

# 1<sup>ST</sup> FREE FRENCH BRIGADE

Bir Hakeim 1942



AN UNOFFICIAL SUPPLEMENT FOR BOLT ACTION







“

*The battle then centred upon Bir Hacheim, where the Free French resisted with the utmost gallantry. Around this place the struggle surged for eight or nine days. Finally it was decided to withdraw the garrison, and this was successfully accomplished, though with heavy losses. Here, no doubt, was a turning point in the battle.*

Prime Minister Churchill in the House of Commons,  
July 2nd, 1942

*In the whole course of the desert war, we never encountered a more heroic and well sustained defence.*

Generalmajor Friedrich von Mellenthin, staff officer in the  
Panzer Armee Afrika, post war.

”

## THE 1<sup>ST</sup> FREE FRENCH BRIGADE

France's defeat and occupation did not mean the end of the fight for all Frenchmen. Many units not in France itself when it fell took refuge in Great Britain. Under Charles De Gaulle they formed the Free French Brigade. In early June 1942, the 1st Free French Brigade found itself on the extreme southern flank of the fortified Gazala line in Libya. For 15 days they stubbornly defended the fortress of Bir Hakeim against constant German and Italian assaults. This fortress was holding up Rommel's swirling armoured thrust to outflank the entire Gazala line.

General Koenig's 1st Free French Brigade (3,723 men) was besieged from May 26th, and was outnumbered ten to one by Rommel's 37,000 German and Italian troops. The defence of Bir Hakeim was truly a matter of honour for the Free French. They had to prove they could fight after the disastrous fall of their homeland in 1940. To this end General Pierre Koenig spent three months fortifying this stronghold, protected by minefields and dug-in artillery. It was used as a base for the Brigade's Jock-Columns who harassed the Axis troops until the total encirclement of the perimeter.

His men came from all over the French Empire. Tirailleurs from Senegal and Morocco, tough veterans of the Foreign

Legion and Marines from the Pacific. They used a mixture of old French equipment, some British and some improvised combinations of both. The French defenders fought off the Italian Ariete Division, knocking out 70 tanks, but by June 10th the garrison's ammunition was exhausted (with only 22 howitzer shells left in reserve). Around midnight, General Koenig's ordered the garrison to break through the encirclement and force their way through enemy lines. Led by Legionnaires in Bren Carriers, the hard-fought breakout allowed 2,619 men to escape. Rommel's flanking move had been blunted and the allied armies were able to fallback in good order to positions near El Alamein.

You can find a complete account of the Bir Hakeim siege here:

<http://www.1dfl.fr/en-route-avec-la-dfl/bir-hakeim-in-english/>

This theatre selector allows you to field the 1st Free French Brigade from the Bir Hakeim Siege in June 1942. You will need a copy of *Armies of France and the Allies*, as well as *Armies of Great Britain and the Commonwealth* to use this army list.





## ARMY SPECIAL RULES

### Fighting French

Allied planners expected the 1st Free French brigade to hold the Bir Hakeim position for 10 days. They held out for 15 days, and twice refused formal requests for their surrender before fighting their way out of the encirclement. Winston Churchill declared that from this point on, they should be known as the 'Fighting French'.

*All units re-roll unsuccessful morale checks, the second result stands.*

### Colonial Veterans

All members of the 1st Free French Brigade were professional soldiers from the French colonial forces, or Foreign Legionnaires who were veterans of the Spanish Civil War and the 1940 expedition to Norway.

*No inexperienced troops may be used of any kind.*

### Forward Artillery Doctrine

As described in the *Armies of France and the Allies* book. With the exception that the types of gun are limited to light howitzers, or light and medium anti tank guns only.



*Officers of the 1st Free French Brigade plan the defence of Bir Hakeim*

### Sous-Officer

Most of the Free French NCOs had seen action as officers in many wars. A great number of the 13DBLE (13th Demi-Brigade of the Foreign Legion) were veterans from the Spanish Civil War or Norway, and promoted as NCO's in the 13DBLE or in the Senegalese units. A lot of the junior officers were quickly promoted, and NCOs quickly became officers. If your last officer is killed, an NCO or even a trooper will try to take command of the troops .

*Once per game, as soon as an officer has been removed as a casualty, the NCO of the nearest infantry squad within 12" of the Officer when he became a casualty takes over command of the Reinforced platoon. He gains the benefits of a 2nd LT, thus granting +1 to all order and moral tests to his own unit and those within 6" of himself. The newly promoted NCO remains with his original squad and the officer is still removed as a casualty per as normal.*





## REINFORCED PLATOON

1 Lieutenant (1st or 2nd LT)  
2 Infantry Squads

plus :

0-3 Infantry Squads  
0-1 Captain or Major  
0-1 Medical Officer  
0-1 Machine Gun Team  
0-1 Mortar Team  
0-1 Anti-tank Rifle Team  
0-1 Marksmen  
0-1 Anti-tank Gun, Anti-aircraft Gun  
or Field Artillery  
0-2 Armored Car or Self Propelled Gun  
0-1 Transport Vehicle or Tow per infantry  
or artillery unit in the reinforced platoon



## INFANTRY

### HEADQUARTERS UNITS

#### OFFICER

The Free French military was organized identically to the French army of 1940. However, there was a distinct over-representation of junior officers in the Free French units, as many of them were well educated volunteers. The lack of experience and the romanticism of the young junior officers was off-set by the presence of veteran NCOs. If the last officer in the unit becomes a casualty, a senior NCO will take over command .

**Cost:** 2nd Lt 'Sous-Lieutenant' 50pts (Regular), 65pts (Veteran)  
1st Lt 'Lieutenant' 75pts (Regular), 90pts (Veteran)  
Captain 'Capitaine' 110pts (Regular), 125pts (Veteran)  
Major 'Commandant' 150pts (Regular), 165pts (Veteran)

**Team:** Officer and up to two further men

**Weapon:** Pistol, rifle or SMG as depicted on the models

#### Options:

- The officer may be accompanied by up to 2 further men at a cost of +10 pts per man (regular), or +13 pts per man (veteran)
- Give one of the men a VB grenade launcher for +20 pts

#### MEDIC

Regular or veteran as per the 'Armies of France' book.

#### FORWARD OBSERVER ( Artillery)

During Bir Hakeim, the sky belonged to the Germans, so no air observers can be taken. Artillery observers can be taken as per the 'Armies of France' book.

Foreign  
Legion artillery  
observation post



### INFANTRY SQUADS AND TEAMS

#### FOREIGN LEGION VETERAN INFANTRY SECTION

The Foreign Legion was normally deployed in North Africa, but at the outbreak of the war, some units were directed to France. The 13th Legion half brigade fought hard in the failed Norwegian campaign before France itself fell. This unit decided to pursue the fight and formed the nucleus of the 1st Free French Brigade.

**Cost:** 70pts (Veteran)

**Composition:** 1 NCO and 4 men

**Weapons:** Rifles

#### Options:

- Add up to 7 additional soldiers at +14pts each
- Add up to 1 additional soldier armed with pistol only at +11 pts
- NCO may have a submachine guns for +3pts
- Up to 2 soldiers may have a submachine guns for +3pts each
- One soldier may have a light machine gun for +20pts. Another soldier becomes the loader (always the pistol-armed soldier if present)
- One soldier may have a VB launcher for +20pts

#### Special Rules:

- **Stubborn:** Legionnaires don't give in easily! Veteran Legionnaires count as stubborn. If forced to check their morale when reduced to half strength then they always test on their full morale value, ignoring any pin markers





*Senegalese Tirailleurs of various  
'Battalions De Marche'*



### SENEGALESE BATAILLON DE MARCHÉ SECTION

Senegalese Tirailleurs are native colonial troops that served throughout the French Empire. Although called 'Senegalese' this term was used to describe all the troops recruited from France's sub-Saharan colonies in east, central and western Africa. These Tirailleurs were not issued the best weapons and sometimes lacked LMGs and VB launchers. These African troops proved to be tough and determined fighters. They formed the bulk of the Free French infantry.

**Cost:** 55 pts (Regular)

**Composition:** 1 NCO and 4 men

**Weapons:** Rifles

**Options:**

- Add up to 6 additional soldiers at +11pts each
- Add up to 1 additional soldier armed with pistol only at +8 pts
- One soldier may have a light machine gun for +20 pts. Another soldier becomes the loader (always the pistol-armed soldier if present).
- One soldier may have a VB launcher for +20 pts

**Special Rules:**

- Tough Fighters

### NORTH AFRICAN INFANTRY SECTION

Algerian, Moroccans and Tunisian Tirailleurs are troops raised from the natives of the North African French Territories. These troops were raised from the mountainous areas of North Africa and were formidable light infantry.

**Cost:** 55 pts (Regular)

**Composition:** 1 NCO and 4 men

**Weapons:** Rifles

**Options:**

- Add up to 6 additional soldiers at +11pts each
- Add up to 1 additional soldier armed with pistol only at +7 pts
- NCO may have a submachine guns for +3pts
- One soldier may have a light machine gun for +20 pts. Another soldier becomes the loader (always the pistol-armed soldier if present).
- One soldier may have a VB launcher for +20 pts

**Special Rules:**

- Mountaineers: Treat all rough ground as open ground. The players should discuss and agree before the game which terrain this rule should not apply to, like water features and other terrain elements that obviously mountain troops would have no advantage in crossing.

### REGULAR INFANTRY SECTIONS

The 24th Colonial Infantry Regiment was partly garrisoned in Cyprus and Syria. Part of this regiment refused the armistice and joined the British in Egypt. They became the first fighting unit of the Free French Force renamed 1st Marine Infantry Bataillon. A Bataillon was also raised from volunteers of French Polynesia and New Caledonia.

**Cost:** 50pts (Regular)

**Composition:** 1 NCO and 4 men

**Weapons:** Rifles

**Options:**

- Add up to 7 additional soldiers at +10pts each
- Add up to 1 additional soldier armed with pistol only at +7 pts
- NCO may have a submachine guns for +3pts
- One soldier may have a light machine gun for +20 pts. Another soldier becomes the loader (always the pistol-armed soldier if present).







### SAPPERS-MINERS SQUAD

The French spent three months fortifying the Bir Hakeim strongholds, covering and linking them with deep minefields. The 1st company of Sapper-miners (1e Compagnie de Sapeurs-Mineurs) were trained in laying and clearing the land mines.

**Cost:** Regular 50 pts Veteran 65 pts

**Composition:** 1 NCO and 4 men

**Weapons:** Rifles

**Options:**

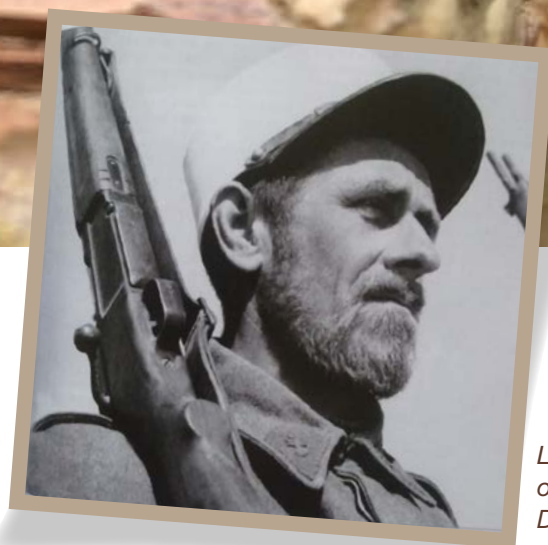
- NCO may have a submachine guns for +3pts
- Add up to 6 additional soldiers at +10pts at Regular or 13pts at Veteran each

**Special Rules:**

- Engineers, this infantry unit has the same advantages as Pioneers in terms of navigating and clearing minefields.

### MARKSMAN :

In the French army, there were no “sniper” teams. Instead the best shot of a section was provided with a sniper rifle, performing his role alone. A good marksman can pick off unsuspecting soldiers or their officers without giving away their position.



*Legionnaire  
of the 13th  
Demi Brigade*

**Cost:** 40pts (regular), 50 pts (veteran)

**Composition:** 1 marksman

**Weapons:** Rifle

**Special Rules:**

- Sniper

### LIGHT MORTAR TEAM :

Regular or veteran as per the ‘Armies of France’ book.

### MACHINE GUN TEAM :

Regular or veteran as per the ‘Armies of France’ book.

### MEDIUM MORTAR TEAM :

Regular or veteran as per the ‘Armies of France’ book.

### BOYS ANTI-TANK RIFLE TEAM

Regular or veteran as per the ‘Armies of France’ book.



*A dug in Canon de 75 fights off another determined enemy attack*



## FIELD ARTILLERY

### LIGHT HOWITZER:

The famous Canon de 75, formed the backbone of the defence of Bir Hakeim and had access to new AT shells. After the loss of these guns during the garrison's withdrawal, the artillery of the 1st Free French Brigade were equipped with British 25pdr guns. Use the regular or veteran light howitzer options as per the *'Armies of France'* book with the following options.

#### Options:

- Can be upgraded with the option for AT shells for +5pts. These give the Canon de 75 a Pen value of +4 - the same as a light anti-tank gun. The Canon de 75 can shoot either HE or AT - if put into ambush the player must specify which kind of shell is loaded

## ANTI TANK GUNS

### LIGHT ANTI-TANK GUN:

This entry represents both the French 25mm AT gun and the British 2pdr, which replaced the French gun after the siege. Use the regular or veteran Light AT gun options as per the *'Armies of France'* book.

### MEDIUM ANTI-TANK GUN:

This entry represents both the French 47mm APX gun and the British 6pdr, which replaced the French gun after the siege. Use the regular or veteran Medium AT gun options as per the *'Armies of France'* book.

## ANTI AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY

### 25mm ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN

Regular or veteran as per the *'Armies of France'* book.

#### Special Rules:

- Tenir vos Armes! The brave crews of these guns kept firing even at Stukas making direct strafing runs on them. These units may never voluntarily use the Down order.

### 40mm BOFORS ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN

Regular or veteran as per the *'Armies of Great Britain'* book.

#### Special Rules:

- Tenir vos Armes! The brave crews of these guns kept firing even at Stukas making direct strafing runs on them. These units may never voluntarily use the Down order.

### The guns at Bir Hakeim

The artillery available to the Bir Hakeim garrison was:

- 24 x 75mm guns
- 12 x 40mm Bofors
- 6 x 40mm Bofors manned by the 43th Battery RA of the City of London
- Unknown number x 25mm Hotchkiss AA gun
- 6 x 13.2mm AA mount (dual and quad)
- 18 x 25mm light anti-tank guns
- 7 x 47mm medium anti-tank guns
- 30 x 75mm AT guns (count as light howitzer with light anti-tank ability)





# ARMoured CARS

## DODGE TANAKE

Captain Bich, an artillery officer in command of the Army Vehicle Fleet in Beirut, proposed in 1940 a model of a lightly armoured car built on a 1½ ton Dodge truck chassis obtained as commercial purchase from Egypt. At least 20 Dodge Tanake were built, the name Tanake meaning 'jack-of-all-trades'. These vehicles were captured after the fall of Vichy held Levant, and put into action by the 1st Free French Brigade in the Western desert. They were crewed by the Moroccan Spahis and performed aggressive patrols and raids from the the Bir Hakeim fortress.

**Cost:** 115pts (Regular), 138pts (Veteran)

**Weapons:** Low velocity light AT gun (+3 pen) with co-axial MMG in an open turret, pintle-mounted LMG

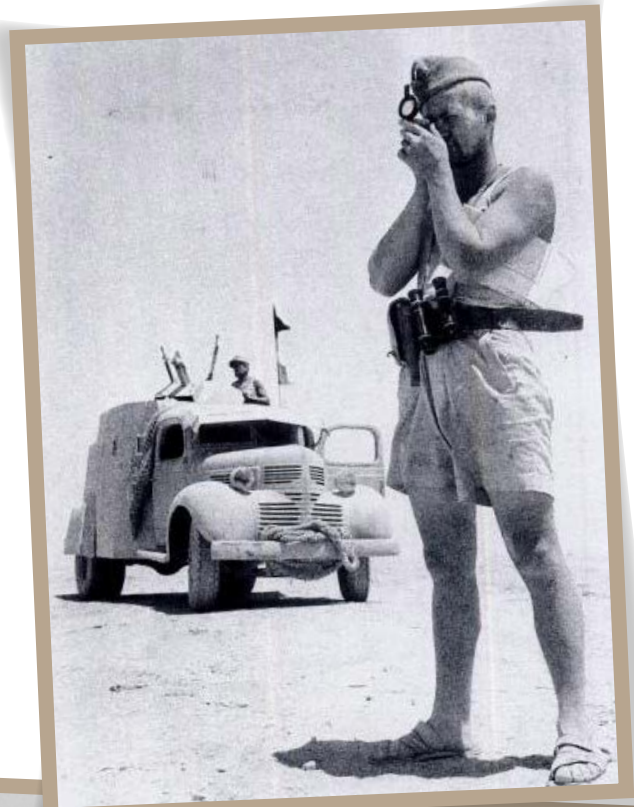
**Damage Value:** 7+ (armoured carrier)

**Special Rules:**

- Open-topped
- Low velocity AT gun
- Recce

## RECCE CARRIER

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book.



*A Dodge Tanake squadron patrols no mans land outside of the Bir Hakeim fortress.*



*Chevy 75mm portee*

## SELF PROPELLED GUNS

### CANON DE 75 PORTEE

Captains Bayrou and Belan modified Ford or Chevrolet trucks to mount a Canon de 75 in the flat bed of the truck. It could be removed using 2 loading ramps.

**Cost:** 65pts (Regular), 78pts (Veteran)

**Weapons:** One rear-facing light howitzer

**Damage Value:** 6+ (soft-skin)

**Options:**

- Can be upgraded with the option for AT shells for +5pts. These give the Canon de 75 a Pen value of +4 - the same as a light anti-tank gun. The Canon de 75 can shoot either HE or AT - if put into ambush the player must specify which kind of shell is loaded

### DERVISCHÉ LIGHT ANTI-TANK PORTEE

A 25mm anti-tank gun on a naval mount and fitted to the bed of a 15cwt truck .

**Cost:** 65pts (Regular), 78pts (Veteran)

**Weapon :** Lght anti-tank gun on open platform with 360-degree arc of fire

**Damage Value:** 6+ (soft-skin)

### ANTI-AIRCRAFT TRUCK

The Fusiliers-Marins regiment, who were in charge of the anti-aircraft defense of the 1st Free French Division mounted some naval Anti-Aircraft HMGs on trucks .

**Cost:** 60pts (Regular), 72pts (Veteran)

**Weapon :** Dual-mounted AA HMG on open platform with 360-degree arc of fire

**Damage Value:** 6+ (soft-skin)

**Options:**

- Upgrade to quad-mounted AA HMG with 360-degree arc of fire for +40pts

**Special Rules:**

- Flak

*Anti-Aircraft truck*





### 25mm CARRIER :

Some British Universal carriers were fitted with a modified French 25mm AT gun.

**Cost :** 105pts (Regular), 126pts (Veteran)

**Weapons:** One front-facing light anti-tank gun

**Damage Value:** 7+ (armoured carrier)

#### Options:

- Add a pintle-mounted LMG for +5pts

#### Special Rules:

- Open topped
- Turn on the spot
- Flak



Modified Bren Carrier with 25mm AT gun

*Legionnaires use their Boyes Anti-Tank rifle in a desperate attempt to stop the Panzer III*



## TRANSPORTS AND TOWS

### BREN CARRIER

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book.

### 3 TON TRUCK

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book.

### 15CWT TRUCK

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book.

### 30CWT TRUCK

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book.

### JEEP

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book without the pintle mounted MMG option.

### QUAD TRACTOR

As per the regular or veteran options in the 'Armies of Great Britain' book.

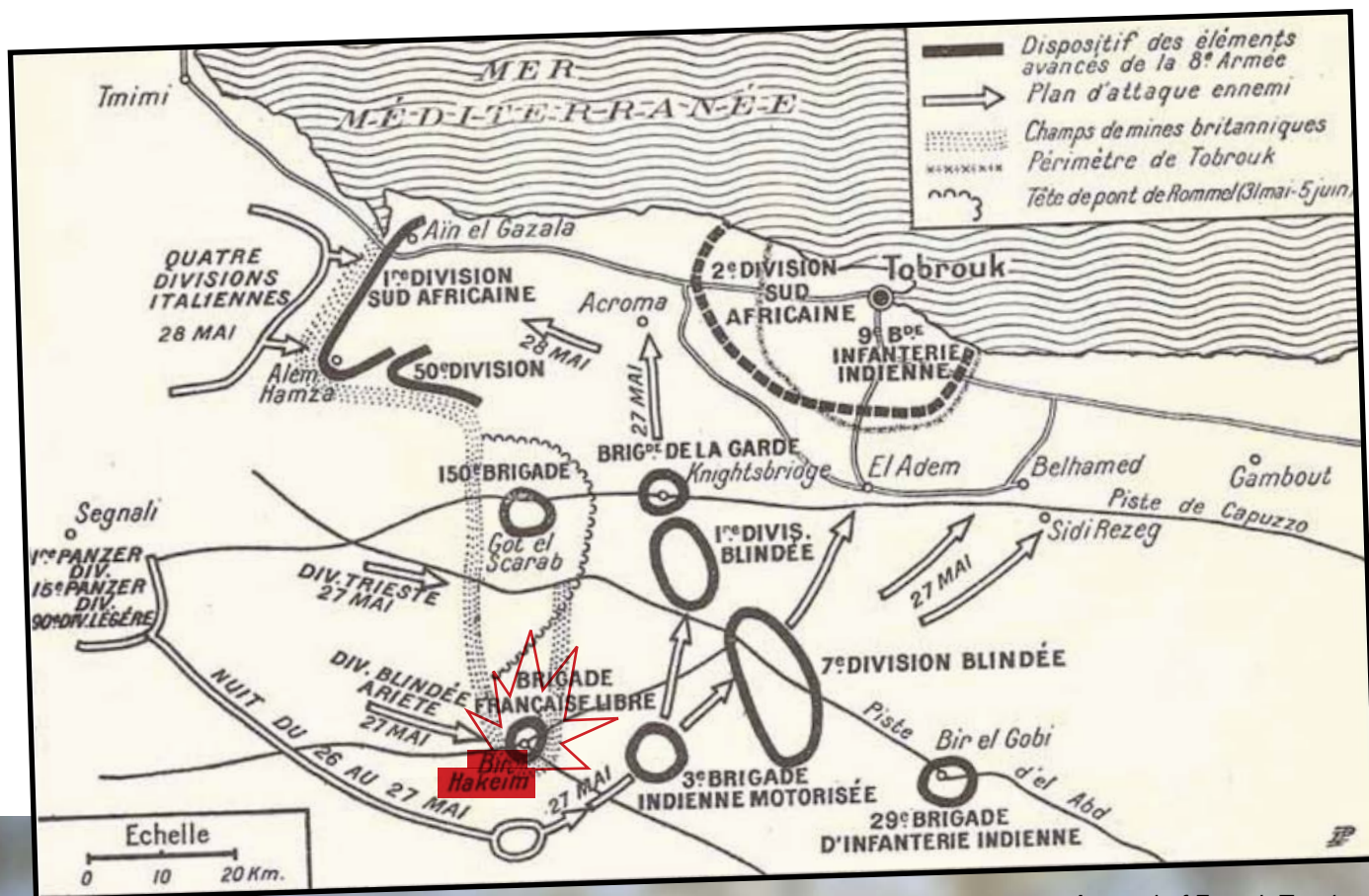
*The stubborn defenders of Bir Hakeim fight off another Axis assault*







# THE GAZALA LINE



A patrol of French Tanake armoured trucks engages with DAK recon elements outside of the Bir Hakeim fortress







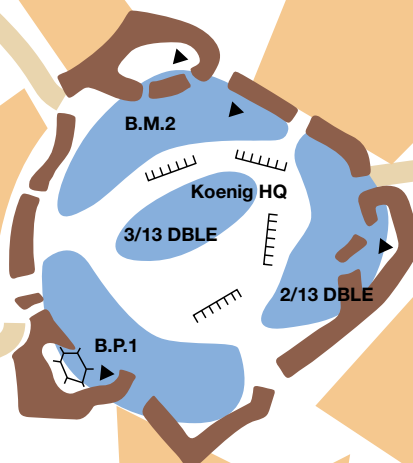
# THE BIR HAKEIM FORTRESS



General Pierre Koenig,  
commander of the 1st Free  
French Brigade at Bir Hakeim

-  Minefields
  -  Minefields & wire
  -  French unit positions
  -  Observation post
  -  75mm gun battery
  -  Fort
- B.M.2:** Senegalese Battalion  
**13 DBLE:** Foreign Legion battalion  
**B.P.1:** Pacific battalion

↑  
To Gazala



General Der Panzertruppe Erwin Rommel,  
commander of Panzer Armee Afrika. Seen  
here overseeing the assault on Bir Hakeim

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