



MICHAEL GRIEVE

During the battle for Crete, which lasted from May 20 to June 1, 1941, the British and Dominion and Greek forces defending the island had very little armoured support, the only available tank units being C Squadron of the 3rd Royal Hussars fielding 16 Light Mark VI tanks, and two troops from B Squadron of the 7th Royal Tank Regiment with a strength of six (later nine) Matilda Mk II tanks. These tanks were distributed over the various defensive sectors set up on the island's northern shore, the 3rd Hussars sending six to Heraklion and seven to Canea (three were unserviceable), and the 7th Royal Tanks dispatching pairs of Matildas to bolster up the defences of the three airfields at Maleme, Rethymno and Heraklion. After the German airborne invasion had

started, the tanks were committed in various attempts to counter-attack, with mixed success. Several were knocked out, others bogged down, some were recovered and carried on fighting with improvised Australian crews, but in the end all those still operable after 12 days of battle had to be left behind in the final evacuation from the island. This is *Gnome III*, one of the pair of Matildas that was sent to Rethymno, pictured in the location where it was knocked out during the failed Australian attack on Perivolia on the 27th. (Each battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment adopted tank names beginning with the equivalent letter of the alphabet to their number. Thus, the 7th Royal Tanks named all their tanks starting with the seventh letter 'G'.)

MATILDA TANKS ON CRETE

TANKS FOR CRETE

One of the problems facing Freyberg was that his troops, having abandoned all of their heavy weapons in Greece, were considerably under-resourced when it came to facing up to the forthcoming airborne invasion. In the end these deficiencies were never properly made up. A number of troops were simply withdrawn from the island because there were insufficient weapons for them, while what artillery that could be made available was obsolete by modern standards and even lacked basic items such as gunsights.

The British did have some armour in the form of 35 Bren and Universal carriers that had come over with the three battalions sent over in 1940 and plans were afoot to augment them with tanks. In fact earlier on in April, C Squadron of the 3rd King's Own Hussars, commanded by Major Gilbert Peck, had been pulled out of Tobruk and sent back to Alexandria just for this purpose. A search around the workshops in the Delta area dug up 16 Light Vickers Mk VI tanks, most in various stages of disrepair. All lacked functional wireless sets but sufficient were obtained before they departed for Crete on May 11, though there was no time to fit them. On the 14th their ship, the *SS Dalesman*, anchored in Suda Bay but even before they had started to unload their tanks and lorries the harbour came under attack from

the Luftwaffe. Worse still, their ship took a hit from a bomb that passed through the aft cargo hatch and blew a hole in the hull. With the ship taking on water, the crew beached it.

The squadron was keen to recover its vehicles and fortunately all of them were in the forward hold. However, there was some equipment in the rear hold, including a few of the wireless sets, and these ultimately could not be recovered. Though there was no power to the ship's winches, due to the engine room being flooded, they still managed to start unloading their tanks the following morning and by 6.15 p.m. had got all 16 of them off, transferring them by lighters to the shore. The vehicles had not suffered much from their ordeal, only one failing to start up so it was towed to the Ordnance workshops in Suda. After some persuasion they also managed to convince the port authorities to bring another ship alongside to assist in the unloading and on the 16th, with its help, they also got their lorries off.

On the 18th, six of the tanks departed for Heraklion under the command of 2nd Lieutenant Jack Clarke but several hours later one of them returned, suffering from a broken selector fork that had considerably reduced its speed. It too was sent to the Ord-

nance workshops and a replacement provided for its crew. The next day, the remaining seven tanks set out for Canea, a further tank having to be sent to the workshops because they could not get it mobile.

In contrast, the decision to send over Matilda tanks (heavier and designed for infantry support, they were usually referred to as 'I' (Infantry) tanks) to Crete appears to have been an afterthought. It was only on May 8 that the 7th Royal Tank Regiment, then at Sidi Bashir, Egypt, was ordered to select two troops of tanks, i.e. six Matildas, and have them ready to leave Egypt within a week. The regiment duly complied the next day, drawing three officers and 35 other ranks from their B Squadron, only to find themselves down at the docks in Alexandria on the 10th and the next day on their way to Crete. The plan for deployment of the detachment was for pairs of Matildas to be sent to each of the three airfields — Maleme (defended by the 5th Brigade of the 2nd New Zealand Division), Rethymno (protected by two Australian and two Greek battalions) and Heraklion (held by the British 14th Infantry Brigade, one Australian and two Greek battalions) — to bolster up their defensive strength.

By Jeffrey Plowman, Michael Grieve and Mark Wilson



The battle of Crete began with fighting in three widely separated areas: Maleme-Canea, Rethymno and Heraklion.

At least their arrival in Suda Bay on the 13th was somewhat less fraught than that of the 3rd Hussars. After disembarking, the detachment commander, Captain Samuel 'Sandy' Badrock, sent Lieutenant George Simpson to conduct a recon around Rethymno and Lieutenant John Johnson to do the same at Heraklion, while Badrock met up with Brigadier James Hargest, commander of the 5th New Zealand Brigade. Badrock then spent some time scouting suitable laying-up sites for the two Matildas that were to go to Maleme airfield, with some difficulty as it turned out, considering this to be the hardest of the three airfields. Eventually he settled on two depressions some 300 to 400 yards apart at the base of Hill 107. Leaving instructions for two revetments to be dug for them and for an irrigation ditch between them and the airfield to be filled in, Badrock returned to Suda Bay.

By the time he got back the six tanks had been unloaded, the two for Maleme first, and after dividing up the spares Sergeants A. J. Gosnold and Francis Marshall drove them two miles up the road to a position that gave them good cover from the air. After dark, a lighter arrived to take the two tanks to Heraklion but the lighter for the Rethymno-bound tanks did not show up, it had broken down apparently. Captain Badrock then joined Gosnold's and Marshall's tanks –

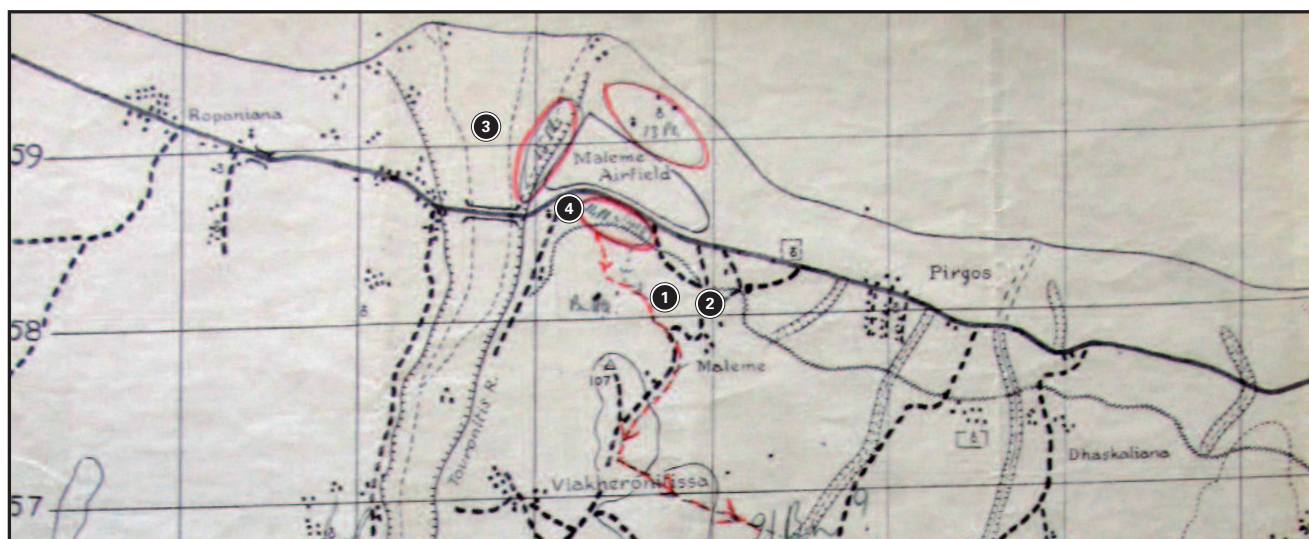
T7368 *Gnu III* and T7398 *Greenloaning* – and set off for Maleme, a journey that involved a number of detours, as far as the beach in one case, as some bridges proved incapable of taking them. The gearbox in Marshall's Matilda also gave trouble and at times his driver could not engage the gears at all. In the end they had to find another location to lie up for the day.

When Badrock got back to Suda on the 14th he discovered that the lighter had still not arrived for the two tanks for Rethymno and there was no indication from the Navy as to when it would be ready. As nothing could be done till nightfall he set about sorting out the stores for the tanks and getting these to their respective airfields. Finding sufficient diesel for the vehicles proved to be another problem but someone from the RASC succeeded in the end. Their ship, still carrying some of their stores, was also bombed later that day but they managed to get the rest of these off. When Badrock returned to Maleme that evening he found that the revetments for the tanks were not ready so he located a second lying-up point closer to the airfield and ordered Gosnold and Marshall to make for there the next night.

When there was still no sign of the lighter for the Rethymno tanks on the 15th, Badrock ordered them to drive over that

night. The pair set off, but just to the west of Georgiopolis one of them broke down. An ordnance officer, who had been travelling with them, went back to Suda to make a replacement bearing as they had no spares of any sort with them. With this they managed to get the tank going again the following night but it broke down again after travelling another ten miles. By this stage the other tank had made it to Rethymno, so what followed was a complicated set of gymnastics. On the 19th the ordnance officer took a good bearing off the tank at Rethymno, fitted it to the broken-down tank, which then set off for the airfield. In the meantime he returned to Canea to make another, which he said could be done within 24 hours.

Badrock then went back to Maleme where he and Sergeant Gosnold met with Lieutenant-Colonel Leslie Andrew, the commander of the 22nd NZ Battalion. During that meeting they brought him up to date with the situation regarding the tanks and impressed on him that the tanks were under orders not to be used except if enemy troop carriers landed on the aerodrome. That done, and before leaving, Badrock arranged for spare batteries to be sent Gosnold as his were flat. This was of sufficient concern to him that when he returned to Canea he arranged for batteries to be sent to all the other tanks as well.



The two Matildas sent to Maleme airfield — T7368 *Gnu III* and T7398 *Greenloaning* — were put under command of the 22nd New Zealand Battalion of the 5th New Zealand Brigade. Primarily responsible for the defence of the airfield itself was

C Company, which had No. 13 Platoon north of the airstrip itself; No. 15 Platoon to the west of it, overlooking the Tavronitis river, and No. 14 Platoon between the road and an irrigation ditch, with Company HQ to the east of them.



WILHELM WEIER

The two Matildas were sited in revetments in depressions some 300 to 400 yards apart at the base of Hill 107 — marked [1] and [2] on the map. During the counter-attack at Maleme on May 20, the lead one, *Gnu III* commanded by Sergeant A. J. Gosnold, drove down into the Tavronitis riverbed and swung to the right under the bridge, before heading further down-

stream towards the sea. It eventually came to a halt in an area [3] that was noted to be seething with enemy troops. After remaining motionless for a time, the crew was observed to climb out and surrender. The parachute supply containers, discarded by the paratroopers of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment, are evidence of the German presence.

MALEME – MAY 20

T7368 *Gnu III* (Sergeant A. J. Gosnold)
T7398 *Greenloaning* (Sergeant Francis Marshall)

The main defence around Maleme was based around Andrew's 22nd NZ Battalion, whose C Company was on the landing ground, D Company bordering the Tavronitis river south of the bridge, A Company on Hill 107, B Company to the south-west of A Company and HQ Company in Pirgos. Further support came from Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Leckie's 23rd NZ Battalion to the east of Pirgos and Lieutenant-Colonel John Allen's 21st NZ Battalion to the south of 23rd Battalion.

Like any other day the morning of May 20 started out with the usual morning 'hate' from the Luftwaffe, albeit a little more intense than others. Then around 7.30 a.m. the first gliders of the 3. Kompanie of the I. Bataillon (Major Walter Koch) of General-major Eugen Meindl's Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment swept in. After overrunning the anti-aircraft position at the mouth of the Tavronitis, they tried to advance inland but ran into heavy fire from C Company, their

commander Oberleutnant Wulff Freiherr von Plessen being among those killed. Oberleutnant Kurt Sarrazin's 4. Kompanie fared no better coming down south of the airfield, many of their gliders flipping over as they struck the rugged riverbed. Those that survived were driven off by fire from 22nd NZ Battalion. Another cluster of nine gliders under Major Franz Braun, however, managed to land close to the Tavronitis bridge, which they assaulted and, though suffering heavy casualties, including Braun who was killed, managed to secure, forcing the right wing of D Company to pull back to the irrigation ditch at the base of Hill 107.

Of the parachutists of the assault regiment, those of Major Otto Scherber's III. Bataillon who landed within the 23rd NZ Battalion area were, for all practical purposes, destroyed as a fighting unit within minutes. However, Hauptmann Walter Gericke's IV. Bataillon landed unopposed to the west of the Tavronitis and, although many of their heavy weapons and motorcycles were damaged, Gericke's troops managed to close up

on the river. There they linked up with Koch's force, taking control of the RAF camp, in the process driving a wedge between C and D Companies. Other German moves were not so successful, attempts to get between A and B Companies by Major Edgar Stentzler's II. Bataillon being blocked by the 21st NZ Battalion. The paratroopers in the RAF camp also failed to extend their hold to the lower slopes of Hill 107. They launched an attack pushing some air force prisoners ahead of them but when they got close enough to the New Zealand lines someone yelled at the prisoners to drop, at which point the New Zealand platoon opened up, killing many of the paratroopers and forcing the rest to retire. Around midday, Student, thinking that Maleme was now under German control, sent over two Junkers Ju 52 troop carrier aircraft but as the first started to touch down it was hit by intense rifle and machine-gun fire, shattering windscreens and ripping holes in the fuselage, very nearly failing to take off again. A second attempt in the afternoon met the same response.



MARK WILSON

When Mark Wilson visited Crete in May 2016 for the 75th commemorations of the battle, he found a lot had changed in the Tavronitis valley since the war (and even since Jean Paul Pallud had visited there in 1984 in preparation of the Crete feature in *After the Battle* No. 47). The river has now

become canalised, with tall trees and ten-foot-high cane on either side of it, making a comparison more difficult. Mark took this photo on the right of the river but feels that the tank was probably some 50 yards away on the other side of the river.

Right: Another view of *Gnu III*, this time looking east and giving a good view of the many Junkers Ju 52s parked on Maleme airfield. In the afternoon of May 21, the second day of the battle, the first Ju 52s bringing in Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 of the 5. Gebirgs-Division began landing with great boldness on Maleme while it was still being shelled, some 80 aircraft being wrecked in the process. Then, after the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment had finally secured the town and airfield that evening, the rest of the mountain division was flown in over consecutive days.

While things had not gone well for the paratroopers at Maleme, the situation of the 22nd Battalion was also starting to look serious. With his telephone lines cut and his runners unable to get through, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew had lost contact with his forward companies. The artillery observers with him had also lost contact with their guns. Around mid-afternoon Andrew sent up some emergency flares but these went undetected by the 23rd NZ Battalion. When Andrew radioed Hargest at 5th NZ Brigade headquarters at 5 p.m. to request that 23rd Battalion put in a counter-attack, he was told that: '23 Battalion were itself engaged by paratroopers in their own area', when in fact the latter had told Hargest that they had cleared up most of the enemy troops before midday. Worse still, Hargest had told Leckie, the 23rd Battalion commander, at 2.25 p.m. that things were under control and he would not be needed to put in a counter-attack unless things turned serious.

Around 5.15 p.m. Andrew decided to launch his own counter-attack, utilising the two Matildas — Sergeant Gosnold's *Gnu III* and Sergeant Marshall's *Greenloaning* — and No. 14 Platoon, the latter under the command of Lieutenant Haddon Donald. The trouble was it was hardly a well-coordinated affair, there being no communication between Donald and the tanks before the counter-attack was launched. When Donald and his men broke cover and spread out, two sections to the left of the road and one on the right, the nearest tank was already 100 yards ahead of them, while another 100 yards beyond that the lead tank was halfway to the Tavronitis bridge. To make matters worse when the infantry tried to close up on the rear tank they ran into an increasing hail of fire that saw one man killed and others in the right-hand section wounded while the lead section on the left was reduced to half strength. By now the rear tank had come to a halt 75 yards ahead of them and the other had reached the bridge.



WILHELM WEIER

According to Captain Stanton Johnson of C Company, the lead tank, Gosnold's *Gnu III*, continued up to the Tavronitis, firing as it went. It then drove down into the riverbed, enfilading the German line as it did so, before swinging to the right and passing under the bridge. It eventually came to a halt further downstream. Lieutenant Rob Sinclair of No. 15 Platoon noted that: 'The place was seething with enemy plainly visible in the long grass.' The tank then sat motionless for a time, its crew appearing to the New Zealanders to not to know what to do next. Shortly afterwards its crew were seen to climb out with their hands up.

Back at the airfield, Lieutenant Donald attempted to make contact with the other tank, Marshall's *Greenloaning*, but was forced to take cover in the ditch alongside the road. At that point, however, the tank turned round and started to make its way back along the road, only to stop beside Donald. According to Johnson it had not fired a shot. At that point Donald got up and tried to attract the attention of the crew by activating their alarm gong from the switch at the rear of the tank. When that failed he ran round to the front and waved at the driver through his visor. Then, as he climbed onto the front of the tank, the commander warily raised his hatch slightly and told Donald that he was pulling out as his turret could not traverse. Donald then spotted that a shell had ripped the cowl at the base of the

turret, jamming it. With the commander's permission they laid some of their wounded on the lee side of the tank and, using it for cover, made their way back. The tank was last seen by Lieutenant Sinclair proceeding in a direction that took it past C Company HQ.

Despondent after the failure of his trump card, and having lost contact with C and D Companies, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew reached the decision around 6 p.m. to abandon Hill 107. Hargest's response on hearing of this from him was: 'If you must, you must' but then he offered to send two companies, one from the 28th (Maori) Battalion and the other from 23rd NZ Battalion. Just after dusk Andrew and A Company withdrew to B Company's position. When A Company of the 23rd Battalion arrived they were sent forward and re-occupied Hill 107, without incident, though later one platoon ran into a German patrol, losing several killed and wounded. The company from the 28th (Maori) Battalion managed to get within 200 yards of C Company but on hearing German troops moving around thought that the airfield had been taken and returned to the 21st NZ Battalion. Their failure to show up led Andrew to order a withdrawal to the line held by the 21st and 23rd NZ Battalions. This left his C and D Companies alone on the airstrip but when their runners failed to find any sign of the rest of the battalion, they too withdrew.



MICHAEL GRIEVE

Left: Various reasons have been offered as to why the crew of *Gnu III* surrendered. According to Corporal Bob Smith from No. 14 Platoon, who was captured 24 hours later and had a chance to examine the tank, the turret had become jammed, possibly by a Panzer-Buchse (anti-tank rifle). However, the existing photo material shows the turret pointing in different directions, which refutes that suggestion. Lieutenant Rob Sinclair of



MARK WILSON

No. 15 Platoon, who was also picked up by the Germans, claimed that after the tank was disabled by an anti-tank rifle round (though this weapon was highly unlikely to penetrate a Matilda), damaging the engine, the crew were forced to repair it at gun-point but instead 'ruined it permanently'. Right: These days there is considerably more vegetation, both on Hill 107 and in the old riverbed.



MICHAEL GRIEVE

Above: The other Matilda at Maleme, T7398 *Greenloaning* commanded by Sergeant Francis Marshall, was some 200 yards behind *Gnu III* when Lieutenant Haddon Donald of No. 14 Platoon first saw it and only advanced another 100 yards towards the RAF encampment before it turned around (at [4]). According to Donald, its turret had become jammed as a result of the impact of a shell on the cowling round its turret. It then carried some wounded from Donald's platoon away from the fighting. The tow-cable on the tank suggests that it has been put to good use after its capture by the Germans, possibly hauling wrecked aircraft off the airstrip. In fact *Greenloaning* was one of two Matildas repaired and used by the Germans on Crete during the subsequent occupation. Note the DFS 230 glider in the right-hand background, one of the 40 gliders used to land elements of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment at Maleme.



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Mark took this comparison photo from the eastern end of the airfield but to get to the spot he had to sneak around the end of the wire at the beach. The distant mountains are those of the Rodopou peninsula.



MICHAEL GRIEVE

Left: According to the 22nd Battalion history, the crew of *Greenloaning* found that the breechblock would not accept its 2-pounder ammunition, though its commander did not say as much when Lieutenant Donald made contact with him, his only concern being his jammed turret. Thus it seems more likely that Marshall broke off the attack because of this,



MARK WILSON

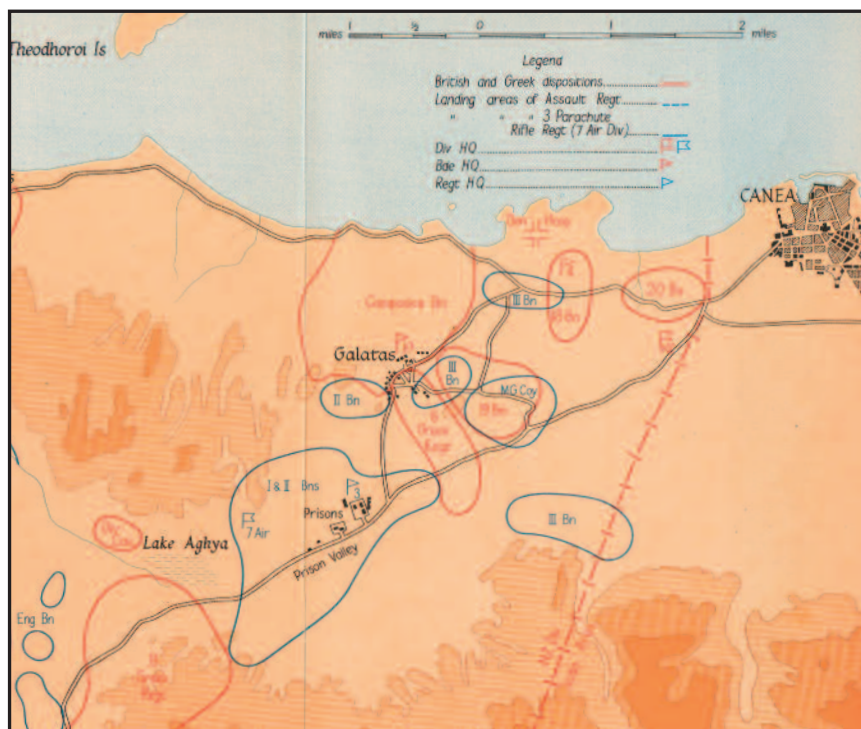
though the disappearance of Gosnold's tank into the Tavronitis and the apparent lack of infantry support may have also been factors. Right: Mark took this shot facing the other way, looking due east. On the left is the island of Agioi Theodoroi, off the coast from Platanias, and on the right the Akrotiri peninsula.

Right: Ten miles east of Maleme, a half-squadron of the 3rd Hussars, fielding seven Light Vickers Mk VI tanks, was stationed in the Canea-Galatas area.

PRISON VALLEY AND GALATAS – MAY 20-26

C Squadron, 3rd Hussars

On the morning of the 20th the crews of the 3rd Hussars were sitting down to breakfast on the outskirts of Canea when the first parachutes were sighted. Second Lieutenant Roy Farran set off immediately with his troop of three tanks and, after passing first through Galatas and then 10th NZ Brigade lines, moved out into the valley where parachutes from Oberst Richard Heidrich's Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3 and Major Ernst Liebach's Fallschirm-Pionier-Bataillon 7, reinforced with machine gun, anti-tank and medical detachments, were seen descending. Shortly after engaging some of the paratroopers in the area one of the tanks threw a track, the crew hastily repairing it by the side of the road covered by the other two tanks. That done, they decided discretion was the better part of valour, especially when there was no sign of their own infantry, and pulled back to the New Zealand lines. While Farran was away, the rest of the squadron assisted the 19th NZ Battalion in rescuing personnel and patients from the British 7th General Hospital and 6th NZ Field Ambulance,



BRITISH OFFICIAL HISTORY

Right: During the night of May 25/26, Lieutenant Roy Farran, commanding one of the tanks, took part in a counter-attack in the town of Galatas. On reaching a corner halfway through the town, his Vickers Mk VI was struck by a round from an anti-tank rifle fired by Obergefreiter Rauch Moritz from the 8. Kompanie of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 from a balcony of a house across the road, splinters from the rounds wounding his gunner. When he ordered his driver to turn round, the latter was hit; in the process he over-compensated and the tank slipped into a ditch on the side of the road. The crew remained in it for several minutes under a hail of rifle fire and grenades, during which Farran was hit twice and his gunner a second time. They then escaped from the tank and took shelter until the infantry of the 23rd NZ Battalion arrived. This photo, probably posed, shows German mountain troops advancing through the town in the opposite direction as taken by the New Zealand troops. Note the dead Greek soldier on the right.



PETER BROWN



MARK WILSON

which had been captured by the Fallschirmjäger, by picking off the German guards at the head and tail of the column.

Later that evening they were back. Around midday it had become evident to the commander of the 10th Brigade, Colonel Howard Kippenberger, that a strong counter-attack was needed on the German forces amassing around the area of the prison, located in the wide open valley about a mile south of Galatas. Brigadier Bill Inglis, commander of the 4th NZ Brigade, also came to see possibilities in such a counter-attack, especially if all the Hussars' tanks

Left: Eleftheriou Venizelou Street in Galatas, where Farran's tank was abandoned, has changed a lot since the war. All of the buildings in the background have been replaced and only the white building on the left is original. A wall now runs where the ditch was and houses now line that side of the road. The view is looking towards the centre of town, which suggests that the tank slipped into the ditch after completing its turn.



Left: Looking the other way, Farran's tank can be seen behind the pole in middle distance. This is another picture taken by a



German combat photographer. Right: Brenton Beach, who accompanied Mark into Galatas, stands in for the soldier.

could be employed, to the extent that he felt that if the prison area could be cleared they might be able to push onto Maleme via a route over the hills. Unfortunately, Major-General Edward Puttick, commander of the 2nd NZ Division, did not agree and nor did Freyberg when he was consulted. Eventually a counter-attack was organised later that evening but only employing the 19th NZ Battalion (of the 4th Brigade) and Farran's three tanks, though in the end only two companies of the battalion were actually used. The infantry moved out at 7.30 p.m., the tanks joining up with them in Galatas. From there they pushed south on to within 1,400 yards of the prison. However the following morning they were withdrawn. Then around midday Farran's troop went up to the 10th Brigade and assisted their counter-attack that saw the recapture of Cemetery Hill, a knoll located just south of Galatas along the road to the prison.

On May 22, the half-squadron was called upon to assist another counter-attack, this time to retake the airfield at Maleme. On the night of May 21/22, having given the Germans a day to land reinforcements on Maleme, Freyberg had decided to take it back with the 20th NZ and 28th (Maori) Battalions. Before this could be launched, however, the Australian 2/7th Battalion had to be brought across from Georgiopolis to take over 20th NZ Battalion's positions and as a result the attack did not get going until 3.30 a.m. the following morning. For this operation the 3rd Hussars were joined by one of their tanks from Ordnance workshops, though this was left behind to cover a road-block in 4th NZ Brigade's area. Unfortunately, while moving up, one of the other tanks left the road and fell down a five-foot drop, landing on its side at the bottom. With no means to recover it, its crew had to abandon it.

Farran and his troop joined up with the Maori Battalion but after passing through Pargos ran into trouble. At a crossroad he was told that the Germans had a fix on the road ahead but when he hesitated an angry officer from 23rd NZ Battalion demanded that they move forward. At that point Sergeant Henry Skedgwell, in the front tank, set off but got too far ahead and ran into two German anti-tank guns in a churchyard. His tank was hit but before it caught fire he managed to destroy one of the guns. Though Skedgwell was badly wounded, Farran managed to drag him free but he died shortly afterwards. Farran returned to his tank but one of its bogey wheels collapsed and he was forced to leave it behind. Later in the day Farran and some fitters from his unit returned and were able to repair his tank with a bogey wheel from Skedgwell's tank.

The failure to secure Maleme enabled the Germans to build up their troops on Crete

and gradually push the defenders back towards Canea and Suda Bay. On the evening of May 25, German troops from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 finally entered the town of Galatas, in the process threatening to cut off the whole left flank of the New Zealand Division and ultimately take Canea.

A little before 8 p.m. Farran and another tank arrived to block the town's eastern entrance, while another two 3rd Hussars tanks under Captain Alfred Crewdson were sent over to block the entrance to Karatsos. Close behind Farran two companies of the 23rd NZ Battalion arrived, followed by two more shortly before he drove off into the town. After a quick reconnaissance Farran returned with the news that the town was 'stiff with Jerries'. Unfortunately, as a result of this sweep, the commander and gunner of his other tank had been wounded so he called for volunteers. Two New Zealanders came forward, Private Charlie Lewis, of the 27th NZ Machine Gun Battalion, took over as commander and Private Ben Ferry, of 4th NZ Brigade HQ, became the gunner. They then withdrew a short distance to allow Farran to provide them with some basic training.

On their return, Farran's two tanks set off again into Galatas, his tank on the left of the road and Lewis' on the right, followed by C



Part of Farran's tank has been preserved in Galatas as a gate to someone's property in an alleyway off the Agias-Galatas road, directly opposite the New Zealand Battle of Crete memorial in the main square.

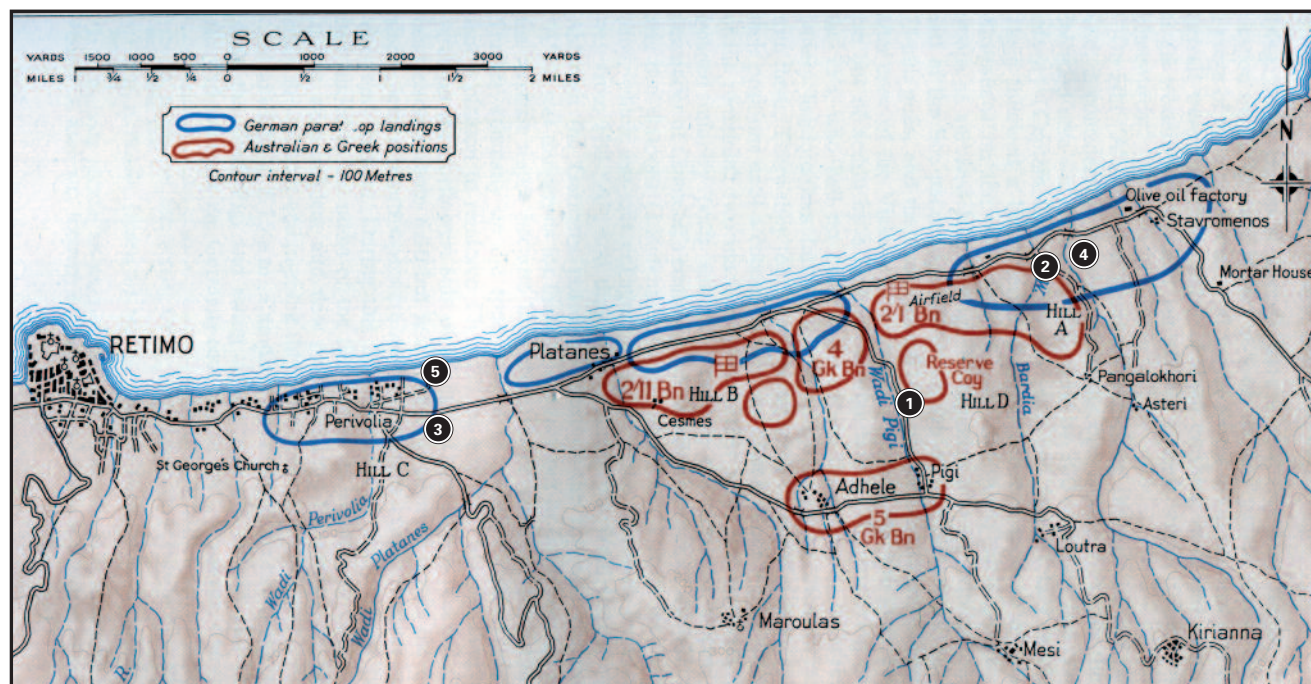
Company, 23rd Battalion. Farran's tank made good progress until it reached a corner halfway through the town when it was struck by a round from an anti-tank rifle fired by Obergefreiter Rauch Moritz from the 8. Kompanie of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 from the balcony of a house above the road. With his gunner wounded in the arm, Farran ordered his driver to turn around and get out but as he did so the tank was hit again, the driver being wounded this time. As a result the latter swung the tank too hard and it slipped into a ditch. Under continual fire from the Germans, who were lobbing grenades as well, Farran was hit twice and his gunner stopped one in the stomach. They dropped to the bottom of the turret and then Farran proceeded to push both crewmen out through the driver's hatch, before crawling out himself. He then pulled himself behind the cover of a small stone wall on his elbows and waited for the infantry to arrive before making his escape.

Lewis' tank was a little more fortunate despite its turret being partially jammed and limited to an arc of 75 degrees. They managed to get past a small well on the outskirts of the town, where a German machine-gun team had taken up station. Unable to turn the turret in its direction, they swung around and drove back down the street, again missing the machine-gun team. In a matter of minutes they found themselves among the advancing soldiers of the 23rd NZ Battalion, being ordered at gun-point by an officer to turn around. This time they got as far as the main square but by then the driver had had enough. He turned the tank around and headed back out of Galatas. On the outskirts of town they were ordered to wait further back but the driver carried on till he reached some British troops.

With the tanks now gone, the New Zealand troops continued on until they reached the main square, forcing the Germans to withdraw in disarray to the south-west corner of the village. However, lacking the resources to hold the place, they had to withdraw to a new line west of Canea.

Meanwhile, the Hussars squadron took up station in an olive grove about half a mile from 5th NZ Brigade's position. However, the retreat had taken its toll on their tanks: one of them had a broken tiller and steering problems, while Major Peck's tank had a broken petrol pipe and the engine had timing problems. There being no way to fix the former, their fitters cannibalised it for its petrol pipe and sorted out the timing problems in Peck's tank.

On the 26th, Captain Crewdson, on receiving orders from 5th NZ Brigade to assist in a counter-attack, led his three tanks in and was instrumental in holding up the Germans in spite of intense aerial activity directed against his tank.



The two Matildas sent to Rethymno airfield — T7411 *Gnat IV* and T6924 *Gnome III* — were to support the Australian 2/1st and 2/11th Battalions and the Greek 4th and 5th Battalions. This map

shows the Australian and Greek dispositions. The two Matildas were initially located alongside Wadi Pigi to the left of 2/1st Battalion's reserve B Company on Hill D — marked [1] on the map.

RETHYMNO – MAY 20-27

T7411 *Gnat IV* (Lieutenant George Simpson)
T6924 *Gnome III*

The airfield at Rethymno, which lay six miles east of the town, was held by two Australian and two Greek battalions under the overall command of Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Campbell. The Australians were placed on two features, Campbell's own 2/1st Battalion on Hill A to the east of the airfield and Major Ray Sandover's 2/11th Battalion on Hill B to the west of the airfield, with the 4th Greek Battalion on the ridge between them and the 5th Greek Battalion behind them in reserve. Lieutenant Simpson's two Matildas — T7411 *Gnat IV* and T6924 *Gnome III* — were concealed among some olive trees behind the ridgeline in Wadi Pigi, with one company from the 2/11th Battalion.

German plans for Rethymno called for the I. Bataillon of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 2 under Major Hans Kroh and a machine-gun company to be dropped to the east of the airfield and thence capture it. A second force consisting of the III. Bataillon under Haupt-

mann Oscar Wiedemann, the 2. Batterie of Fallschirmjäger-Artillerie-Regiment 7 and another machine-gun company were to land further west, between the Platanos river and Perivolio, and secure Rethymno itself. These landings represented the second airborne lift,

following up after the morning's first-wave landings at Maleme and Suda. Originally this operation had been set to start at 2 p.m. but ended up being delayed considerably, largely as a result of the first-wave assault on Maleme and Suda. Many of the aircraft

Gnat IV had a chequered history. On the first day of the airborne assault its commander, Lieutenant George Simpson, managed to get it ditched in Wadi Bardia [2], only to be killed himself when he got out. His crew surrendered. Recovered by men of the carrier platoon of the Australian 2/1st Battalion and 5th Brigade Workshop two days later, the tank, with a scratch crew under RAOC Lieutenant Frank Mason, took part in several unsuccessful attempts to winkle the paratroopers out of the olive oil factory at Stavromenos. Then, on the 25th and 26th, now under the command of Australian Lieutenant George Greenway of the 2/11th Battalion, it participated in two abortive attacks on Perivolio, finally pulling out after a direct hit jammed its turret. On May 27, the 2/11th launched a third attack on Perivolio, this time with both Matilda tanks in support. *Gnat IV*, now commanded by Lieutenant Patrick Lawry of the 2/1st Battalion, was advancing on the south side of the main coastal road when it was struck by a round from a 10.5cm Leichtgeschütz 40 of the 2. Batterie of Fallschirmjäger-Artillerie-Regiment 7 that killed the gunner and brought the tank to a halt. The rest of the crew escaped but Lawry was badly burnt. Note the fabric clogging the tank's suspension: in lieu of mines the paratroopers had strewn their parachutes over the field in the hope that it would foul the tank tracks and bring it to a halt or at least slow it down.





Left: *Gnat IV* was struck just below the gunsight where the base of the mantlet meets the turret. The resulting explosion blew off the driver's hatch and part of the hull roof armour and warped the turret ring. The blackening of this area of the turret and hull is consistent with the Australian observation that the tank appeared to catch fire. Note the Junkers Ju 52 wreck behind the tank, one of the over 280 transport aircraft lost by

returning from those missions to the airfields on mainland Greece were peppered with bullet holes and in need of repair. They also had to be refuelled by hand as there were no petrol tankers available and this was no trivial task, the paratroopers themselves being enlisted to help. The dust kicked up by the aircraft taking off caused more delays, two even colliding on one airstrip.

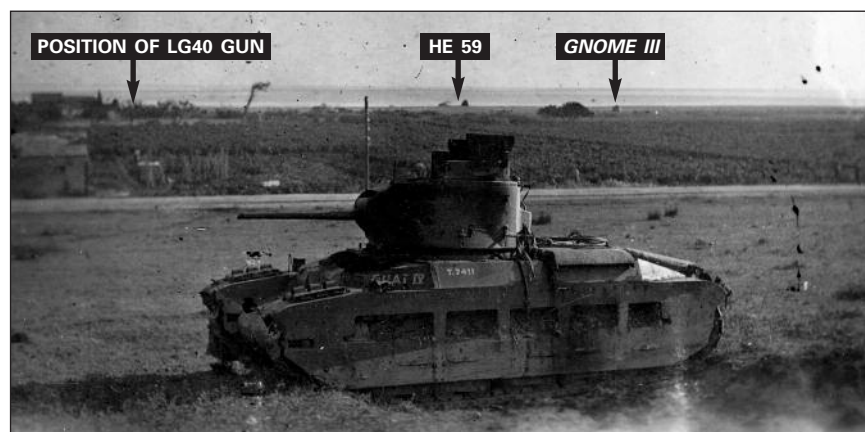
In the end the aircraft carrying the paratroopers did not reach the target area until 4.30 p.m. Of the 160 aircraft involved, nine were shot down while more were seen flying back to Greece, some of them on fire or damaged. A number of men landed in the sea and drowned. Two of Kroh's companies dropped on the airfield right in front of Campbell's men, though most managed to crawl away and link up with the rest of their battalion which had come down around an olive oil factory at Stavromenos. The commander of Fallschirmjäger-regiment 2, Oberst Alfred Sturm, and his headquarters company also landed in front of the Australians. Twelve of the paratroopers were killed and a further 80 captured including Sturm himself the following day. They were lucky as two companies of Wiedemann's battalion landed almost on top of the Australians and were all but wiped out.

The remainder, however, came down on the right drop zone although they ran into fierce resistance from a force of Cretan police and armed civilians at Rethymno and

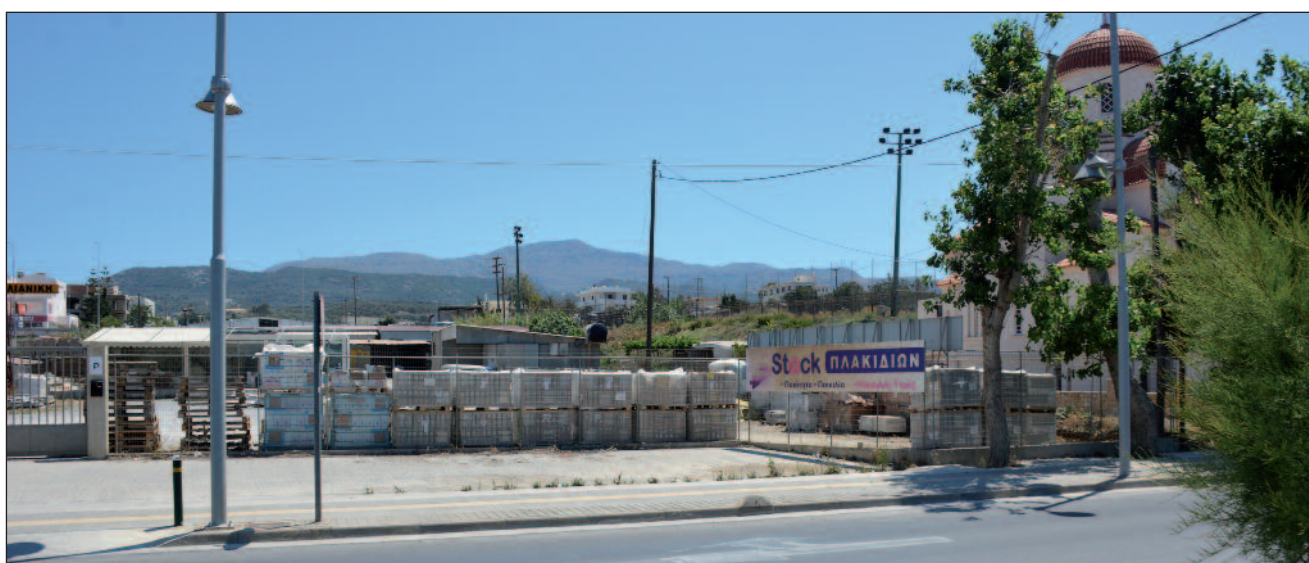
were forced to take up a defensive position around Perivolia. Of their supporting artillery, four recoilless 10.5cm Leichtgeschütze 40s were dropped with them but



the Germans in the Crete battle. Right: *Gnat IV* was most probably knocked out near where today stands the Holy Church of St Peter and Paul on Plateia Machis Kritis — [3] on the map — in the beach resort town of Missiria, east of Perivolia, as this road was the original main coastal road in 1941. This view is north toward the sea but the growth of vegetation across the road all but obscures the field where the Ju 52 lay.



Another shot of *Gnat IV*, now with a clear view of the sea. The village of Perivolia is over to the left, while the other Matilda, *Gnome III*, can be seen in the distance, just to the right of the bush on the right. Visible above the cupola of the Matilda, along the line of the beach, is a Heinkel He 59 floatplane, presumably one of those destroyed by Australian artillery on the 22nd.



Construction of the church began in 1994 and the rise seen behind the tank in the wartime photo was levelled for a soccer field.



Gnome III, the second Matilda at Rethymno, also bogged down during the first day's counter-attack, slipping into ten-foot-deep Wadi K — [4] on the map — and its crew was captured too. It was five days before the 2/1st Battalion could begin attempts to recover it, the tank finally being dug out on the 26th. The next day, now with an Australian crew and commanded by Lieutenant John Bedells of the 2/11th, it joined *Gnat IV* in supporting the Australian attack on Perivolio. On its approach to the village, it was struck by a round from Richard Witzke's 10.5cm LG40 light gun (the latter's approximate position is arrowed on the photo on the previous page). This broke the right-hand track and may have also been responsible for blowing open the commander's hatch, causing Bedells to lose three fingers when it fell shut on his hand. The prominent fig trees beyond and to the right of the tank mark the location of one of the German trench positions. *Gnat IV* can be seen just to the left of them.

the wheels for the guns fell into the sea. Worse still, they only had a total of five rounds for all four guns.

Kroh managed to rally his troops at Stavromenos, before leading them back to the airfield. They launched an assault on Hill A driving the 2/1st Battalion and their artillery crews off the eastern side and the summit, the artilleryman removing the firing mechanisms of their guns before departing.

Campbell responded by moving up some infantry to block any further movement along the ridge. At the same time he launched the two Matildas in a counter-attack against Hill A, though with less than satisfactory results. They were supposed to advance along the east bank of Wadi Pigi, then cross the airfield parallel to the road and attack Hill A. Simpson's tank, T7411 *Gnat IV*, instead of using the bridge over the drain in Wadi Bardia, entered the wadi at an open cut on the northern edge of the airfield and got stuck sideways. When Simpson climbed out he was killed whereupon his crew surrendered. The other tank, T6924 *Gnome III*, carried on around Hill A but slipped into ten-foot-deep Wadi K on the immediate east of the hill, its crew also being captured. Both crews were taken back to the factory at Stavromenos.

Determined to regain Hill A, Campbell sent the 2/1st Battalion in again before first light the next morning and, after throwing in additional troops around 8 a.m., finally pushed the Germans off the hill, recapturing not only his own guns but also German mortars, machine guns and an anti-tank gun. The surviving paratroopers then retreated to the beach where they started sniping at Hill A until they were attacked again and rounded up by the battalion. In the afternoon the Australians mopped up any stragglers in the area.

On the 22nd Australian attention turned to dealing with Kroh's men in Stavromenos. Two carriers were sent there in support of C and D Companies of the 2/1st Battalion and the 5th Greek Battalion. After taking over

the German regimental aid post they pressed onto the factory, the two carriers being destroyed in quick succession by an anti-tank gun. The Australians then put down artillery fire on the factory with the guns on Hill A but when the infantry stood up to advance on the building they came under intense fire from the paratroopers inside. Their casualties being heavy, the attack ground to a halt. A second attack that evening that was supposed to include the Greeks also failed when they failed to show up, casualties again being

heavy among the 40 Australians who took part. That night the Greeks took over the containment of the factory from the Australians.

That same day, the 2/11th Battalion drove the remaining Germans back westwards along the coast to Perivolio before establishing themselves on a low ridge 100 yards east of Wadi Perivolio. However, no attempt was made to attack the garrison other than by counter-battery fire on both sides, the Australians losing one of their 100mm guns in the process. They did manage to destroy two Heinkel He 59 floatplanes that landed off the coast, one of which was trying to ferry what looked like a radio ashore.

With the area around Lieutenant Simpson's abandoned Matilda, *Gnat IV*, now clear, Lieutenant Patrick Lawry and some men from the battalion's carrier platoon turned their attention to recovering it. With the advice of Lieutenant Frank Mason of the 5th Brigade Workshop, RAOC, the tank was eventually driven back to base and arrangements made to train up its new crew in driving and gunnery.

At 6 a.m. on the 24th the newly repaired Matilda was driven down to the Stavromenos factory, approaching to within 100 yards without being fired upon. It was then sent in again at 10 a.m. under the command of Mason and driven by an ordnance sergeant. They managed to get as far as the 'Mortar House', which was another house on the high ground to the right of the factory, where Germans had been seen earlier in the day. A few Germans were spotted but they took shelter in the house and on the way back the tank came under fire from the factory.

Later on, *Gnat IV* was sent in a third attempt to reach the Mortar House. However, before it reached the factory, it was stopped by some of Campbell's men and when the driver opened his hatch to talk to them he was shot and wounded by a sniper. This left the Australians with a dilemma. The driver was now unable to operate the controls but, being at the same time under the watchful gaze of the Germans in the factory, they could not get him out. Instead they had to wait till nightfall to recover the Matilda. Naturally enough, Major Sandover had to call off the attack on Perivolio until the next day.



Mark pinpointed the approximate position where *Gnome III* was knocked out — [5] on the map — by means of the mountain range in the background, taking this shot on Ionias Street in Missiria, just to the east of the Missiria apartments, at a point where a track crossed the road on the way to the beach. His rental car marks the position of the tank. Knowing the position of the two knocked-out Matildas in relation to each other, he then used this to determine the location of *Gnat IV*, the latter being somewhere in line with St Peter and Paul Church visible in the distance.



MICHAEL GRIEVE

Left: Taken at a slightly different angle, this shot shows the same crash-landed Ju 52 aircraft that we earlier saw behind *Gnat IV*. It is evident from this view that the damage to the



HANS BENDLER

tank was caused by a high-explosive round striking the tank above the second mud chute, the resulting blast warping the skirting plate. Right: A close-up of the Junkers.

At first light on the 25th the Matilda set off for the start line with a scratch crew under the command of Lieutenant George Greenway from the 2/11th Battalion. It was at this point that a Blenheim light bomber chose to make a pass over the area. This startled its inexperienced driver causing him to swerve, the tank plunging into a ditch beside the road. Quickly covering it with foliage, some engineers began to dig it out and around 9 a.m. drove it back to Hill B. Once again Sandover had to postpone the attack. Instead that night they drove the tank round to Wadi K and tried to tow out the other Matilda, *Gnome III*, but were only able to move it slightly. There was, however, one success that day: the 2/1st Battalion, using a captured German mortar, managed to drop a round on the Mortar House, killing the five men inside. The Greeks then drove off another 40 Fallschirmjäger from the high ground around it and took over the position.

On the 26th, an attack was launched on St George Church in Perivolio but it came to a halt almost as soon as it started. *Gnat IV* had lumbered off from the start line and managed to get within 100 yards of the German lines before receiving a direct hit. This both stunned the commander, Lieutenant Greenway, and jammed the turret. It also put its Besa co-axial machine gun out of action so its crew, unable to clear the stoppage with the interior lights not functioning, drove back to Wadi Pigi to try to sort it out. Thus, lacking tank support, the 2/11th Battalion came under heavy fire when they launched their attack and were unable to make any headway so the attack had to be called off again.

Not that the Matilda was idle. Instead it accompanied a platoon from B Company of the 2/1st Battalion in an investigation of the Stavromenos factory, as the Greeks had reported very little firing coming from it. What followed was a short but sharp battle in which some 40 wounded and 40 unwounded Germans were captured, their three surviving officers and 30 others having escaped before dawn to make for Refuge Point to the east. Also rescued were the original British tank crews, though now very famished and shell-shocked. That night the second tank, *Gnome III*, was dug out of Wadi K, a scratch crew found for it and some rudimentary training provided.

At 5.35 a.m. on the 27th the attack on Perivolio was renewed, now with both tanks operating, the right-hand tank, *Gnome III*, commanded by Lieutenant John Bedells of the 2/11th Battalion, while Lieutenant Lawry had taken over from Greenway in *Gnat IV* on the left. By now Wiedemann's four 10.5cm LG40s in Perivolio were down to their last two rounds. (Although a re-supply operation had taken place, the shells that

were dropped turned out to be for the 7.5cm version of the gun.) After crossing the start line, Bedells' tank continued to advance north of the road. When it was close enough, the LG40 commanded by Richard Witzke fired, the shell striking *Gnome III* on the right-hand track frame, bringing it to a halt and blowing open the commander's hatch. Bedells quickly grabbed the rim of the cupola to hoist himself out but the hatch slammed down on his hand, cutting off three of his fingers.

The problem the Germans now faced was Lawry's tank which had strayed to the south side of the road. The nearest gun was that of Hans Danzer but it had no ammunition. With no other option, the battery's last round was unloaded from the gun it was in and transferred under fire to Danzer's weapon. This round killed the gunner, Ian McNeilage, and set *Gnat IV* on fire. The rest of the crew bailed out but Lawry was very badly burnt on his face and hands.

Bedells and his crew, trapped in their tank by the intense enemy fire, remained inside the vehicle for the rest of the day, continuing to fire back until their ammunition was exhausted. They then made their way back after dusk. Due to the loss of both tanks, the

2/11th Battalion assault came to a halt and the companies went to ground, also returning to their original positions at dusk.

Undaunted, the battalion went in again that night but unfortunately, as the assaulting companies were moving up, the Greeks on Hill C disobeyed orders and opened fire on St George's Church, an act that woke up the Germans on the southern flank. This brought down an intense hail of fire just as the Australians were pushing through to Perivolio. Despite this, one company did eventually reach as far as the crossroads. The intense firefight ultimately forced them to withdraw before dawn, leaving one company to hold on for another day in the town before making their escape.

Thus ended the final attempt to clear the paratroopers out of Perivolio. By May 30 it was all over. Unbeknown to the Australians the evacuation from Crete was now in full swing. When a force of Germans arrived from the west they were faced with two choices — surrender or evade. While Campbell chose the former, Sandover opted for the latter, he and half his battalion reaching the south coast. Most were eventually forced to surrender but 13 officers, including Sandover, and 30 other ranks did reach Egypt.



MICHAEL GRIEVE



MARK WILSON

Various other claims have been made by the Australians regarding the demise of *Gnome III*. According to the 2/11th Battalion History, it ran onto a mine that wrecked the tracks (although the paratroopers did not possess any) and then came under a hail of mortar fire that blew open the commander's hatch, Bedells losing three fingers to another bomb burst before he could close it. According to the 2/1st Battalion History, Bedells lost his fingers because, as was trying to get out and had gripped the rim of the hatch, a burst of machine-gun fire slammed it shut. The Australians also maintained that both the tank's two-pounder and Besa machine gun were damaged by mortar fire but neither weapons show any sign of damage in any of the photos.



Of the two Matildas sent to Heraklion (they appear not to have carried a name), T7402 was commanded by Sergeant Oakley. On May 20, the first day of the battle, it was ordered to flush out a party of German paratroopers that had taken hold in the Greek Army barracks — [1] on the map below — located just south-east of the airfield, but, according to the Black Watch, its gun suffered permanent damage when the driver failed to negotiate the gate leading to the barracks and knocked the gun sideways. According to the 7th Royal Tanks war diary,

it was left behind at Heraklion after suffering a hit from an anti-tank gun that damaged the radiator and caused the engine to overheat and seize. (Once again, this seems unlikely as the Fallschirmjäger's 37mm anti-tank gun could not penetrate the armour of the Matilda, so maybe this was written to cover up the stupid error of the driver.) This picture of T7402 standing beside the Greek Army barracks was taken by the Germans after the battle. Mark was unable to get into the present-day Greek Air Force base to take a comparison.

HERAKLION – MAY 20-22

T7006 (Lieutenant John Johnson)
T7402 (Sergeant Oakley)

The defence of Heraklion had been entrusted to three battalions of British infantry (comprising the 14th Brigade), three battalions of Greeks and the Australian 2/4th Battalion, under the overall command of Brigadier Brian Chappel. The Australians were dug in on two conical hills in the centre, known as 'The Charlies', while the 2nd Black Watch were on East Hill, a rocky outcrop dominating the airfield; the 2nd York and Lancasters were linked up with the Greek Brigade in Heraklion itself, and the 2nd Leicesters were in reserve. In addition Chappel had 13 obsolete field guns and 14 Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft guns around the airfield, plus six Light Mk VIs from the 3rd Hussars and the two Matildas — T7006 and T7402 — the latter two commanded by Lieutenant Johnson and Sergeant Oakley respectively.

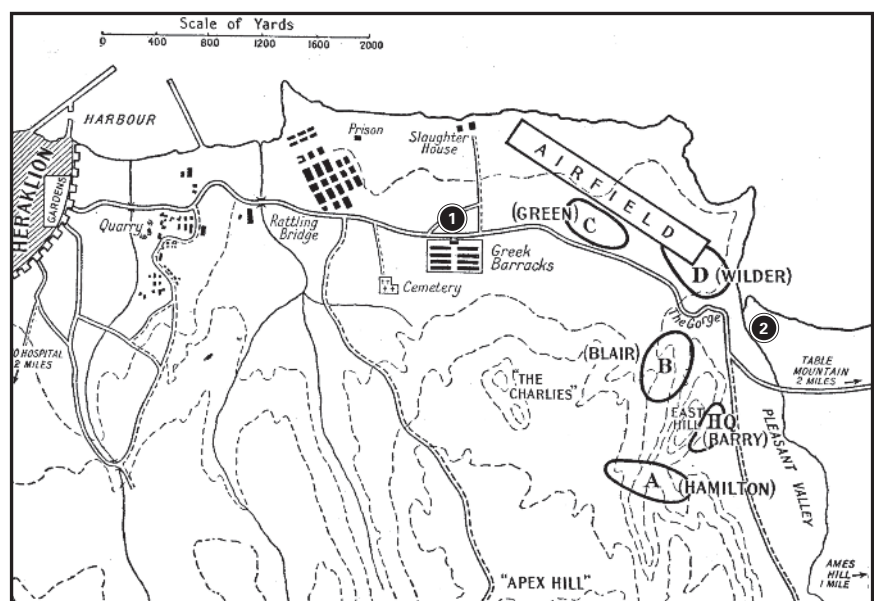
German plans called for Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 1 under Oberst Bruno Bräuer to secure the airfield and surrounding areas at Heraklion, the I. Bataillon under Major Erich Walther dropping five miles east of the airfield; the II. Bataillon under Hauptmann Burkhardt directly onto the airfield, and the III. Bataillon under Major Karl-Lothar Schulz to the west of the town. In addition two companies from Hauptmann Gerhart Schirmer's II. Bataillon of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 2 were to block the coastal road to the west.

As at Rethymno, the actual launch of the airborne assault had been delayed because of the difficulties experienced with repairing and refuelling the aircraft returning from the first lift in the western sector. The landings were preceded by the usual aerial bombard-

ment but, with further to go, the attacking aircraft started to run out of fuel and had to depart the scene well before the slower Ju 52s appeared over Heraklion at 5.30 p.m. Under Chappel's orders, the well-camouflaged anti-aircraft guns had been ordered to hold their fire until the troop transports showed up. The effect of them, and of the infantry small-arms fire when they too joined in, was devastating, a total of 15 Ju 52s being shot down.

Of the nine transports heading towards the Australians on 'The Charlies' (carrying one

company of Burkhardt's II. Bataillon), one was hit on the nose and crashed on the shore; a second aircraft crashed on the airfield; two caught fire and, though the men jumped, either their parachutes failed to open or simply caught fire. A fifth Ju 52 had its tail shot off and the occupants, jumping at 50 feet, were all killed. When one aircraft crash-landed close by, an Australian promptly ran over to it and tossed grenades inside, while others opened up on any survivors with automatic fire.





Left: In fact, the Germans did get the tank operational again and it served for a time in Panzer-Abteilung 212, a unit that had its origins in the 5. Kompanie of Panzer-Regiment 31 of the 5. Panzer-Division, and was part of the Crete garrison until the German evacuation of the island in 1944. Judging

The remaining paratroopers landed on an open space known as Buttercup field, where many were dealt with before they could get to their weapon containers. When the parachutes started to appear, the two Matildas also emerged and opened up on the men who had landed. One of the tanks was right underneath a stick of paratroopers and swung around and around running over them as they landed. When another 20 paratroopers came down in a field of crops at the end of the airfield, the Australians immediately set fire to it. The tanks then moved up and mowed the Germans down as they emerged from the flames. The Light Mk VIs of the 3rd Hussars were also active, their troop leader, Lieutenant George Petherick, claiming that his tank commanders had killed 30 paratroopers, firing from their open hatches with their revolvers.

The other two companies of Burkhardt's battalion landed east of the airfield in front of the 2nd Black Watch. Those that tried to charge up the hill against the Scottish soldiers were caught in a cross-fire. Losses were heavy, over 300 Germans being killed and 100 wounded, the two companies that landed to the west of the airfield being almost wiped out to a man. In the end only a few managed to rally around Burkhardt at the end of the ridge.

Some Fallschirmjäger managed to get into the area of the Prison and the Slaughter House from which they could bring fire to bear onto the airfield itself, while some others had entered the nearby Greek Barracks. Sergeant Oakley's Matilda T7402 was sent in to fire on the barracks but, according to the Black Watch, in his excitement the driver failed to negotiate the gate and knocked the gun sideways. Apparently it never fired again.

Further to the west, Schulz's III. Bataillon also suffered heavily from anti-aircraft fire, Schulz being the only survivor from his plane. Many of his men were attacked by Cretans when they hit the ground or were caught dangling from trees. Schulz eventually managed to gather together some troops and attacked Heraklion but soon ran into fierce resistance from the police and armed civilians.



by the cloud of smoke above the vehicle, it was on the move when this picture was taken. Right: Mark found the location in a gully that leads down to Karteros beach between Heraklion airfield and where the Krateros stream runs into the sea.



The Germans parked the tank up on the beach — [2] on the map — and left it there, the vehicle soon becoming a popular venue for group photos (see front cover).



A timeless comparison and one that was easy to find, Karteros beach being a popular holiday spot. The table mountain across the bay is the Kako Oros.

Right: Before the Germans finally left Crete in mid-October 1944 (leaving the island to the Greek partisans), they set off demolition charges in T7402, the resulting explosion blowing off the turret.

Walther's I. Bataillon was luckier, landing near Gournes, five miles east of the airfield at around 8 p.m., meeting no resistance and capturing its objective, a radio station, with ease. Regimental commander Bräuer landed with Walther's battalion and, after reporting back to Athens that things had gone well, took one of Walther's platoons to the airfield only to discover that Burkhardt's battalion had been all but annihilated and the area strongly held by the enemy. Over to the west of Heraklion, Schirmer's men landed successfully and set up a blocking position there.

The following morning, May 21, Schulz renewed his assault on Heraklion after a bombing run by the Luftwaffe. The attack made good progress, the Fallschirmjäger reaching the harbour in the afternoon but Chappel's reinforcements arrived around the time Schulz was negotiating terms of surrender with the Mayor and they were forced to retreat to the eastern outskirts of the town. At the airfield, having reinforced the company there, Walther's men tried to break through the perimeter defences but failed. Then the Black Watch counter-attacked, the two Matildas (the damaged one apparently went along despite its inoperative gun) with two Light Mk VIs in the lead, overrunning the survivors. The Light Mk VIs were soon forced to withdraw because their guns failed and there were no spares to repair them.

At 8.45 a.m., D Company under Captain Archie Wilder went out with the Matildas along the road to the east to search for a couple of enemy field guns reported in that area, but they proved to be anti-tank guns and the sortie was called off. Meanwhile, the other Matilda, Johnson's T7006, and the remaining light tanks of the 3rd Hussars, were occupied in carrying out fighting patrols.

Although the airfield was now invested and under German small-arms fire at short range, RAF aircraft still landed there on three separate occasions expecting to be refuelled and rearmed. On one occasion, the refuelling of a Hurricane was actually achieved under the protection of one of the Matildas, but the tail assembly was so damaged that it could not take off.

On the 23rd Johnson reported that his traversing gear was out of order, while Oakley's tank was out of action, apparently — in addition to its damaged gun — having suffered a hit from an anti-tank gun that pierced the radiator and caused the engine to seize. Not that they, or the 3rd Hussars, now had much to do apart from dealing with snipers. After destroying the last of their tanks, all the crews were eventually evacuated from Heraklion harbour, along with the Black Watch and other troops, during the night of May 28/29.

Right: Matilda T7006 was originally the mount of Lieutenant John Johnson and fought at Heraklion for the first four days of the battle. Then on the 23rd, Johnson handed it over to Lieutenant Jack Terry — who had arrived with two additional Matildas from Timbákion on the south shore — and proceeded to put T7006 and the other two tanks on lighters and move them over to the Suda sector, 70 miles to the west, thinking they would be more useful there. First committed near Galatas on the 25th, under Terry's command, the tank was disabled by mortar fire. The crew exited the vehicle but, coming under attack from a dive-bomber, Terry ordered his men back inside, while he drove the aircraft off with a machine gun. For that exploit he was awarded the Military Cross.



MICHAEL GRIEVE



MARK WILSON

The face of the bluff has changed little, though the beach has receded somewhat since the war.



MICHAEL GRIEVE

Right: The consignment that had arrived at Timbákion to reinforce the 7th Royal Tanks detachment had originally consisted of three Matildas. After disembarkation on the night of May 19/20, one of them proved a non-runner and had to be left at the port, the other two proceeded to Heraklion under command of Lieutenant Terry. This is believed to be the one that was left behind.

THE TIMBÁKION MATILDAS

T10084

T18896

T????? [number unknown]

On May 23, Johnson learned that Lieutenant Jack Terry was bringing over two Matildas from the south coast. A total of three had been landed at Timbákion on the night of May 19/20 but one had broken down and had to be left at the port, the other two proceeded to Heraklion at a stalemate, Terry arranged for the remaining two — T10084 and T18896 — to be shipped over to Suda Bay on lighters that day, taking Johnson's only runner, T7006, with him. However, no one had consulted Captain Badrock, the detachment commander, and when he found out about the move, he was unimpressed because he considered the terrain around Suda, with its closed-in vegetation and numerous small streams, totally unsuitable for tank deployment. He and Terry spent the next two days reconnoitring the area but by the time they had finished on the 25th, the general situation had changed for the worse. The Germans were gaining the upper hand and the retreat of Creforce had already started. Nevertheless Badrock reported to Freyberg and, after informing him of the arrival of the three tanks, was simply told that they were not needed for any offensive operations.

In the meantime Terry had returned to his tanks at Suda and soon found himself in action during the drive by Oberst Willibald Utz's Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 towards Galatos on the 25th. Though under heavy attack, he kept his Matilda T7006 in action until it was disabled by mortar fire. The crew abandoned the tank but Terry ordered them back to shelter inside when they were attacked by a bomber, while he himself drove it off with machine-gun fire.

The remaining two Matildas were now to assist the rearguard covering the withdrawal and evacuation of Creforce. On the night of May 26/27, a commando force, under Colonel Robert Laycock, consisting of A and D Battalions of Layforce, plus a detachment of B Battalion, had landed at Suda. Too late to be employed in an offensive role, they were ordered to leave their heavy equipment and transport behind and take up a position on the road that led inland to Sphakia, the selected point of embarkation on the south coast. That same day Badrock contacted Major-General Eric Weston, the commander of the Royal Marine Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation (MNDBO) in Canea, and was told that the tanks were to join Layforce, proceeding to a position 12 miles east of Suda that night.

Right: Mark's comparison proves that T10084 was abandoned just south of Stylos, this view looking back towards the town from the direction of Neo Chorio. The II. Bataillon of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85 claimed in a report that they knocked out two tanks near Stylos, which Dan Davin, the author of the New Zealand Official History of the Crete battle, thought were probably a Light Mk VI tank and a Bren carrier. However, since all of the four light tanks then remaining with the 3rd Hussars are accounted for further south and known to have been in action as late as May 28, it is more likely that the tank reported 'knocked out' by the Gebirgsjäger was in fact Matilda T10084.



MICHAEL GRIEVE



MICHAEL GRIEVE

The pair that made it to Heraklion and was shipped over to the Suda sector with T7006 were T10084 and T18896. With T7006 lost on the 25th, they were the last two Matildas left operational when the final retreat to Sphakia started on the 28th. That day, they helped Layforce break through the German lines north of Stylos and join up with the 5th NZ Brigade at the latter town. Shortly after, T10084 was abandoned, apparently because it ran out of fuel.



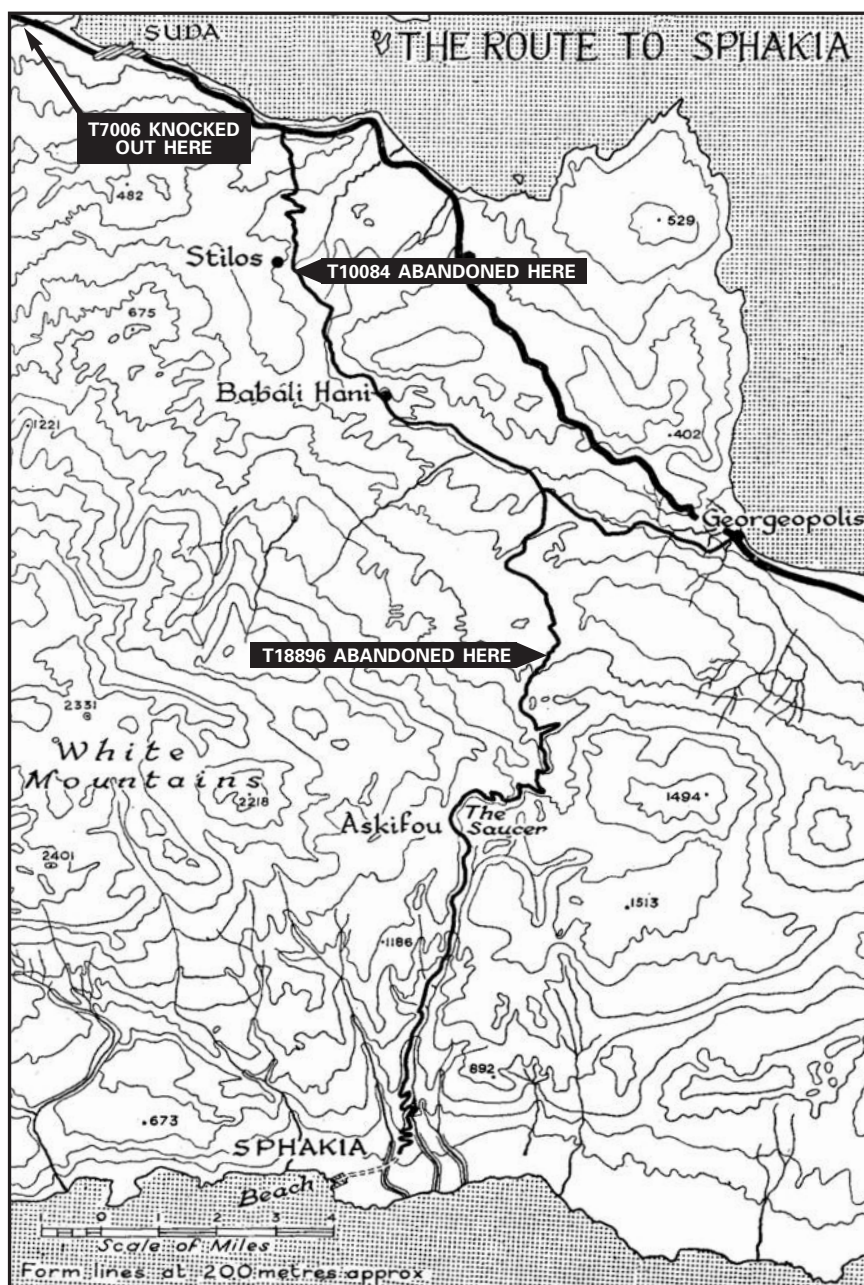
MARK WILSON

The following morning the two Matildas made their way forward to join up with Layforce, meeting up with Laycock himself and his A Battalion just south of the turn-off to Stylos. It proved to be timely as the II. Bataillon of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85, in a move to cut them off, had attacked the 5th NZ Brigade at Stylos and become involved in vicious hand-to-hand fighting. With the aid of the Matildas, Laycock and A Battalion were able to break through to the 5th Brigade. Shortly after, T10084 was abandoned south of Stylos, either due to lack of fuel or knocked out by the Gebirgsjäger.

Later in the day, Laycock established another rearguard position with D Battalion just north of the Babali Hani crossroads, with A Battalion and the last remaining Matilda (T18896) in reserve. Around 1.30 p.m., after the last of the retreating troops had passed through, the Gebirgsjäger launched their first attack on Layforce, this falling on C Company to the west of the road. Though the battle raged for half an hour, the Germans were repulsed until they tried again two hours later on the left flank. At this point the Australian 2/8th Battalion was called upon to assist. Then B Company of D Battalion launched a counter-attack, while T18896 made a number of sorties along the road, thus stabilising the line. Although the Germans had planned to launch another attack that evening they were too late, Laycock having received orders to pull out that night, the withdrawal starting at 9.15 p.m. T18896 was abandoned on the road to the Askifou Plain, south of the Babali Hani crossroads, swung sideways to act as a road block, but what happened to the crew after that is not known. One assumes that they, together with that of T10084 and Terry's crew, got away in the final evacuation.

Early on the evening of the 27th the remaining four Light Mk VI tanks of 3rd Husars were ordered to proceed to the plain of Askifou to deal with any paratroopers that might land there. They set off at 9 p.m. but on reaching the 2nd New Zealand Division headquarters received orders to send one tank back to the 5th Brigade on the Suda Line, the task being given to Corporal Summers. The other three tanks reached the Plain of Askifou at first light on the 28th and took up positions on the southern side of the basin where they were joined by Summers around midday.

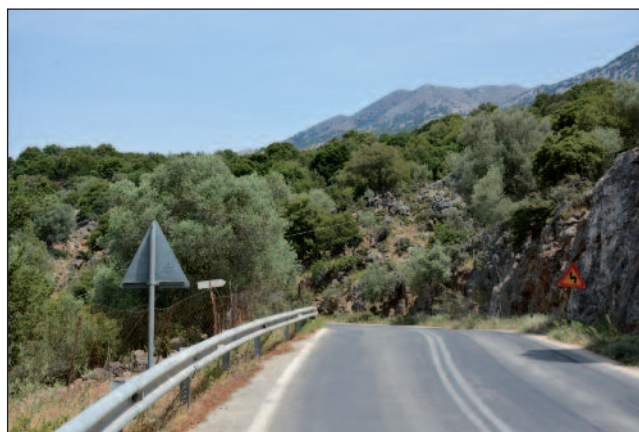
Early the following morning, Squadron Sergeant Major Child's tank was sent up to the head of the pass to provide support to a rearguard from the 18th NZ Battalion but mid-afternoon they learned that the 4th and 5th



BRITISH OFFICIAL HISTORY



MICHAEL GRIEVE



MARK WILSON

Left: T18896 — the last Matilda left in action from the force of nine — was abandoned on the road to the Askifou Plain, somewhere south of the crossroads at Babali Hani, on the 27th. Before leaving it, the crew appeared to have swung the tank around to block the road but whether they also attempted to sabotage it is not clear. **Right:** Mark and his wife Robyn spent a considerable amount of time driving from Vyresess to Askifou to try to match the skyline of

T18896, making a nuisance of themselves to the cars following by stopping every 50 yards to scan the various ridges. However, it was only on the return journey, as they motored round a bend, that Robyn, now actively engaged in the hunt, spotted this view. She continued to insist that it was the right location for another 300 metres down the road until Mark turned the car around and drove back to obtain this perfect comparison.

Brigades were pulling out, leaving them without infantry support. They were now nominally under the command of the 19th Australian Brigade, whose last troops were also moving down to Sphakia to set up another rearguard above the beach. However, after discussion with their commander, Brigadier George Vasey, some Bren carriers were promised as support. The three tanks then moved a mile back down the road towards the town of Invros, where they were to cover a party of engineers who were preparing to blow the road in four places, but on the way there the timing gear in Major Peck's tank failed again and the vehicle had to be abandoned. That evening Child's tank pulled back into Invros.

Before dawn on the 30th, the light tanks of Captain Crewdson and Corporal Summers were joined by Child's and at first light three Australian Bren carriers joined them. This proved to be timely as the leading German troops made their appearance shortly afterwards. Crewdson opened up on them and managed to kill 12 before both guns jammed. Shortly afterwards, his tank was hit by an anti-tank round that penetrated its petrol tank, fortunately without exploding although it drained it of its fuel. Both Crewdson and his driver, Trooper Mumford, were wounded, Mumford by the round itself and Crewdson by shrapnel inside the turret. With the tank thus immobilised they had no choice but to abandon it.

The remaining two Light Mk VI tanks then withdrew to the southern outskirts of Invros, allowing the engineers to blow the first of their demolitions. Joined by a party of Royal Marines, infiltration by Germans down a ravine forced them to pull back behind the next two demolitions that were blown just after midday. Then, when mortar fire eventually made life uncomfortable, they retreated again behind the final demolition but asked the engineers not to blow it. After waiting about ten minutes, Summers drove slowly back up the road accompanied by two Bren gunners on foot and caught a party of 40 or 50 Germans, most of whom were killed. After pulling back down the road, Summers tried the same tactic again but this time was not so lucky. Met by fire from two anti-tank rifles from the slope above the road, he withdrew allowing the sappers to detonate the last demolition.

That evening they pulled further back to the main infantry position but the two tanks were now almost finished mechanically, both suffering from steering, brake, engine and clutch problems. So, after consultation with Brigadier Vasey, both were immobilised and left blocking the road. The crews then made their way down to Sphakia where Brigadier Inglis of the 4th NZ Brigade got them on board with his headquarters party.

ARMoured SUPPORT IN RETROSPECT

Looking back at the operations in which the Matildas participated, it is apparent that they were of mixed success. Major Thomas Hawthorn of the 22nd NZ Battalion maintained that these particular tanks had been used for training purposes at the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks in Cairo and 'were much the worse for being handled by beginners'. This is exemplified in what happened on Crete, Marshall's Matilda suffering from gearbox trouble after leaving Suda for Maleme, while one of the Rethymno-bound Matildas broke down twice on its way there. In the case of Oakley's tank at Heraklion, the regimental diary noted that it suffered damage to its radiator as a result of a strike by an anti-tank gun although this seems unlikely, given that the 37mm guns dropped with the paratroopers could not penetrate the Matilda's armour. The fact that the Germans eventually took it over after the battle and used it would further support this.

At Heraklion the Matildas played a significant role helping to eliminate German para-



MICHAEL GRIEVE

The Germans were eventually able to move T18896 from its road-block but the question was whereto. We thought it might have been at a hairpin bend where the 23rd NZ Battalion rearguard had been but this proved to be not the case. An exhaustive search downhill from the tank road-block was also fruitless, so the exact location of this shot remains unknown. (An important clue that enabled Jeff Plowman to distinguish the Matildas of the first consignment from those in the second was their paint scheme. The first six Matildas to arrive in Crete all came from the 7th Royal Tanks and, as that regiment had fought in Operation 'Compass', all its tanks were painted in the standard desert camouflage of the time. Known as Caunter, after the officer who came up with it, it consisted of three colours, Silver Grey, Slate and Portland Stone, that started at a sharp point at the rear of the tank, each band expanding as it went forward. It is easy to spot because the colours are separated by long straight lines on the tank. However, of the three Matildas that were sent later, two were finished in different schemes, the one that was left at Timbákion appearing to be completed in overall Light Stone, and T18896 in Dark Green and Khaki Green, the latter being essentially the European scheme as used by the BEF and in England. The third — T10084 — had been completed in the Caunter scheme, but this vehicle had originally been issued to the 44th Royal Tanks, which arrived in Egypt in April 1941.)

troopers during the actual drop and in the counter-attack to clear up the remaining enemy the following day. At Rethymno the results were more mixed. That the Australians had gone to great lengths to recover and then employ the two Matildas that had been so carelessly ditched by their British crews is clearly evident. In the end they were both lost in the final attack on Perivolía though had they been deployed in a manner in which they could have provided mutual support, the result may have been different. Ironically, the Australians achieved more in their night-time attack on the town than they did with tank support and might have done even better had the Greeks not disobeyed orders.

It was a different story at Maleme. There the counter-attack involving the tanks and Lieutenant Donald's platoon was clearly mishandled and the question is why? One thing apparent is that Donald was expecting a combined operation with his infantry working together with the tanks. The trouble was that it was not the normal modus operandi of 7th Royal Tanks. During Operation 'Compass' — the first, and greatly successful, British offensive in the Western Desert against the Italian forces which had run from December 1940 to February 1941 — the standard practice had been for the tanks to precede their 'supporting infantry' by a considerable margin, often in two waves, and that the infantry, when they reached the objective, were simply there to mop up. This is what Gosnold and Marshall, the commanders of the two Matildas at Maleme, may have been expecting and it is possible that they would not have appreciated that what had worked with the Italians would not necessarily work with the Germans.

What else was odd was the number of sergeants sent to Crete. The normal structure of command in a troop of three tanks was an officer, sergeant and corporal. From Badrock's point of view, it made perfect sense to send one lieutenant to Rethymno and the other to Heraklion, each with a subaltern (a sergeant in the case of the Heraklion detachment) but for some reason the two tanks at Maleme were both commanded by sergeants. This raises the question as to who was nominally in charge of the detachment there because Badrock's role as detachment commander was clearly more administrative. It is possible that in introducing Sergeant Gosnold to Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew on May 19, Badrock intended him to take charge but in the end both tanks appear to have acted quite independently. Admittedly the manner in which they were dispersed may have been a factor but that was largely because of the problems of finding suitable places where they could be hidden from the air. Had an officer been present, or if one of the commanders had been a corporal, the senior of the two tank commanders would have surely insisted on the two tanks conforming before going into action but this did not happen. If the tanks had worked closer together, then their combined fire might have been able to suppress that from the Fallschirmjäger at the RAF encampment and their armour could have at least shielded Donald's platoon as they moved up. While this may still not have been enough to dislodge the Germans, it would have been better than what did happen. Which raises another question: if the counter-attack had been successful would Andrew have been more inclined to hold onto Maleme a little longer?