast, when our India possessions would be in great danger." Clemence Dane, *The Nelson Touch* (1942), pp. 77-8.

clearly when it told Hitler that the development of the situation in the Mediterranean with its effect on the African and Middle East areas was of decisive importance for the outcome of the war, and urged him to "fight for the African area as the foremost strategic objective of German warfare as a whole".⁵

II

During the period of the Greek and Crete campaigns and the British reverse in Libya, and overshadowed by them, events in tropical Africa and in the Middle East had developed in Britain's favour; a fact largely due to her control of the Indian Ocean. In the exercise of that control Australian ships took part, the sloops *Parramatta* and *Yarra* by active participation in the East African and Middle East campaigns; and in the wide ocean reaches the cruisers *Australia* and *Canberra*, and the Australian-manned armed merchant cruiser *Kanimbla*. For the first three months of 1941 the two sloops were with the Red Sea Force. In the main the work, escorting convoys and patrolling, was monotonous and uninspiring. Harrington in *Yarra* complained that the month of December 1940 was extremely uneventful, having been spent almost entirely in escort duties and being entirely lacking in air raids or other events of interest which might serve to break the monotony.

Similarly Walker in *Parramatta* wrote in January 1941 that the morale of the ship's company remained high, but

disappointment is of course felt that the ship has not yet been able to participate in a surface action or active operation.

The evidence of the value of their work was, however, constantly with those in the Red Sea Force—the ships of the convoys they escorted, many crowded with Australian and New Zealand troops. Of a north-bound convoy which *Parramatta* joined off Aden on the 26th February, Walker wrote:

It was an inspiring sight when formed, consisting as it did of 21 of the largest troop ships escorted by a cruiser, two escort vessels and a destroyer; the second most expensive convoy to which we have been attached, with a total tonnage of over 320,000.

New Zealand troops in the *Athlone Castle* (25,564 tons), commodore of the convoy, hailed *Parramatta* with "Hello! Pommies"; and Walker remarked that his ship's company "indignantly repudiated the aspersion". It was at this time that Walker recorded "a sense in the Red Sea Force of impending climax". That climax was the defeat of the Italians in East Africa.

In January the British armies launched a pincer movement attack. In the north, General Platt⁷ drove eastward from the Sudan into Eritrea

⁵ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 14 Nov 1940.

⁷ General Sir William Platt, GBE, KCB, DSO. GOC Troops in Sudan 1938-41; GOC-in-C East Africa Cd 1941-45. B. 14 Jun 1885.

towards the Red Sea base at Massawa. In the south General Cunningham⁸ advanced from Kenya northwards into Abyssinia, and eastwards into Italian Somaliland with its seaports Kismayu and Mogadiscio. Here advance to the coast was rapid, and naval assistance was given by Force "T" under Captain Edelsten⁹ in *Shropshire*, with H.M. Ships *Hermes*, *Hawkins*,¹ *Capetown* and *Ceres*, and the destroyer *Kandahar*, which carried out bombardments of ports and of Italian transport on the coast road. Opening of the ports and supply from the sea was essential to General Cunningham, who would otherwise have found it necessary for his forces "to return to the Italian Somaliland border as I would have been unable to maintain them forward".² On the 14th February, after a point-blank bombardment of the forts by *Shropshire*, Kismayu was occupied, and Mogadiscio was taken eleven days later.

III

Meanwhile there was considerable activity, both British and enemy, in the adjacent ocean area. Middle East troop convoys from Britain, India, and Australia, traversed it from the south and east; and always somewhere in its spaces were smaller commercial convoys and independent unescorted ships. It was a focal area attracting surface raiders. In January the raider *Atlantis*, which had been refitting at Kerguelen Island far to the south, began operations off East Africa, working westward roughly on the latitude of Mombasa. East of the Seychelles she sank the British *Mandasor* on the 24th January, and westward of those islands captured the British *Speybank* (dispatched as a prison ship to Germany) on the 31st, and the Norwegian tanker *Ketty Brovig* (retained as an oiler for raiders) on the 2nd February.³

Early in February H.M.A.S. *Australia*, which had been employed on convoy escort work in the Atlantic, rounded the Cape escorting eleven ships to Durban. They left that port on the 15th February, joined another convoy from the Cape escorted by the cruiser *Emerald*,⁴ and steamed in seven columns north for Suez via Mozambique Channel as convoy WS.5B.⁵ On the 21st, when off Mombasa, *Emerald* was detached with four ships for Bombay, and *Hawkins* joined the escort in her stead. That evening a distress message was received from S.S. *Canadian Cruiser* (7,178 tons)

⁸ General Sir Alan Cunningham, GCMG, KCB, DSO, MC. GOC 66, 9 and 51 Divs 1940, East Africa Cd 1940-41, Eighth Army Nov 1941. High Commr and C-in-C Palestine 1945-48. B. 1 May 1887.

⁹ Admiral Sir John Edelsten, GCB, GCVO, CBE; RN. SNO in ops against Italian Somaliland 1940-41; C of S to C-in-C Mediterranean Stn 1941-42; RA (Destroyers) British Pacific Fleet 1945; Vice-Chief of Naval Staff 1947-49; C-in-C Mediterranean 1950-52. B. 12 May 1891. (It was he who sighted *Zara* and *Fiume* from *Warspite's* bridge immediately prior to the night action at Matapan.)

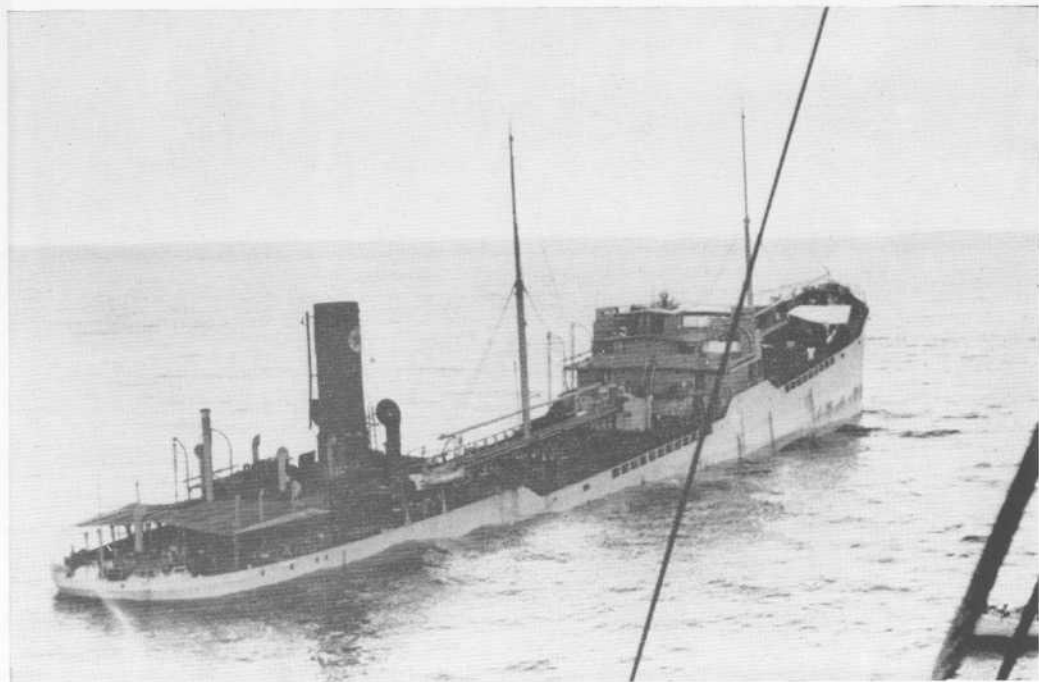
¹ HMS *Hawkins*, cruiser (1919), 9,800 tons, seven 7.5-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 29.5 kts.

² Lt-Gen A. G. Cunningham, Despatch, *Operations in East Africa, November 1940-July 1941*.

³ The *Mandasor* was of 5,144 tons, *Speybank* 5,154 and *Ketty Brovig* 7,031.

⁴ HMS *Emerald*, cruiser (1926), 7,550 tons, seven 6-in guns, sixteen 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

⁵ Of twenty ships, convoy WS.5B included one "*Monarch*" (of Bermuda), two "*Empresses*" (of Australia and Japan), two "*Duchesses*" (of Bedford and Richmond), and no less than six "*Castles*" (*Winchester*, *Capetown*, *Durban*, *Arundel*, *Windsor*, and *Athlone*). It was the convoy later, as stated above, escorted from Aden to Suez by *Parramatta*. These eleven vessels ranged in tonnage from 17,000 to 27,000.



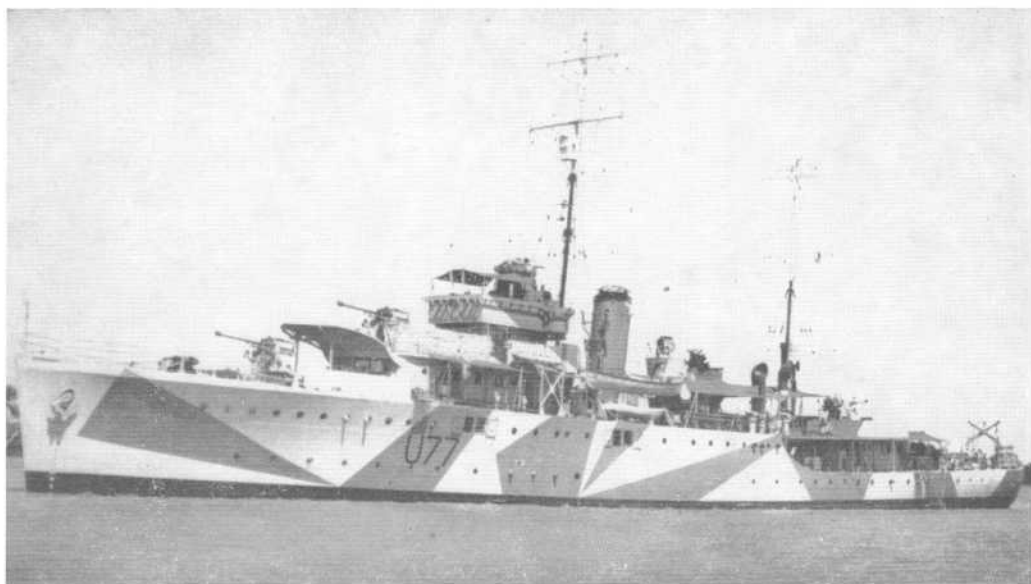
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Norwegian Tanker *Ketty Brovig* sinking 4th March 1941.



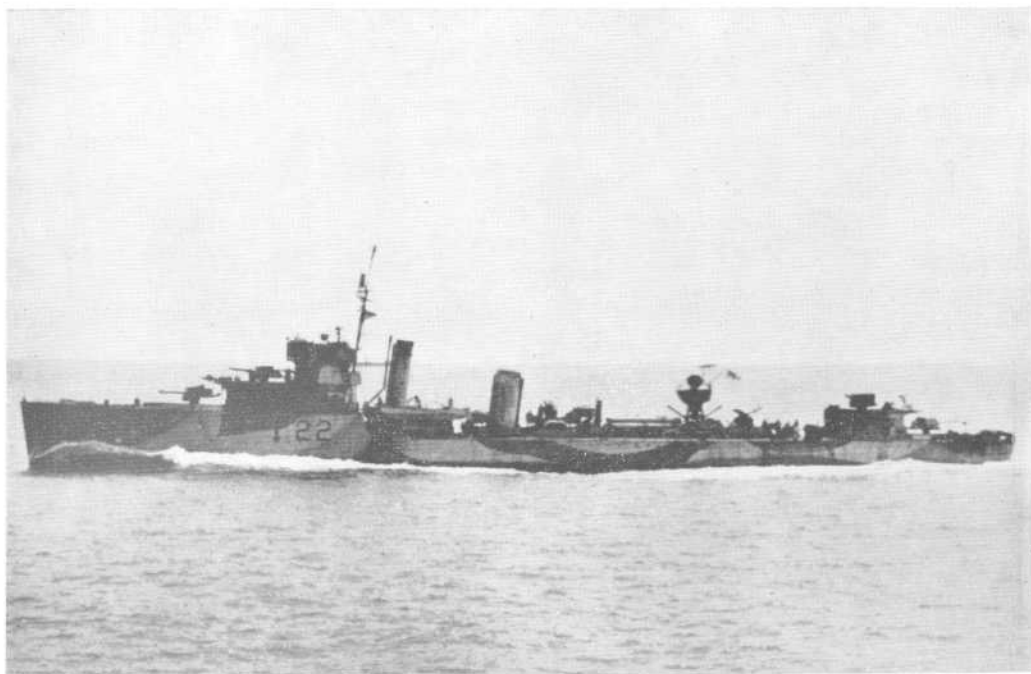
(R.A.A.F.)

German Motor Vessel *Coburg* on fire, 4th March 1941.



H.M.A.S. *Yarra* in Persian Gulf, August 1942.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



H.M.A.S. *Waterhen*.

(Petty Officer G. A. Balshaw, R.A.N.)

saying that she was being chased by a battle cruiser in position about 275 miles east-south-east of the convoy.

The raider (as was subsequently learned) was the German "pocket battleship" *Admiral Scheer*. She entered the Indian Ocean from the Atlantic on the 3rd February. On the 14th she met *Atlantis*, *Speybank*, *Ketty Brovig* and the supply ship *Tannenfels* (7,840 tons) some 1,000 miles east of the northern tip of Madagascar, and fuelled from *Ketty Brovig*. The ships parted company on the 17th, and on the 20th *Scheer* intercepted and captured the *British Advocate* (6,994 tons) and the Greek *Grigorios C.II* (2,546 tons) 400 miles east of Dar-es-Salaam. The first-named she sent off as a prize. The other she sank. Neither ship broadcast a distress message.

On receipt of *Canadian Cruiser's* alarm the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Admiral Leatham), made dispositions to intercept the raider and strengthen the cover of convoy WS.5B, the four eastbound ships from which were sent in to Mombasa. In that port were *Hermes*, and *Capetown*. One hundred miles north-west of the convoy was the cruiser *Enterprise*.⁶ *Shropshire* was off the coast of Italian Somaliland supporting the army with a bombardment of Brava. The cruiser *Glasgow* was in the vicinity of *Canadian Cruiser's* position and was told to investigate immediately. *Enterprise* was instructed to proceed to cover convoy WS.5B from the south. *Emerald*, *Hawkins*, and *Capetown* were disposed to hunt the raider. On the morning of the 22nd, before the search yielded result, a further distress message was received, this time from the Dutch *Rantaupandjang* (2,542 tons), from a position some 300 miles south-east of *Canadian Cruiser's*.⁷ Then, shortly after noon, *Glasgow* reported that her aircraft had sighted a "pocket battleship" in position 8 degrees 30 minutes south, 51 degrees 35 minutes east, and that she was chasing to the south-east.

H.M.A.S. *Canberra* was at this time on passage to the Maldive Islands from Colombo, where she had arrived on the 20th after escorting convoy US.9⁸ from Fremantle and handing it over off Colombo to H.M.N.Z.S. *Leander* for escort to Bombay. *Canberra* intercepted *Glasgow's* signal at 4.40 p.m. on the 22nd, and shortly after was directed by Leatham to proceed towards the Seychelles and join the hunt, which had by now been strengthened by *Hermes* and *Shropshire*. Later in the day Leatham was told by the Admiralty that *Australia* also could be used, and she was directed to turn convoy WS.5B (proceeding northwards at its best speed) over to *Hawkins*, and to take part in the search. The hunting group now consisted of *Hermes*, *Shropshire*, *Emerald*, *Capetown*, *Glasgow*, *Australia* and *Canberra*. For four days a fruitless search was made, and on the

⁶ HMS *Enterprise*, cruiser (1926), 7,580 tons, seven 6-in guns, sixteen 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

⁷ *Canadian Cruiser* and *Rantaupandjang* were both sunk by *Scheer*.

⁸ Convoy US.9: *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, left Fremantle 12 Feb 1941. On 16 Feb *Queen Mary* was detached off Sunda Strait to Singapore escorted by H.M.S. *Durban*. She reached Singapore on 18 Feb carrying the first AIF troops for Malaya. The other three ships had AIF and NZ troops for the Middle East. They were trans-shipped at Bombay and reached Suez on 15 Mar 1941 in *Nevasa*, *Khedive Ismail*, *Westernland*, *Slamat*, and *Cap St Jacques* (of 9,213, 7,290, 16,479, 11,636 and 8,009 tons respectively). *Farramatta* formed part of their Red Sea escort.

26th February the hunting group dispersed. It was subsequently learned that, after sighting *Glasgow's* aircraft, *Scheer* made off to the east and south, and eventually returned to the Atlantic. She rounded the Cape (some 400 miles south of it) on the 3rd March.

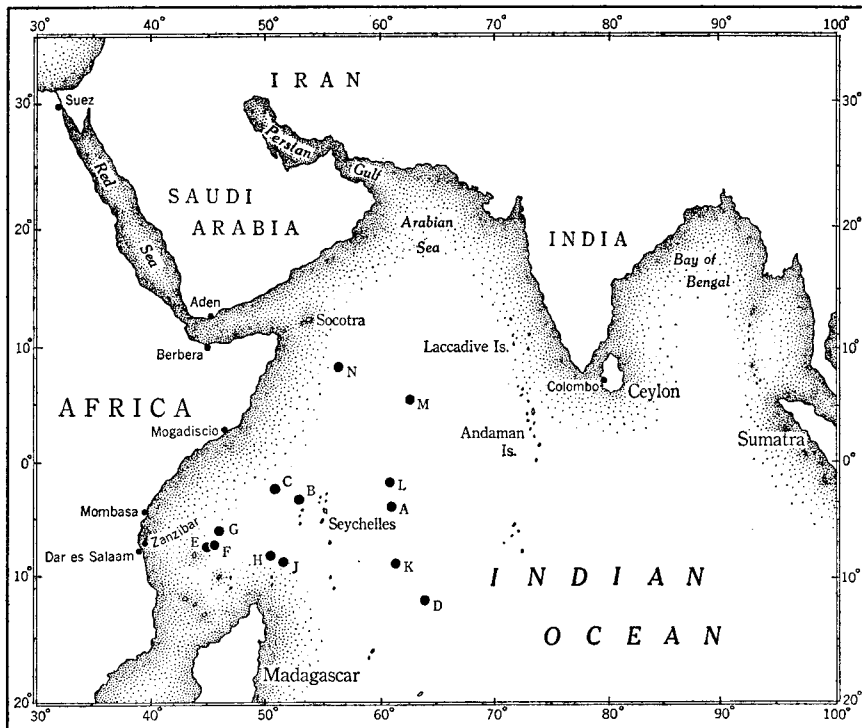
On the 20th February, the day *Canberra* and *Leander* met off Colombo, an Italian ship, *Ramb I* (3,667 tons), sailed from Massawa, where she had been fitted out as a raider. Next day she was followed by the German vessel *Coburg* (7,400 tons). Both ships successfully ran the gauntlet of the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden, and broke out into the Indian Ocean. *Ramb I* made for the Netherlands East Indies (with orders to raid merchant ships on passage); *Coburg*, unarmed, was to operate as supply ship for the German raiders. In the forenoon of 27th February *Leander*, having escorted convoy US.9 to Bombay, was patrolling west of the Maldive Islands when she intercepted *Ramb I*. In a short, sharp action, *Ramb I* blew up. Her 103 survivors were rescued by *Leander*.

The day previously *Canberra*, under orders to rendezvous with *Leander*, sailed from Port Victoria, Seychelles, where she had gone to fuel. The two ships met on the 2nd March and searched an area between the Seychelles and Chagos Archipelago for possible raiders. The 4th March found *Canberra* steaming alone reconnoitring the northern portion of Saya de Malha Bank. Temporarily the ships had separated tactically to widen the search. The day was still and the sea calm. Visibility was extreme, and the sky clear except for isolated groups of rain clouds. At 1.53 p.m. *Canberra* catapulted her aircraft. At 4.28 p.m., when *Canberra* was in 8 degrees 42 minutes south 61 degrees 42 minutes east, steering S.S.W. at 17½ knots, the masthead lookout reported smoke on the starboard bow. *Canberra's* captain (Farncomb) altered course to close and increased to 25 knots, and six minutes later the aircraft reported two ships, shortly amplifying this to an armed raider with a tanker. (Actually, as was soon learned, the strangers were *Coburg* and *Ketty Brovig*, and when sighted *Coburg* was supplying the tanker with fresh water.) By this time the ships were in sight from *Canberra's* bridge, and had themselves sighted the cruiser. They parted company, *Coburg* to the north and the tanker to the south, and both disregarding *Canberra's* signals. Farncomb concentrated first on *Coburg*, the supposed raider. This ship disregarded a warning salvo ahead, and at 5.6 p.m. *Canberra* opened fire on her at about 21,000 yards. At this stage Farncomb still thought she was an armed raider, possibly with torpedo tubes; and with this in mind manoeuvred to keep the range over 19,000 yards. At 5.16 p.m. fire was checked when *Coburg* was seen to be on fire just abaft the bridge.

Meanwhile *Canberra's* aircraft was paying attention to *Ketty Brovig*. Lieutenant Malleison, the observer, assumed that *Canberra* would engage *Coburg*, so he decided to make the tanker heave to, and at intervals dropped four bombs close to her. The last two fell in her wake, and at about 5.10 p.m. she stopped. From his position aloft Malleison could see that both ships had taken scuttling action and were being abandoned, and so informed *Canberra*, but Farncomb refrained from closing im-

mediately "as I was still suspicious of a 'booby trap' in the merchant ship in the shape of a couple of torpedoes".

Malleson now decided to land and board the tanker before she sank.⁹ The aircraft landed alongside, and Malleson stripped and swam the



Activities of German Raiders in North-West Indian Ocean, January-May 1941

A—Raider *Atlantis* sank *Mandasor* 24 Jan 1941. B—Raider *Atlantis* captured *Speybank* 31 Jan 1941. C—Raider *Atlantis* captured *Ketty Brovig* 2 Feb 1941. D—Meeting place of raiders *Scheer* and *Atlantis*, and supply ships *Tannenfels*, *Speybank* and *Ketty Brovig* 11 Feb 1941. E—Raider *Scheer* captured *British Advocate* 20 Feb 1941. F—Raider *Scheer* sank *Grigorios C.II* 21 Feb 1941. G—Raider *Scheer* sank *Canadian Cruiser* 21 Feb 1941. H—Raider *Scheer* sank *Rantaupandjang* 22 Feb 1941. J—Raider *Scheer* sighted by aircraft from *Glasgow* 22 Feb 1941. K—*Canberra* at sinking of *Coburg* and *Ketty Brovig* 4 Mar 1941. L—Raider *Pinguin* sank *Empire Light* 25 Apr 1941. M—Raider *Pinguin* sank *Clan Buchanan* 28 Apr 1941. N—Raider *Pinguin* sank *British Emperor* 7 May 1941.

twenty yards or so to the ship. "I regret," he later wrote, "that the sensible course of using the rubber dinghy did not occur to me, and for my own peace of mind I did not see the several sharks that were cruising round until I was safely back in the aircraft." He made a hasty survey of the

⁹ The aircraft's crew were Lt C. V. S. Malleson, RN, observer; Flight Lt P. O. Lavarack, RAAF, pilot; and Leading Telegraphist E. M. Hutchison, RAN, wireless operator.

ship, collected what papers he could, and signalled *Canberra* that she might be saved if a salvage party were sent immediately.

At 6.38 p.m. *Leander* appeared on the scene and was requested to stand by *Coburg* while *Canberra* closed *Ketty Brovig* and sent a party on board. It was, however, not possible to save her. She was badly down by the stern. Engine and boiler rooms were full of scalding water; and water was lapping in the open ports of the after accommodation. In an endeavour to close these one of the boarding party had an unpleasant few minutes when a wave swept through the port he was trying to secure, flooded the room he was in, and slammed and jammed the door. He was, however, released with a wetting and the loss of his boots.

Before *Leander* could reach *Coburg*, that ship sank, at 6.50 p.m., and *Leander* picked up her crew. *Ketty Brovig* was slower, and her end was hastened by a few rounds of 4-inch shells from *Canberra*, who picked up the Germans, Norwegians, and Chinese who formed her company.

Only half an hour elapsed from the time *Canberra's* ship's company was aware of the presence of an enemy and the time of opening fire, and the initial excitement persisted for some time after closing up at action stations. In consequence various minor mistakes in drill were made. As Farncomb later remarked:

It should be remembered that *Canberra* has carried out many abortive air reconnaissances in the past few months with greater expectation of meeting an enemy than on this occasion. . . . The "shoot" on the 4th March was an excellent rehearsal for the real thing, with the added advantage that the enemy was unable to profit by our errors.

As it was, no harm was done; but 215 rounds of 8-inch ammunition were fired in the "shoot". The two enemy ships took scuttling action with such celerity that their loss could not in any case have been prevented. Down in the engine and boiler rooms of *Canberra* a description of the happenings above was passed over the loud speakers from time to time and, reported the Commander (E)¹ "held the ratings' interest more than a broadcast description of a Test Match with Bradman batting against Larwood".

So far as the enemy was concerned the loss of *Ketty Brovig* was not known beyond those immediately concerned for nearly two months, and caused considerable derangement of German plans for refuelling raiders in the Indian Ocean.

IV

Convoy WS.5B reached Suez safely on the 2nd March with *Parramatta* in the Red Sea escort. Back in Aden on the 3rd, the Australian sloop sailed again on the 5th escorting convoy US.9 through the Red Sea. Good news continued to reach Walker. He was told to be prepared for operational duty in support of General Platt's advance on Massawa; and on his way south with a Red Sea convoy on the 17th March he noted that Berbera was retaken by combined British forces on the previous day. For

¹ Cdr O. F. McMahon, OBE; RAN. Cdr(E) *Canberra* 1938-42; Dep Engr Manager Garden Island, Sydney, 1942-46. Of Malanda, Qld; b. Marceba, Qld, 15 Jan 1900.

the rest of the month *Parramatta* was on Perim patrol, which was strengthened to intercept any ships attempting to escape from Massawa or the more southerly port of Assab. One ship, the German *Oder* (8,516 tons), was intercepted by the sloop *Shoreham* on the 23rd March, and scuttled herself immediately she was challenged; and *Bertram Rickmers* (4,188 tons) which left Massawa on the 29th was intercepted by H.M.S. *Kandahar*. At the end of the month *Parramatta* was in Port Sudan for an operation designed to establish at Marsa Kuba, thirty-seven miles north of Massawa, an advanced base for Platt's coastal forces. *Parramatta's* task, assisted by the destroyer *Kingston*, was to sweep a channel clear of mines for a convoy of pontoons and supply ships. By this time Massawa was invested, but forts on the mainland and off-lying islands were unsubdued, and attack was possible by destroyers, motor torpedo boats, and submarines.² On the 1st April a Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm (seventeen of which, from *Eagle*, were operating from Port Sudan in support of the advance on Massawa) sighted one destroyer (*Leone*³) aground or scuttled off Norah Island, 40 miles from Massawa. Two days later four large destroyers were sighted by Fleet Air Arm aircraft nineteen miles off Port Sudan. They were bombed, and two of them (*Nazario Sauro* and *Daniele Manin*⁴) were driven ashore. The remaining two (*Pantera* and *Tigre*⁵) beached themselves on the Arabian shore south of Jedda, where they were destroyed by *Kingston* and R.A.F. aircraft. The last of the seven original large destroyers, *Cesare Battisti*,⁶ scuttled herself off the Arabian shore on the 4th.

The flotilla of four destroyers sighted off Port Sudan left Massawa on the 2nd, and apparently passed close to *Parramatta* when that ship was patrolling off Massawa on the night 2nd-3rd April, but contact was not made; nor did *Parramatta* meet any opposition from other vessels or the forts during her operations. She successfully guided the pontoon convoy and supply ships into Marsa Kuba on the 5th April, and a pontoon jetty was established and stores unloaded, facilitating the capture of Massawa on the 8th April. A few hours before the surrender, the Italian navy at Massawa made a final gesture. At 1 a.m. on the 8th *Parramatta*, at anchor off Marsa Kuba, received from *Capetown*, patrolling in the offing, a signal to say she had been torpedoed. With the Indian sloop *Indus*, *Parramatta* weighed and stood by the damaged cruiser, and later the Australian ship towed her to Port Sudan, where they arrived on the 10th.⁷

² When Italy entered the war her Red Sea force comprised 7 large destroyers, *Francesco Nullo*, *Nazario Sauro*, *Daniele Manin*, *Pantera*, *Tigre*, *Leone*, and *Cesare Battisti*; two small destroyers, *Vincenzo Orsini* and *Giovanni Acerbi*; eight submarines; a sloop, *Eritrea*; two armed merchant cruisers, *Ramb I* and *Ramb II*; and eight minor vessels. *Francesco Nullo* was sunk in October 1940 (Chapter 5), and *Ramb I* was sunk by *Leander* in February 1941 as stated above. *Eritrea* and *Ramb II* succeeded in escaping early in 1941. *Eritrea* was reported to have reached Kobe on 22 March 1941. *Ramb II* was sunk by HMS *Triumph* on 30 May.

³ *Leone*, Italian destroyer (1923), 1,526 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, six 18-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

⁴ *Nazario Sauro* and *Daniele Manin*, Italian destroyers (1926), 1,058 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

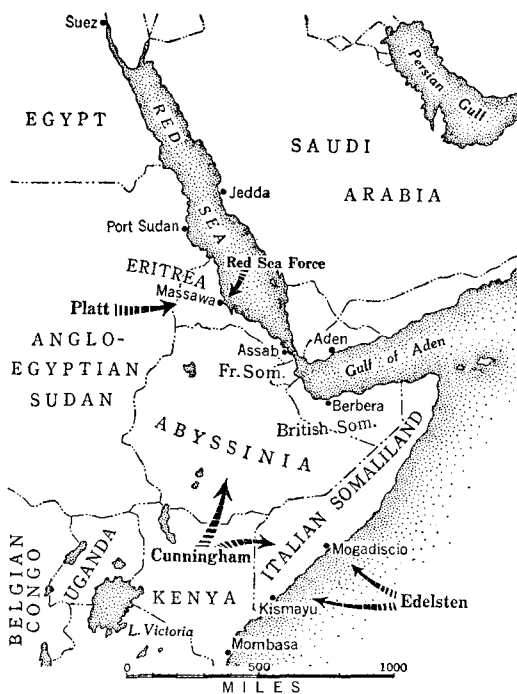
⁵ *Pantera* and *Tigre*, Italian destroyers (1924), 1,526 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, six 18-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

⁶ *Cesare Battisti*, Italian destroyer (1926), 1,058 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

⁷ *Capetown* was torpedoed by an Italian motor torpedo boat which was not sighted. After temporary repairs at Port Sudan she was towed to Bombay in May for permanent repair.

Parramatta was back off Massawa the following day, and assisted in sweeping a channel to the port, a number of mines being cut and sunk. It was desired to establish a British naval staff at Massawa as early as possible, and on the 14th April Walker sent his motor-boat (from the then limit of the swept channel about fourteen miles from Massawa) into the port with staff officers on board. "Thus," he wrote, "the first British naval officer to reach Massawa by sea was Lieutenant G. W. A. Langford,⁸ R.A.N., in charge of my boat."

Parramatta herself anchored off Massawa harbour the following morning, and Walker found that "the Italian naval base presented a strange sight, as scuttled merchant ships lay in fantastic positions in the various fairways and the harbours". Among the scuttled vessels found there were the two small destroyers *Vincenzo Orsini* and *Giovanni Acerbi*.⁹



The occupation of Massawa virtually completed the conquest of Eritrea and lessened the possibility of attack on ships in the Red Sea and its approaches. One important result was that on the 11th April President Roosevelt issued an order declaring the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden no longer "combat zones"¹ and thus now open for United States merchant ships. The possibility of attack by surface raider or submarine, at any rate in the Gulf of Aden or nearby ocean area, remained. This was evidenced later in April and early the following month, when three British ships, *Empire Light* (6,537 tons), *Clan Buchanan* (7,266 tons) and *British Emperor* (3,663 tons), were intercepted and sunk by the German raider *Pinguin*, in the north-west Indian Ocean. *Pinguin*, after

⁸ Lt G. W. A. Langford; RAN. 1st Lt *Parramatta* 1940, temp CO 1941. Of Roseville, NSW; b. 27 Aug 1912. Lost in sinking of *Parramatta*, 27 Nov 1941.

⁹ *Giovanni Acerbi*, Italian destroyer (1916), 669 tons, six 4-in guns, four 18-in torp tubes, 33 kts; bombed by British naval aircraft, 1 Apr 1941.

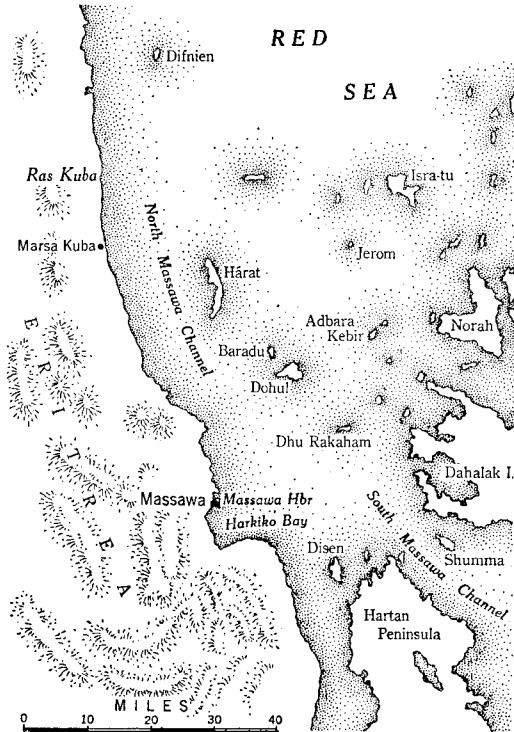
¹ In Nov 1939 the provision of the U.S. *Neutrality Act*, which forbade the entry of American merchant ships into defined "combat zones", came into force.

her activities off Australia and in the southern Indian Ocean (Chapter 6), operated in the Antarctic and South Atlantic, and in March 1941 spent some days at Kerguelen refitting, before proceeding north in the Indian Ocean. Here her presence was disclosed by a distress message from *Clan Buchanan*. In the afternoon of 8th May she was intercepted by H.M.S. *Cornwall*, and in the resulting sharp engagement she blew up and sank.

The improved situation south of Suez enabled the release of a number of ships of the Red Sea Force for service in the Mediterranean, among them *Parramatta*. Before leaving she spent a few hours in Massawa harbour,

and there embarked the three ratings from *Hobart*, Jones,² Sweeney³ and Hurren,⁴ who were captured at Berbera and recovered by the army at Adi Ugri (some fifty miles south-west of Massawa) when that point was taken on the 1st April. Petty Officer Lewis⁵ of *Parramatta* said that the three men "nearly died of excitement" when they found they were to be embarked in an Australian ship.⁶ They were landed at Suez, and went on to Australia in *Queen Mary*, which, in company with *Queen Elizabeth* as convoy US.10A, and escorted as far as Perim by *Canberra*, reached Suez on 3rd May, the same day as *Parramatta*. On the 1st June

(after some days at Suez during which she refloated the steamer *Mount Othrys* (4,817 tons) aground on a sand spit, was degaussed, and met *Vampire* bound for Australia) *Parramatta* entered the Suez Canal, and reached Alexandria on the 3rd June. She had spent nearly forty unbroken weeks in the Red Sea. Before she left it, Walker and his crew had the



² PO H. Jones, 19657, RAN. HMAS's *Hobart* 1939-40, *Australia* 1943. Of Kalgoorlie, WA; b. Kalgoorlie, 14 Nov 1914.

³ AB H. C. Sweeney, 19348, RAN. HMAS *Hobart* 1938-40. Of Brisbane; b. Dalby, Qld, 19 Jun 1911.

⁴ AB W. J. Hurren, 21641, RAN. HMAS's *Hobart* 1938-40, 1945-46, *Bataan* 1945, 1946-47. Labourer; of Brisbane; b. Plymouth, Eng, 9 Apr 1919.

⁵ PO S. F. Lewis, 12037, RAN. HMAS's *Parramatta* 1940-41, *Moresby* 1943-44. Of Maylands, WA; b. Maylands, 8 May 1904.

⁶ P. and F. M. McGuire, *The Price of Admiralty* (1944), p. 236.

satisfaction of receiving from Admiral Leatham the signal: "I am sorry to lose your services which have been invaluable. Good luck to you all", and of learning that the Duke of Aosta, Italian Governor of Abyssinia and Commander-in-Chief East Africa, had surrendered on the 19th May. The East African campaign was won.

V

Britain, from the time of Napoleon, realised the importance of the Middle East, at the crossroads between Europe, Asia, and Africa; and it gained additional strategical importance to her in the earlier years of the twentieth century with the substitution of oil fuel for coal in the Royal Navy and the Admiralty purchase of a controlling interest in the Anglo-Persian oil company. In 1939, though the Middle East states had strong nationalist aspirations, Britain was the greatest power in the area: but the defeat of France and the German successes in 1940 reduced Britain's prestige, particularly in Iraq and Persia.

After the first world war Iraq was placed under British mandate. Subsequently Britain undertook to recognise Iraq as an independent state, and in 1930 a treaty was signed under which Britain was given the right to maintain peacetime air bases near Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf, and at Habbaniya some 300 miles to the north-west; and have the right of transit for military forces and supplies at all times, while in war she should have "all facilities and assistance". In return, Iraq received the promise of assistance in the event of war, and sponsorship for entry to the League of Nations.

The security of Persia was vital to Britain, with its great oil producing areas to the north of the Gulf, and the refinery and shipping port of Abadan on the Shatt-el-Arab. Britain's policy towards Persia had been to encourage her independence and court her friendship; but German prestige stood high, and an active German mission was installed in the capital, Teheran.

The Persian Gulf, covering an area of some 97,000 square miles, and joined to the Gulf of Oman by the 29-mile wide Strait of Hormuz, is almost an inland sea. Its length from the coast of Oman to the head of the Gulf is about 500 miles; its width varies from 180 miles to the 29 miles of the Strait. Within the Strait the Gulf is very shallow, and deep soundings range from 40 to 50 fathoms, with the line of greatest depth nearer the Persian than the Arabian coast. Numerous islands dot the expanse of the Gulf, especially in the western part. Those of the Persian littoral are rocky and scarped; those on the Arabian side are shoal islands and coral islets. Cool, dry and bracing from November to April, the Gulf is hot and humid in the summer, with maximum temperatures ranging between 108 and 120 degrees. As with the Red Sea, navigation is tricky, with high refraction causing false horizons. By night the richly phosphorescent water marks a ship's passage in coils and flashes of green light. Adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of Kuwait at the head of

the Gulf, Iraq had a narrow but important entrance in the Shatt-el-Arab, the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. For some fifty miles from the coast the left bank of the Shatt-el-Arab formed the boundary between Iraq and Persia. Within this narrow entrance Iraq expanded into a large country north to Turkey, north-west to Syria, and west to Jordan.

On the 2nd May, the day before *Parramatta* reached Suez on her way to the Mediterranean, Walker recorded that "hostilities commenced against Iraq this day". The event was the culmination of some months of Axis intrigue and of the overthrow of the Iraqi government by a *coup d'état*; and closely concerned *Parramatta's* sister *Yarra*, then in approximately *Parramatta's* latitude but some 1,000 miles to the eastward, at the head of the Persian Gulf.

German leaders had for long recognised the importance of fomenting Arab opposition to Britain and France in the Middle East, and some months before the outbreak of war had, in 1938, taken steps to establish there organisations willing to work for a Pan-Arab united front with German support. When, early in March 1941, the British proposed stationing troops in Iraq with right of transit in the terms of the treaty, the proposal was opposed by the Iraqi Government, and Germany and Italy were given to understand that this opposition would be backed by military action if arms were forthcoming from the Axis powers. The Germans tried to arrange delivery of arms via Turkey and Persia, and from Japan.

On the night of the 3rd-4th April 1941 the existing Cabinet in Iraq, some members of which were inclined to agree to the British proposals, was overthrown by a *coup d'état*, and the pro-German Rashid Ali became Prime Minister. The pro-British Regent, Amir Abdul Illah, took refuge in H.M.S. *Cockchafer*⁷ at Basra. Britain wasted no time in getting troops to Iraq and early in April, by arrangement with the Indian Government, a brigade group and regiment of field artillery already embarked at Karachi for Malaya were diverted to Basra. *Yarra* was part of the escort.

Yarra left the Red Sea in the middle of March for Bombay, where she docked and refitted until 9th April. On that date she sailed for Aden, but the following day was diverted to Karachi where she arrived on the 11th. On the 12th she sailed as escort to the Basra convoy of eight ships (BM.7) and reached Basra (being joined en route by H.M. Ships *Falmouth* and *Cockchafer*) on the 18th. H.M.S. *Emerald* was there, and a few hours later the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Leatham), arrived in *Leander*. The landing of the troops at Basra was unopposed and the official attitude was friendly; but the Iraqi Government said no more troops could land until those already in Iraq moved on. The British Government replied that in view of the situation in Egypt, additional troops were already on their way. (They were in convoy BP.1, which left India on the 22nd April.)

Leander, with Leatham, left Basra for Colombo on the 23rd April. In view of possible opposition to the forthcoming landing, H.M. Ships *Hermes* and *Enterprise* were disposed in a covering position thirty miles

⁷ HMS *Cockchafer*, river gunboat (1915), 625 tons, two 6-in guns, 14 kts.

south of the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab; but convoy BP.1 arrived without incident on the 28th April, and was escorted from the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab to Basra by *Yarra*. The incident, however, forced Rashid Ali's hand. On 30th April Iraqi troops concentrated around the R.A.F. establishment at Habbaniya. On the 2nd May they opened fire on the British cantonments and the two countries were at war.

Axis help for Iraq was inadequate and tardy. It was the 9th May before the German Foreign Office told Rashid Ali their proposed supporting measures, which included making Syria available as a supply base and sending to Iraq a first bomber formation of twenty aircraft. Four more days passed before the first German aircraft, and first trainload of supplies from Syria, reached Mosul. By then the siege of Habbaniya was over, the Iraqi forces were in retreat towards Baghdad, and the Iraqi air force had been virtually destroyed. On the 29th of the month the British were attacking Baghdad, and on the 30th Rashid Ali and the most senior officers fled to Persia. The following day, 31st May, an armistice was signed, Amir Abdul Illah was reinstated as Regent, and a new Government took office. British forces rapidly occupied all the important points in the country.

Yarra's service in the war with Iraq, carried out under the orders of the Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf⁸ (Commodore Cosmo Graham⁹) was in the Shatt-el-Arab. For the first three weeks of May she operated in support of land forces occupying Basra and its port of Ashar, securing a bridge over Qarmat Ali Creek above Ashar to prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements, and occupying Fao at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab. On the 2nd of the month the Iraqis, who had previously mined the Qarmat Ali bridge, attempted to destroy it in the face of attack by a platoon of Sikhs advancing from the south. The charge misfired, and *Yarra* landed her Gunner,¹ who withdrew the charges. They, Harrington recorded, "were found to consist of wet guncotton manufactured at Waltham Abbey in 1937. Misfire due to most inefficient fitting of primer".

On the 24th May Harrington commanded the naval force in the combined operation "Scoop", the object of which was "to attack and disperse all enemy found on the right bank of the Shatt-el-Arab in the vicinity of Habib Shawi [some seven miles up river from Ashar] and to inflict maximum casualties". The naval task was to bombard objectives, to land two companies of Gurkhas and battalion headquarters, and subsequently to re-embark the force landed and cover the withdrawal.

The operation was preceded, on the night of the 22nd-23rd, by a reconnaissance of the landing position when six ratings from *Yarra*, disguised as Arab fishermen in a native bellum, took soundings. Harrington's flotilla, *Yarra*, the tugs *Souriya* and *Shamal*, and two native mahailas, weighed

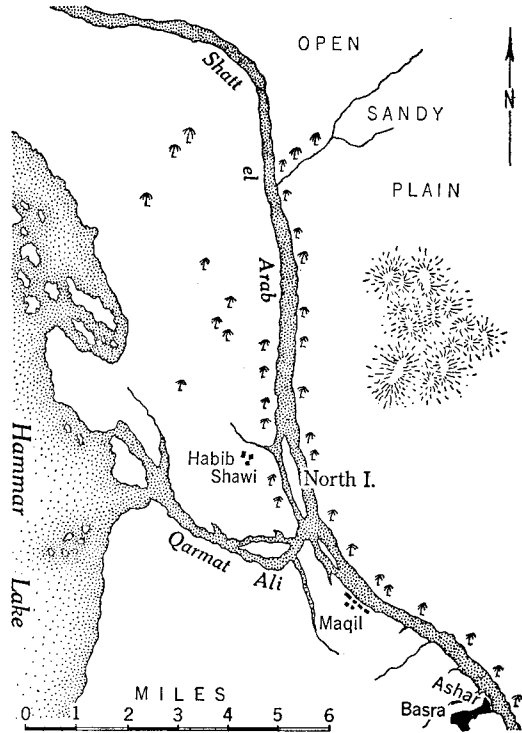
⁸ The short title was SNOGP, and the verbal reference was always to "Snop-Gee".

⁹ Rear-Adm C. M. Graham, CB; RN. (Comd HMS's *Victor* 1916-17, *Springbok* 1917-19.) Comd HMS *Shoreham* 1939-41, and SNO Persian Gulf 1939-42; Cmdre Cdg Burma Coast 1942; FO Cdg Humber Area 1942-45. B. 13 Feb 1887. Died 5 Nov 1946.

¹ Gnr (later Lt) J. S. Godfrey, MBE; RAN. HMAS *Yarra* 1938-41; HMAS *Australia* 1941-42. Of Earlwood, NSW; b. Darlinghurst, NSW, 25 Oct 1899.

from Ma'qil, just above Ashar, at 3.20 a.m. on the 24th. *Yarra* had on board the battalion headquarters and two trench-mortars with a crew of Iraq levies; the two companies of Gurkhas were in the tugs. They were in position upstream at 4 a.m., and *Yarra* opened fire on two main objectives, "Big House" and a date godown, covered the landing with a smoke screen, and later engaged targets of opportunity farther upstream. By 9.42 a.m. *Yarra* was back in her berth at Ma'qil, the operation, Harrington recorded, "being successfully completed, and 'Big House' and 'South Village' being left in flames. Expenditure of ammunition—43 rounds 4-inch H.E., 216 rounds 0.5-inch and 550 rounds .303-inch". On the 31st May, the day the armistice was signed, *Yarra* was at anchor off Ashar.

The conduct of *Yarra's* company during this period was, Harrington recorded, "excellent", but health was "lamentable. The sick list now numbers about 25, and it appears will remain at about this figure during the malaria season. . . . Only one signalman now remains off the sick list. . . . At present, due to sickness, only two guns can be manned." All, however, remained cheerful and willing, and *Yarra's* only casualties at this period were those caused by mosquitoes.



VI

Britain's success in Iraq was simultaneous with her failure in Crete. On the 31st May, the date the armistice was signed in Baghdad, the final embarkation from Sfakia was carried out. Possession of Syria now became of first importance; and here the Germans had established a foothold in connection with their efforts to support Iraq.

For some weeks the future of Syria had been a subject of concern to the British Government and of discussion between it and General Wavell. In a message to Mr Churchill on the 22nd May, Wavell remarked that:

German Air Force established in Syria are closer to the Canal and Suez than they would be at Mersa Matruh. . . . The whole position in Middle East is at present governed mainly by air-power and air bases. Enemy air bases in Greece make our hold of Crete precarious, and enemy air bases in Cyrenaica, Crete, Cyprus and Syria would make our hold on Egypt difficult. The object of the army must be to force the enemy in Cyrenaica as far west as possible, to try to keep him from establishing himself in Syria, and to hang on to Crete and Cyprus.

Wavell was, he said, moving reinforcements to Palestine "after full discussion with Cunningham, Tedder and Blamey, because we feel we must be prepared for action against Syria, and weak action is useless".

The foremost German agent in Syria was Rudolph Rahn, Counsellor at the German Embassy in Paris. His mission in Syria was twofold, to organise a supply base for Iraq, and to organise Syria against possible British attack. He secured the confidence and cooperation of General Dentz, Vichy High Commissioner in Syria and Commander-in-Chief French Forces in the Levant, but was handicapped by the inability to secure reinforcements for the defence of the country. The German High Command was desirous of holding Syria, but was preoccupied with the impending attack on Russia, of which Rahn was apparently unaware. As a preliminary to that attack, Germany was negotiating a pact of friendship with Turkey (it was signed on the 18th June) and this precluded any immediate German support of Syria by land from the north. Both the German and Italian High Commands regarded Cyprus as the key to the defence of Syria, but the severe handling German airborne troops and paratroops had received in Crete made impossible their immediate use in any attempt to take Cyprus, which was more favourably placed for British defence. A German suggestion that the Italians should invade Cyprus from the Dodecanese, with German air support, came to nothing. Rahn's endeavour, therefore, was to delay any possible British attack on Syria by concealing as far as could be any German activity there which would encourage such attack. As stated above, however, Britain was aware of the Axis foothold in Syria, and of its dangers. Early on the 8th June, British and Australian troops attacked in the south from Palestine and Transjordan.

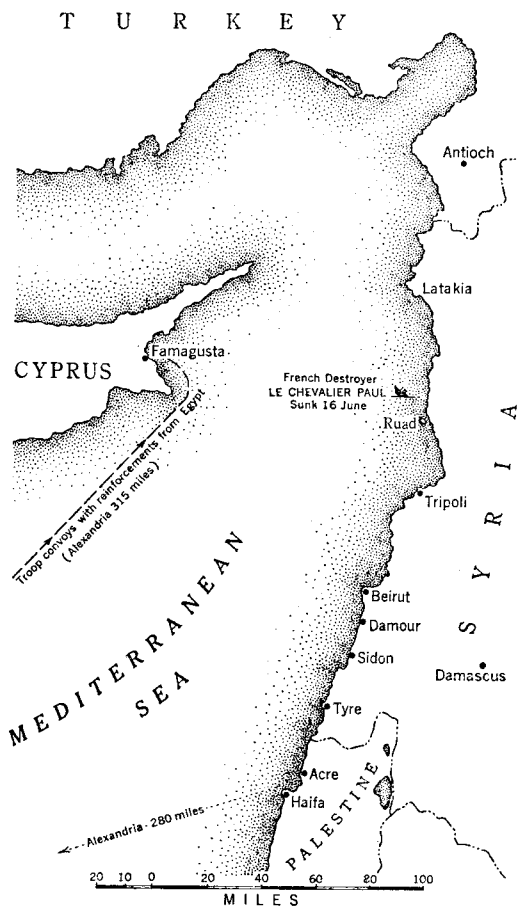
The Syrian campaign, fought in a country with a restricted coastal corridor and a vital coast road with long stretches in full view from the sea, was ideal for naval cooperation. There were, however, a number of naval problems: the difficulty of finding ships after the losses and exhaustion of the Greek and Crete campaigns; enemy air attack which largely confined naval movements to darkness hours unless continuous fighter protection could be given; and the presence of two large French flotilla leaders (almost in the category of light cruisers), three submarines, and some smaller vessels at Beirut. As a further complication, what Admiral Cunningham later described as "this comparatively petty campaign" absorbed the entire effort of all reconnaissance aircraft available for naval cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean excepting those based on Malta; and even so, reconnaissance was inadequate. The available aircraft of the

Fleet Air Arm had to be concentrated in Cyprus for reconnaissance to the north and west against the arrival of enemy reinforcements. Reconnaissance on the Syrian coast had to be left to aircraft of the Palestine and Transjordan Command, which had no sea experience and consequently made some misleading reports—in one instance resulting in *Perth* being bombed by our own aircraft.

Naval operations were under the command of Vice-Admiral King (15th Cruiser Squadron) who left Alexandria on the 7th June in *Phoebe*, with *Ajax*, *Kandahar*, *Kimberley*, *Janus* and *Jackal*. The day previously *Glengyle*, escorted by *Isis* and *Hotspur*, had left Port Said with commando troops to land at the Litani River, just north of Tyre, and capture Khan bridge. The initial attempt, made on the night of 7th-8th June, was abandoned owing to heavy surf on the beaches. *Glengyle* returned to Port Said and *Isis* and *Hotspur*, with *Coventry*, joined King at 6 a.m. on the 8th. Shortly after, King's force closed the coast south of Tyre and tried to gain touch with the head of the army column, but the situation ashore was not clear to King until 3.30 p.m.,

when it appeared that Tyre had been captured. *Kimberley* carried out the initial naval bombardment of the campaign on some French positions near Khan bridge between 8 and 9 p.m.

Early in the morning of the 9th the force closed the coast to support *Glengyle* in the second landing attempt (which was successful) at the Litani River; after which King stood off to the westward. The French flotilla leaders, *Guépard* and *Valmy*,² apparently well served by air recon-



² *Guépard* and *Valmy*, French destroyers (1929-30), 2,436 tons, five 5.4-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 35.5 kts; scuttled at Toulon, 27 Nov 1942.

naissance, seized the chance to sneak in and bombard Australian troops on both banks of the river. King heard of this just after 10 a.m. and closed the coast at full speed but the French ships had gone, driven off by artillery fire of the 2/4th Regiment. In the early afternoon they were encountered off Sidon by four of King's destroyers, *Janus* (Senior Officer), *Hotspur*, *Jackal* and *Isis*. The Frenchmen had the advantage in speed and range, and *Janus*, some way ahead of her consorts, at the outset bore the brunt of the enemy fire. She received five hits, which killed or wounded all on the bridge except the captain, and disabled and stopped the ship. She was quickly supported by the others, whereupon the French ships retired at high speed to Beirut, easily outdistancing the pursuing British. Later that evening *Phoebe*, at the request of the Naval Liaison Officer ashore, bombarded supposed enemy positions on the northern side of Khan bridge, but the ridge fired on was in fact then occupied by Australian troops. The following morning, however, *Kandahar* and *Kimberley* carried out a most useful bombardment of French motor-transport, tanks, and ammunition dumps north of Khan bridge; and on the 11th a naval officer was attached to the Australian 7th Division Headquarters as a visual signal link with the destroyers. Thereafter calls for naval fire were made and answered with accuracy and rapidity.

Throughout June King's force operated along the coast, in support of the army and guarding against enemy reinforcement from the sea. Its composition changed from time to time as other ships became available, including *Stuart*, *Nizam* and *Perth*. *Stuart* was the first Australian ship to join, on the 10th, and remained until the 13th. Her spells of duty consisted of patrolling in support of the inshore bombarding forces. "Our Syrian effort," one of her company later remarked, "was very short-lived and taking it all round not very exciting."³ *Nizam*, having followed Crete with a "ferry" run between Alexandria and Tobruk, joined King's force in company with *Naiad* (which now became flagship), *Kingston* and *Jaguar*, on the 17th June. *Perth*, after making good in Alexandria the damage suffered in the Crete campaign, joined nine days later, on the 26th, relieving the New Zealand *Leander*, which had been with the force since the 13th.

Compared with the strain and vicissitudes of the Greece and Crete campaigns, that of Syria was something of a relaxation for the navy. Of sailing for Alexandria for five days' boiler cleaning after a week with the force, Hodgkinson, *Hotspur's* 1st Lieutenant, wrote:

In a way it was a pity to leave the Syrian coast. After Greece and Crete it was an excellent tonic to be doing something aggressive again. Everybody loved Haifa [there were "excellent dinners at Pross's"] and it is always more pleasant to work with a small independent squadron than to work with the battle fleet.

And, on returning five days later to the force:

The Syrian campaign for the next three weeks was a honeymoon. The weather was perfect. At last we had a real squadron of fighters overhead, and each time

³ Clifford, *The Leader of the Crocks* (1945), p. 189.

we went out, which was only about half the time, we had some amusement. The other half was spent in harbour.⁴

However, the campaign had its moments of encounter. German aircraft put in more than one appearance. In the evening of the 15th June German dive bombers severely damaged *Isis* with near misses; and two hours later a formation of sixteen or so French aircraft attacked the force and similarly damaged and incapacitated *Ilex*. Two French destroyers of the *Cassard*⁵ class attempted to reinforce their forces from the west. One, *Le Chevalier Paul*,⁶ was sunk, by Fleet Air Arm aircraft from Cyprus, north of Rouad Island (off the Syrian coast between Tripoli and Latakia) on the 16th June. The other succeeded in reaching Beirut under strong air escort on the 21st.

Guépard and *Valmy* made frequent sorties and tip-and-run raids, both singly and in company; and King's force was continuously on the watch for them. There was a brief encounter on the 14th June, described by Cunningham as "merely irritating". They kept out of range and retired within their shore defences. There was a more promising meeting in the early morning of the 23rd. King in *Naiad*, with *Leander*, *Jaguar*, *Kingston* and *Nizam*, was about ten miles north of Beirut ("which was brilliantly lit as if there were no war")⁷ sweeping south in search of the enemy ships. *Jervis*, *Havock*, *Hotspur* and *Decoy* were on anti-submarine patrol in the offing. At 1.48 a.m. *Naiad* sighted the two French ships on a northerly course close inshore, distant about 5,000 yards. They turned away making smoke, and retired under the coast defence battery of Nahr el Kelb, which opened fire; and were engaged by King's force for some eleven minutes. At the time it was believed by the British that several hits were scored on the enemy; but this was subsequently found to be incorrect. Only one French destroyer was hit, by a 6-inch shell from *Leander*, stated to have been blind.

The British force, however, did considerable material damage to the French ashore in bombardments, and had a marked influence in lowering the defenders' morale. *Perth*, when bombarding in company with *Naiad*, *Kandahar*, *Kingston*, *Havock* and *Griffin* on the 2nd July, earned a special mention from Admiral King for accurate shooting at a battery at Abey in the Damour area, in which she destroyed four guns and blew up an ammunition dump. It was when south of Tyre on the return from this bombardment that the force was reported by a British reconnaissance aircraft as "three French destroyers with three merchant ships", and *Perth* was bombed. Fortunately the bombs fell wide.

⁴ Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, pp. 164-5. Hodgkinson tells a story of *Nizam*, lying outside *Hotspur* during one of their spells alongside in Haifa. Some of *Nizam's* liberty men "discovered a lighter lying ahead of us completely unguarded by the army. And guess what was in that lighter. It's hardly conceivable, but it was beer. Some of the sailors were still tight next morning, and one insisted on falling in with the *Hotspurs* and scrubbing our decks instead of theirs, and he had to be led gently back. Windfalls like that aren't common." (p. 168.)

⁵ *Cassard*, French destroyer (1932), 2,441 tons, five 5.4-in guns, seven 21.7-in torp tubes, 36 kts; scuttled at Toulon, 27 Nov 1942.

⁶ *Le Chevallier Paul*, French destroyer (1932), 2,441 tons, five 5.4-in guns, seven 21.7-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

⁷ Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, p. 165.

Damascus was captured by Australian and Free French troops on the 21st June, but for some days the advance on the coast was halted while progress was made inland. It was resumed on the 4th July, when *Naiad*, *Ajax*, *Jackal*, *Nizam*, *Kimberley*, *Havock* and *Hasty* carried out a preliminary bombardment. Bombardment support was given on the 5th, 6th and 7th, as the army made steady progress against stiff opposition; and on the 7th King recorded that by the end of that day "it was clear that the capture of Damour [the last strong defensive position before Beirut] was only a matter of time". It was captured by the 7th Australian Division on the 9th. On that day General Dentz asked for an armistice, and hostilities ceased at one minute past midnight on the 11th. The armistice was signed at Acre on the 14th July at 8 p.m. and on that day King, with most of his force, including *Perth*, sailed from Haifa for Alexandria.

Of the naval participation in the Syrian campaign, Admiral Cunningham recorded that at the outset:

Both the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Forces, and the General Officer Commanding, Palestine and Transjordan, were not a little sceptical of the value of having naval forces operating on the flank, in spite of experience in the Cyrenaican campaign. It was actually suggested that owing to their need for fighter defence they should be withdrawn from the flank of the army so that the fighters could be released for army support. This produced a categorical statement from the Brigadier on the left that he would prefer to be without fighters rather than lose his naval support on the left flank.

General Lavarack, in his report on operations of the I Australian Corps, listed

Two factors of the highest importance which contributed to the British victory . . . the bombardments provided in the coastal sector by the Royal Navy, and our superiority in the air. . . . The naval bombardments caused a great deal of destruction of enemy transport and armoured fighting vehicles on the coast road, engaged (frequently with good effect) the enemy's gun positions, and last, but not least, caused a considerable deterioration in morale amongst troops exposed, without hope of retaliation and little of protection, to the gruelling flank fire from the sea.⁸

The success of the campaign in Syria improved Britain's strategic position in the Middle East. It was followed immediately by the considerable reinforcement of Cyprus, which began on the 18th July. Two Australian ships took part in the initial movement from Port Said. The Australian merchant ship *Salamaua* (6,676 tons) carried the motor transport of the 20th H.A. Battery and No. 80 Fighter Squadron of the Royal Air Force, and was escorted by *Parramatta*, which ship thus made the first of a number of passages to Famagusta. The operation continued until the 29th August, and employed numerous ships, including *Hobart*, which joined the Mediterranean Station early in that month. With the safeguarding of Cyprus and the occupation of Syria, enemy penetration eastward from the Mediterranean was forestalled; the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal was extended northwards; and the relief on her southern frontier strengthened and comforted Turkey. By now, however, Germany

⁸ According to a statement by Rahn, in the early stages of the campaign naval bombardments caused 3,000 casualties in a few days.

was advancing eastward north of the Black Sea. On the 22nd June 1941 German armies invaded Russia. By the middle of August they were approaching Leningrad in the north, had captured Smolensk in the centre, and were threatening the Crimea in the south.

VII

In September 1941 Commodore Cosmo Graham, Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf, wrote in his "Report on Operation COUNTEenance": "With the German advance into Russia the Persian thorn began to prick." The thorn was the numerous German population in Persia, centred in Teheran, and well organised as a spearhead for intrigue and action. The security of Persia had now assumed extra significance to Britain. Not only were the oil supplies of prime importance, but the country offered a desirable alternative route to the Arctic passage for material aid to Russia. The elimination of German influence became imperative, but the response of the Persian Government to a request for the expulsion of Axis nationals was unsatisfactory. Intelligence on the spot indicated that the Persians were augmenting their defences along the Shatt-el-Arab and the island of Abadan.

On the 18th June operational control of British forces in the Persian Gulf, which from early in May had rested with Middle East Command, passed back to India Command; and on the 17th July Wavell (who had assumed the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, India, six days earlier) telegraphed to the War Office:

It is essential to the defence of India that Germans should be cleared out of Iran [Persia] now. Failure to do so will lead to a repetition of events which in Iraq were only just countered in time. It is essential we should join hands with Russia through Iran, and if the present Government is not willing to facilitate this it must be made to give way to one which will. . . .

This view was already held by the British Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff, and on the 23rd July Cosmo Graham, at a conference in Basra, was told that pressure was to be brought on Persia to expel the Germans, and that "the strongest force available was to be made ready to occupy Abadan and Khorramshahr by the 29th July and thereafter to be kept at immediate notice". On the 13th August terms were agreed upon between Britain and Russia for respective notes to Persia, these to represent "the final word". They met with an unsatisfactory response, and entry into Persia by British forces from the south and Russian from the north was fixed for the 25th August.

Naval forces available for the intended operations at the head of the Gulf (Code name COUNTEenance) were not large, and consisted of three sloops, H.M. Ships *Shoreham*, and *Falmouth*, and H.M.A.S. *Yarra*; the gunboat *Cockchafer*; the corvette *Snapdragon*;⁹ two armed yachts, H.M.S.

⁹ HMS *Snapdragon*, corvette (1940), 955 tons, one 4-in gun, 17 kts; sunk by aircraft in Central Mediterranean, 19 Dec 1942.

Seabelle and H.M.I.S. *Lawrence*;¹ the trawler *Arthur Cavanagh*;² two armed river steamers and some tugs, motor-boats, and dhows. Cosmo Graham was placed in command of the naval operations, and in response to his request for additional forces the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Vice-Admiral Arbuthnot³) offered him the Australian-manned H.M.S. *Kanimbla*, "which I gladly accepted".⁴

Surprise was essential for the speedy success of the undertaking, and the distribution of naval objectives necessitated the use of the available ships in three separate but simultaneous operations: at the Persian naval base of Khorramshahr; at the port and refinery of Abadan; and at the port of Bandar Shapur, southern terminus of the 872-mile Trans-Persian railway from the Caspian Sea.

The left bank of the Shatt-el-Arab from its mouth to the junction with the Karun River, a distance of forty miles, is the western side of Abadan Island. The northern end of this island is some two miles wide, and on it the Persian naval base of Khorramshahr faces the town of that name across the narrow Hafar Channel of the Karun River. In 1941 the base consisted of 600 yards frontage on the south bank of Hafar Channel, where there were five "T" jetties for small vessels. There was also 100 yards of frontage on the Shatt-el-Arab, with a boat pier and steps. Barracks and other buildings were on shore, among palm groves. Eleven miles downstream from the Karun River junction, and round an abrupt bend in the river, the refinery and town of Abadan and the adjacent Bawarda, with numerous berths for large ships, stretched for some three miles along the island bank of the Shatt-el-Arab.

The eastern side of Abadan Island is bounded by a narrow river, Khor Bahmanshir, which runs from the Karun River and discharges into the Gulf eight miles east of the Shatt-el-Arab. East again some thirteen miles is the western side of Khor Musa, a wide opening which extends northwards into flat, low-lying, sparsely vegetated land to a distance of some forty miles due east of Khorramshahr and then turns eastward. Along this eastern stretch, forty-seven miles due east of Khorramshahr, is Bandar Shapur.

The tasks at these three points were to capture the naval base at Khorramshahr and neutralise Persian forces there; to occupy Abadan without damage to the refinery and oil installations; and to capture Axis merchant ships at Bandar Shapur. At Khorramshahr three of the five "T" jetties were occupied—in order from the Shatt-el-Arab—by the Persian sloop *Babr*, the naval school ship *Ivy*, and two gunboats. It was believed that there were about 1,000 men at the base, which was under the com-

¹ HMIS *Lawrence*, sloop (1919), 1,210 tons, two 4-in guns, 15 kts.

² HMS *Arthur Cavanagh*, trawler (1918), 277 tons.

³ Admiral Sir Geoffrey Arbuthnot, KCB, DSO; RN. C-in-C East Indies in succession to Leatham on 22 Apr 1941. B. 1885.

⁴ "*Kanimbla*, a 12,000 ton armed merchant cruiser, a ship which at first sight appeared most unsuitable as a reinforcement for work in narrow waters but which turned out to be probably the only ship in the navy which could have supplied what I required in the way of a great number of hands, vast administrative, endurance and spacious accommodation." Cosmo Graham, "Report on Operation 'Countenance'", 26 Sep 1941.

mand of Admiral Bayendor. At Abadan, where the contingency to be avoided was fire in the oil refinery and installations, was the Persian sloop *Palang*.⁵ At Bandar Shapur were the Persian gunboats *Karkas* and *Chahbaaz*;⁶ a floating dock; two American merchant ships, *Puerto Rican* (6,076 tons) and *Anniston City* (5,687 tons) alongside the jetty, and, anchored in the stream, eight enemy merchant vessels, the German *Hohenfels*, *Marienfels*, *Sturmfels*, *Weissenfels*, and *Wildenfels* (of 6,000-8,000 tons); the Italian merchant ship *Caboto* (5,225 tons) and tankers *Bronte* (8,238 tons) and *Barbara* (3,065 tons). The task was to neutralise the gunboats and capture the floating dock and enemy merchant vessels before they could be scuttled.

On the bank of the Shatt-el-Arab both above and below the Karun River were a number of Persian strong-posts, with machine-guns and, in one instance on Abadan Island, field pieces. In considering the opposition likely to be encountered, Cosmo Graham based his view on experience in the Iraq campaign when "our light forces found themselves in more than one hazardous situation"; and he decided "that all action should be resolute and no account should be taken of doubtful morale among the Persians particularly as their equipment was known to be modern and efficient".

Kanimbla (Captain Adams⁷), which had been patrolling and escorting on the East Indies Station, arrived in the Persian Gulf on the 7th August. She anchored and remained some thirty miles south of the Shatt-el-Arab light vessel and, by the use of canvas screens, tried to disguise her identity as an armed merchant cruiser. On the 8th August Cosmo Graham (at Basra) wrote to Adams outlining the situation:

We are pressing the Persians to clear out the Germans. If they are recalcitrant we shall move by land, sea and air. The earliest date is 12th August. . . . We have got to get Abadan—the main objective. I have a few ships over—including you, which gives us a chance to capture Bandar Shapur and the shipping there. . . . You will be—must be—in charge of the Bandar Shapur party. . . .

That party was to consist of *Kanimbla*, *Cockchafer*, *Lawrence*, *Snapdragon*, *Arthur Cavanagh*, two dhows, two tugs, and a R.A.F. motor pinnace. The Abadan force was the armed yacht *Seabelle* (wearing Cosmo Graham's broad pendant), *Shoreham*, a minesweeper, two armed river steamers, five motor-boats, two dhows and a launch. The sloop *Falmouth* was in charge of the Khorramshahr force, with *Yarra*, H.M. Kenya Launch *Baleeka*, and the armed river tug *Souriya*.⁸

⁵ *Babr* and *Palang*, Persian sloops (1932), 950 tons, three 4-in guns, 15 kts; sunk 25 Aug 1941.

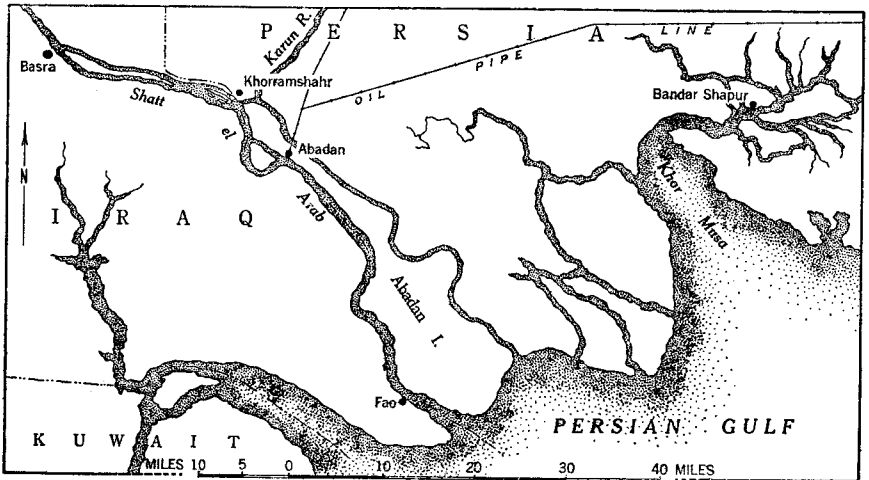
⁶ *Karkas* and *Chahbaaz*, Persian gunboats (1931), 331 tons, two 3-in guns, 15.5 kts.

⁷ Rear-Adm W. L. G. Adams, CB, OBE; RN. HMAS *Canberra* 1940; comd HMAS *Kanimbla* 1941-43, HMS *Wasp* and CF Base, Dover, 1943-44; Director Coastal Forces Material Dept 1944-45. B. 20 Apr 1901. (He relieved Capt Getting in command of *Kanimbla* on 25 Mar 1941. Getting returned to Australia to take up the appointment of Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.)

⁸ "The naval force comprised such vessels as I was able to collect. They included ships and launches manned by the RN, the RAN, the RIN, together with their Reserves and Volunteer Reserves; the RCNVR and the Royal Kenya Naval Volunteer Reserve. Amongst the ratings were included some belonging to the South African Naval Service. New Zealand was also represented. The officer in command of the whole operation was a South African." Cosmo Graham, "Report on Operation 'Countenance'". Most of those in *Kanimbla* and *Yarra* were reservists of the RAN. All *Kanimbla's* officers with the exception of Adams and the Commander (Cdr G. C. F. Branson, RN, Emergency List) were reservists.

The earliest provisional date for the operation had been fixed at the 12th August, but there were many postponements and uncertainties. The delays however afforded opportunity for landing and boarding exercises, and for reconnaissance of the river passages in which *Kanimbla* ratings enjoyed themselves disguised as Arabs in one of the dhows. Finally, on the 23rd August, Cosmo Graham received the Chiefs of Staff telegram ordering that "D.1" for Operation COUNTEenance be the 25th of the month. "So we passed from waiting to execution of my plans which were substantially unaltered from the original design."

On the 24th August the two forces for the Abadan and Khorramshahr operations were, with the exception of *Shoreham*, upstream at or near Basra, where they embarked Indian troops, a total of 1,250 in the Abadan force, while *Yarra* had one platoon and *Falmouth* two platoons and Company Headquarters of the 3/10th Baluch Regiment to deal



with Khorramshahr. *Shoreham* was at Fao, at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab. Of the Bandar Shapur force, *Kanimbla*, with her smaller craft fast alongside, was at anchor in the Gulf south of the Shatt-el-Arab. She had on board two companies of the 3/10th Baluch Regiment, which she had embarked from *Lawrence* on the 11th August. Zero hour for all three operations was 4.10 a.m. on the 25th, and *Kanimbla's* force, having the greater distance to travel, was the first under way. The problem of its approach had caused much thought. There were many navigational dangers in Khor Musa which made it hazardous for a ship of *Kanimbla's* size to go up in the dark. On the other hand she would have been visible over the flat, low land, at a distance of fifteen miles or so in daylight. To keep the element of surprise Adams decided to risk the night passage. One of the dhows ("Dhow 8", manned from *Kanimbla*), and the R.A.F. motor pinnace, left the Gulf anchorage in the afternoon of the 24th, with hurri-

cane lamps to mark any unlighted buoys in the Khor Musa channel. The remainder of the force got under way at 8.15 p.m.

The Abadan force left the Basra area in sections around midnight on the 24th, and as soon as they were clear the Khorramshahr ships weighed and followed them down the river. The night was dark and still, ("every sound seemed like a thunder clap") with no moon, but the clear sky was star-studded. The ships stole quietly downstream, and though the darkened craft passed under the noses of Persian strong-posts on the left bank, and the naval base at Khorramshahr, they were unchallenged and unmolested.⁹ The Abadan force reached its objective precisely at 4.10 a.m. Fire was opened on machine-gun posts on shore, and within ten minutes the first troops were landed. The Persians put up considerable opposition, and by 5 a.m. fighting was general along the Abadan foreshore, which was subjected to heavy enemy machine-gun fire. Meanwhile *Shoreham* had come up river from Fao, and at 4.13 a.m. opened fire on the Persian sloop *Palang* at one of the jetties, and sank her. This act apparently caused the precipitate withdrawal across the Khor Bahmanshir of Persian forces on Abadan Island excepting those manning the water-front strong-posts, who "fought with tenacity and in many cases literally to the last man".¹ Fighting continued throughout the forenoon, with *Shoreham* moving up and down the river engaging such targets as offered, and it was noon before the foreshore was secured. By evening the whole refinery area was in British hands.

As the Khorramshahr force left Basra, *Falmouth* took the ground when turning. Harrington, in *Yarra*, in anticipation that the Persian ships at Khorramshahr might interfere with the landings at Abadan, decided to carry on to Khorramshahr independently, and arrived there at 4.8 a.m. On the way downstream he determined to sink the Persian sloop *Babr* on arrival. His reasons were threefold: to discourage further resistance; to remove a threat in his rear while he boarded the gunboats; and to disallow the opportunity of escape of the gunboats which his boarding of *Babr* would have presented. His arrival off Khorramshahr was apparently unobserved and, in order not to spoil the surprise of the Abadan force he lay concealed behind an anchored merchant ship until he heard gunfire downstream. He then cleared the line of sight, past the northern point of Karun River, illuminated *Babr* by searchlight, and opened fire. After ten salvos *Babr* was burning fiercely; the explosion of her after magazine blew a hole in her bottom, and she subsequently sank.

Yarra then moved up the Karun River, and with machine-gun and rifle fire silenced some rifle fire from the naval barracks and the two gunboats. Harrington then went alongside the gunboats, boarding parties went over, and the two ships and their crews were quickly secured. By 4.59 a.m. "all was quiet", but Harrington decided to await the arrival of *Falmouth*

⁹ "A reason which seems not improbable for this inaction was given by a Persian officer under interrogation: 'You had passed down river at night so often before.'" Cosmo Graham, "Report on Operation 'Countenance'".

¹ Cosmo Graham, Report.

before landing his troops. *Falmouth* entered the Karun River at 5.30 a.m. and secured alongside the school ship *Ivy*, and she and *Yarra* landed their troops. By 7.30 a.m. *Yarra* had transferred her prisoners to *Ivy*, and washed down the ship. The soldiers on the northern bank of the Karun were moving in quietly "and it became very hot". The Persian gunboats had Italian engineers who "were invited to place the engines of the gunboats in working order". They agreed without hesitation, and by evening both gunboats were entirely serviceable. On shore the main opposition was on the northern bank of the Karun in the vicinity of the wireless station, where Admiral Bayendor led a defence which collapsed when he was killed. "His death," wrote Cosmo Graham, "was regretted by all who knew him. He was intelligent, able, and faithful to Persia."² By nightfall the occupation of the Khorramshahr area was complete, and at 9.30 p.m. *Yarra* slipped and sailed down river and Gulf to Bandar Abbas.

Kanimbla, with the remainder of her force, had an uneventful passage up the Gulf from the anchorage. At 3.15 a.m. the force was well in the Khor Musa, and reached Bandar Shapur at the appointed time of 4.10 a.m. It was subsequently learned that the German ships were prepared for incendiarism and scuttling, but were under orders to await the alarm from *Hohenfels* before taking action. As *Kanimbla's* force approached Bandar Shapur *Hohenfels*, at 4.10 a.m., sounded her siren, and Adams arrived to find that "incendiarism was taking place on a greater scale than was anticipated, and *Weissenfels* was seen to be in a serious condition". This ship's chief engineer had anticipated the alarm from *Hohenfels*. She was burning furiously and so continued unapproachably all day. *Bronte* was badly on fire, and Adams took *Kanimbla* alongside her and secured, and salvage parties went on board. Meanwhile parties from the smaller ships boarded the other enemy merchant vessels (with the exception of *Weissenfels*) and proceed to fight fires and nullify scuttling action. These parties included 16 officers and 111 ratings from *Kanimbla's* ship's company. The Persian gunboats offered no resistance, and shortly arrived alongside *Kanimbla* under their own officers but wearing the White Ensign. While alongside *Bronte*, Adams started landing his troops by boat at the jetty a mile distant. They met little opposition ashore until nine-tenths of the town had been occupied. *Kanimbla* had little cause to use her main armament. She opened 6-inch fire with two guns on a railway train (which made good its escape), and fired with 3-inch high angle guns on aircraft (which were, it later transpired, British). When the fires in *Bronte* were under control shortly after noon, *Kanimbla* went alongside the jetty (where the two American merchant ships cooperated most willingly by shifting ship as needed and taking *Kanimbla's* lines) and landed the rest of the troops and stores. By 5 p.m. on the 25th the situation ashore at Bandar Shapur was calm, the principal persons were in custody, and arrangements were in hand for supplying water, and food from *Kanimbla*, for the local population, normally supplied by train. Of the enemy merchant ships, all

² Admiral Bayendor was buried in the Khorramshahr naval base which, with its capture, became HMS *Euphrates*, depot for the Royal Navy in the Gulf throughout the war.

except *Weissenfels* (which subsequently sank in deep water) were saved, and sailed or towed with prize crews to Indian ports. *Kanimbla* carried out a major salvage feat on *Hohenfels*.

There was one more enemy merchant ship saved in Persian waters, the Italian *Hilda* (4,901 tons), which *Yarra* was sent to secure at Bandar Abbas, on the northern shore of the Strait of Hormuz. *Yarra* arrived from Khorramshahr off Bandar Abbas just before 8 p.m. on the 27th August, and found *Hilda* anchored off the town, abandoned and badly on fire. The flames and heat were too great to do anything that night, but at 9 p.m. on the 28th Harrington took *Yarra* alongside the Italian, whose fires were now glowing and smoking, and by midnight had them sufficiently under control to start towing the damaged ship alongside. By the forenoon of the 29th Harrington was able to tell Cosmo Graham that he would have *Hilda* in tow astern by noon, with all fires extinguished and most leaks stopped. In reply he was told to tow towards Karachi, which he did at speeds gradually decreasing, owing to head winds, from four-and-a-half to two-and-a-half knots. In the afternoon of the 2nd September Harrington took his tow into Chahbar Bay, a few miles west of the Persia-India boundary, and there anchored her to await the arrival of a salvage tug from Karachi. The tug, the *Sydney Thubron* (439 tons), arrived on the 5th September, and on the 7th *Yarra* sailed for Kuwait, carrying with her a kitten and "an animal of unattractive appearance and surly disposition", subsequently identified as a Sind Gazelle, which she had rescued from the burning *Hilda*. That ship, in the tow of *Sydney Thubron*, sailed from Chahbar Bay for Karachi on the 8th September.

From its start on the 25th August, the campaign in Persia moved to a swift conclusion. On the 27th August the Persian Government resigned, and next day their successors ordered resistance to cease. Joint British-Russian proposals were accepted on the 2nd September, but attempts by the Shah to circumvent this led to his abdication in favour of his son on the 16th September. The following day British and Russian forces entered Teheran, where they remained until the 8th October, by which time communications through the country were secured. It was as a highway to Russia that the Persian Gulf was to become familiar to many members of the R.A.N. in the war years ahead.