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A.I.F.

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pilots took over the side. What saved them was the three  
 Hurricanes who had been cruising around afraid to dust rising  
 and wandered over to investigate. They immediately took a hand  
 in the affair and so far as Theo and the Coy were concerned  
 cleared the way for them. They arrived rather very much shaken.  
 We ourselves had had the circus over us and watched them  
 sail over towards Korea Bay about 11 miles away and our  
 interpretation of the fruit news and dust was that 8 Coy were  
 doing it in their area. Chapman to their annoyance  
 was of the bet that they had been in it. To return to  
 the air. The squadron at Adgebari was a weak one but was  
 composed entirely of Australian pilots. These three got into the  
 eight Junkers bombers carrying out the attack and got four  
 of them all of which fell into the sea. One pilot of which more a  
 little later was almost certain of a fifth but it did not fall into  
 the sea within his sight and he therefore could not claim it  
 officially. Unfortunately that our three planes did not see was  
 an escort of 11 Messerschmidt fighters high up and whilst they  
 were occupied in dealing with the Junkers these came down  
 out of the blue and entered the fight. One of our men was shot  
 down almost immediately - another got away and the third  
 a lad named Lavin of Melbourne was set on fire by an  
 explosive bullet in the tank and had to crash land, that  
 annoyed him really (apart from the fact that his first indication  
 he had of trouble was catching sight of the enemy on his tail  
 in his rear view mirror) was the fact that after he had  
 got out of his plane and was retreating away they machine  
 gunned him. He was brought in by 8 Coy in whose area  
 he had crashed and as he was bleeding from cuts on the  
 nose and under the eye they rushed him to Ross Godby  
 at 8 Coy. We had just finished lunch when he arrived so  
 we gave him a whiskey and boiled water to clean him up.  
 The lad was like a wet hen and rather amused us with  
 his fussing as if he had not seen a wounded man before.  
 After cleaning his cuts turned out to be only superficial,  
 and a couple of bits of plaster put him right. He was  
 however considerably shaken. We reported to brigade and  
 they sent a car for him so he left us after a couple of hours.  
 Incidentally we were very glad to know that he received a  
 Distinguished Flying Cross for this fight. Keith Walker and

the KQ's office were in shelter. Since Bob Green's death Walker had been appointed official Battalion Photographer and during the attack he spent some time taking snaps of the bombs leaving the plane. They were low enough for that. Most of his snaps however when developed later were very hazy and useless, but only of this show but other things as well. This makes how that Walker used the wrong kind of film. The next day February 20 following the plans made the day before C, D and HQ Coy moved forward some distance and occupied the already dug positions previously occupied by the Support Group of the 7th Armored Division. I cannot remember much about this position except that C Coy were on the right and that there was a minimum of digging to be done. Some had to be done of course as their dispositions did not fit in with ours. The scrub bushes were particularly bad or rather numerous here - they caused little or no trouble except that you had to be on them everywhere. If I did not tell you before they rolled refuse into little balls and manipulated them to their holes. We utilized a blank space where a tent had been dug up previously to shelter Theo's car. It only needed a ramp dug and the result was the car was dug in. All the engines of all our trucks had to be dug in at not to great a slope to protect the vital parts from machinegunner or bomb splinters. It had to be carefully done at not to great an angle or the oil ran out of the pump and then when the engine was started untold damage was done. As the driver had to do all the digging himself he desisted flat ground for at least more earth to be excavated so here was no complaint of my final disposition placed the trucks against a slight hill of rice or weeds. Oct 20 and 21 were quiet days but on the 22, we had a busy morning. We had three arrivals at 8.30, 10 am and 1 pm and fortunately no one was hurt. Most of the enemy planes followed the road fairly closely as it simplified navigation and as we were dispersed awhile at they always gave us some passing attention. We had attached to us a platoon of the Brigade Anti Tank Company and they went under the command of the KQ's Lt de Agherles. Unfortunately this patrol was shot up and the platoon commander, by name Rowley had the doubtful

honor of being the first Australian officer in captivity. Anyway he was the first in the Brigade. On the night of Oct. 20/21 the Battalion also moved forward towards C Coy at Santa Cruz and dug itself a new position near a white Spaniard road house. We were not at all keen on this roadhouse for it seemed to have a remarkable attraction for enemy aircraft. Although they saw that it they always gave the area around it a go in passing. I know and I think others did too that when passing it along the road in a car I breathed a sigh of relief as it was a good aiming mark. February 22 was a quiet day but on Sunday the 23 the plane made up for it as we had four raids. On checking up I find that I have made a mistake about Lowley - that is regarding dates. The patrol of the KQ's were shot up alright but Lowley did not go on his one. It was another patrol on the night of Oct 20/21 on which he was captured. Previously we had wrecked two aerodromes at de Agherles by skimming the surface with empty patrol bombs and some old vehicles. The Germans during the day had taken away some of these vehicles and substituted their armored cars. Lowley was lost in the columns and the Germans let the KQ's go on. For some reason he turned into the fort and became a prisoner immediately. Tuesday Oct 22 was uneventful by 4 time raids but still honors were seen. No damage to us and none we could see to them. The Brigade decided to give Theo a rest from his anxiety and the after effects of his bombing and also the news of his mother's death which he received on Oct 23. By the same mail the Brig had news of one of his parents' death. Accordingly he called Theo over to Brigade area for a rest and left me in charge for four days. The 24<sup>th</sup> was a quiet day for us only Reconnaissance planes over flying high down the roads to Cuzco. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Theo returned and was I think glad to as the atmosphere at Brigade particularly with Brock was not very happy. Both the 26<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> were quiet. I mean no raids. There was always plenty to do. Our aircraft at Adgedabro were being used now only for Reconnaissance and they had brought us news of activity of the enemy in retreating columns some hundreds of miles away. It was decided on Monday 28 to alter the dispositions of the Battalion they were to move forward again another couple of kilometers

to B Coy and to straddle the road. This had been to be for his orders and before he left on his Reconnaissance of the new area he gave me the Engineers order to go forward of our area and reconnoiter the ground for a new position for one, two or three battalions. Ahead of B Coy and almost in the middle was a low hill and here we had established an observation post in daylight manned by one of our carriers and an Artillery Officer. I was to take his Carrier and also call for an Artillery Officer at Artillery Headquarters to accompany me and advise on Artillery matters. On the way and for my own protection I was to call at Koko Hags for information about their patrols as in an armoured vehicle prowling around they - their patrols I mean might and certainly would open fire and ask questions afterwards. When I got here I found several tracks leading to their CO and Adjut so I had some delay until he had gone and could get the necessary information from them. The train stopped and spoke to me on the way out. I then collected my Artilleryman and we went in my truck to the O.P. exchanging for the carrier. All this took time and it was late afternoon and we had a lot of ground to cover. The country was very rocky and the carrier was slow and we had not completed our job when darkness set in. We returned homewards and collected my truck and then I dropped Flynn at his Headquarters. I mentioned earlier that the Battalion was moving forward but I did not stress then that I did not know its where - except it was about 3 miles nearer to me than when I started. It was very dark - darkness descends rapidly in the desert - there is no twilight once the sunsets it is completely dark in less than three minutes. We turned up and down the road looking for the light but could not find it. After two or three tries to set a turn off I met Cramp who was carrying the new telephone wires. He told me that C Coy was about 100 yards due back from where I was. We turned the truck and going over the ditch broke the front axle. As it was not so shabby my own and only a utility truck I sent the driver walking home to Bachelors which had remained in its old position.

I had none of my gear in it so we abandoned it for the night and I set off to walk on a compass bearing to C Coy. I could not find them and tried twice and then finally lost myself. I was fortunate in catching a telephone wire which seemed to be going in the right direction so I picked it up and followed it. I walked for what seemed hours but probably was only about half an hour - it is very slow but safe following a telephone wire - when I saw a movement and challenged. It turned out to be the left forward section of C Coy and that I was following an Artillery wire which led from their Hags another 2 miles to the forward guns. I got the position of C Company Hags and took Keller and used their phone and reported to my whereabouts. It was about midnight and they had been wondering what had happened to me. They were not greatly worried as I had reported through B Coy. So I started on my only safe way home - a bit bad tempered but pleased to have some good directions. Then I really started cursing. For some time there had been a factory camp off for lying our wire too tight. This wire it was easily broken by tripped over or run over. This time he went to the other extreme and laid it so loose that I pulled in yards and yards at a time before I could advance and also had to cover much bare ground as it was pegged and caught in camelthorn bushes and went in all sorts of directions. I finally made the road and was moving along this when I was challenged by D Coy on the other side. I went to Coy Hags to check up my position and here got a drink of beer and something to eat. They assured me that if I went down the wire down the road I would come to the T piece to C Coy. I did this and followed the wire of the road and eventually said thank God when I reached the phone at the end. I was almost speechless when I found it was A Coy (the by the way had been back about a week). I was dog tired and very bad tempered. Kuss Hange gave me a bearing for C Coy which was still two yards further on. I brushed off and later a truck loomed up. I woke the driver and found it was my very own truck also lost. He followed me

and I eventually got to CTR. He moved off in the darkness to sleep and I'm damned if I could find him again. As all my sleeping gear was on it I was very fed up. Anyway I ended a very unpleasant day by sharing a bottle of beer I got from the mess truck with Harry Halliday and sleeping in his hole and sharing his blanket. Drove up by daylight and reported to breads that I had to finish his job. After a hurried breakfast I left at 7 o'clock and picked up my Artillery Officer and the Carrier and we set off once more. As we got further forward I must admit that I did not like the job any better as we had news that the enemy was advancing slowly. That meant that at any time they might appear and I knew there were no patrols of Katos out ahead of us today. I was rather pleased to see one fellow in about an hour later. On our way we saw two beautiful gazelle. The troops driving the carrier wanted to see the brown bear on them but I would not allow this as the sound of automatic fire might give a false impression further back. We tried to hit them with a rifle but had no success. This was a rotten job that. Hobony went right with it. The Carrier went over a dip alright but it was an old one and something broke. Anyway we had to complete our job on foot and then walk home. On the way we were crossing a large white salt pan when a plane flew over. We both dropped but felt rather like mountains on the sublime white. Fortunately the plane either did not see us or thought us not worth bothering about. On the way home we passed a wrecked and burnt out German plane which did our hearts good but could see no signs of the crew. They may have got away. The desert just about now was an absolute picture - covered with flowers. Admittedly they were stunted and small but their coloring was marvellous - mostly pastels. These sand he covered 18 varieties of common garden flowers growing wild in a space of 20 yards. The most prolific were Anemone with about a half inch stem and in the most delicate shades. I cannot now say I remember all the varieties. Probably I gave them to you in letters but the best we can do now is - Anemone, Poppies, Argemone, Bees, Antirrhinum, Campanula, Marguerite, Orchids, Sweet

The part that I have crossed out was only padding put in whilst the Germans were closing the books. Read his in place of the crossed out line. "His party were no more popular at CTR as they seemed to have no knowledge of discipline and truck discipline and drove straight up to the CTR truck and blew on to this's dugout. Completely destroying all the careful work we had done in concealing our headquarters. I arrived and immediately we rapidly despoiling a lot of staff cars. Sir Philip seems<sup>VC</sup> may have been a brave man but he was a very pigheaded man and would not believe the information we passed on that German armored vehicles and armor were nearing us. He said that he would only believe it when he saw a German soldier taken from one end to the other of the vehicle, so we had to send out a tank hunting patrol as I have described a few lines down. I can tell you that my only thought when I heard that he had been captured was that he had probably brought it on himself

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to find all our camouflaged was just as far as roads were the enemy ~~was~~ advancing to the reconnaissance planes at St. Helena. On land it was two directions. His call on us after taking up our Army. "Jumbo" Wilson had a of Argemone. They were there and to come in the evening along the road road used at from choice. Telephone messages came from approaching at high speed would they open fire without decision not to and at party who had lost themselves. A Coy because of the evening darkness he arrived to get the first along from the only memory of the day but they could not I spent of conversation into one we had our own special service receive among particulars one of this day was that in day and that I had to in a faint whisper. It was long to the north as the desert and two platoons of ours attacked and two hundred part of the Katos to make up. about 50 miles forward and called the enemy camp. In fact an ambush. were unfortunately spotted morning they were attacked and one of our trucks was airplane bullets. Our only morning show and were

and I eventually got lost to despair and I'm damn as all my sleeping gear. Anyway I ended a very nice sleep I got from the mess and sleeping in his hole and she breakfast and reported to the job. After a hurried breakfast up my Archery Officer and more. As we got further for not like the job any better was advancing slowly. The night appeared and I knew out ahead of us today. I follow us about an hour beautiful gazelle. The first to see the Ben was on the as the sound of automatic firing back. We tried to be success. This was a rotten night with it. The Carrier was an old one and soon to complete our job on foot way we were carrying a plane flat over. We both mountains on the ridges either did not see us or about. On the way home we cut German plane which did see no signs of the crew. It just about now was an about. Admittedly they were struck were marvellous - nearly 18 varieties of Common ivy a space of 20 yards with about a half inch shade. I cannot see a variety. Probably I gave but we can do how to bark, Antbirds, Ravens, rumpalates, vireos, and

by sheer stupidity and that it was the best thing that had happened to the British Army in the Desert. That thought is without knowing the true story of his capture.

leaf, purple iris and blueflower. Range to find all our cultivated flowers here. The whole of hands I was quiet as far as raid was concerned - information was that the enemy had advancing slowly. The 8<sup>th</sup> was also quiet but the reconnaissance planes information was that the enemy were at El Adfata. Our hands I we had a little bit of excitement on two occasions. Sir Philip Neame K.C. was expected to call on us after taking up his appointment to command the Desert Army "Jumbo" Wilson had relinquished his to become Governor of Hyderabad. They were expected at some certain time or other and to come in the normal way from the rear. Not necessarily along the road as no one who could travel off the road used it from choice. We received a shock when a telephone message came from A Coy that a number of cars were approaching at high speed across the desert from our left. Should they open fire without question? This made the fortunate decision not to and it turned out to be the inspecting party who had lost horses. They were I gather not to popular about A Coy because of the dust they had made and after receiving directions he arrived at HQ. I shall have to wait and get the full story from Ross before we have him again. My only memory of the visit was that it was very interesting but they were not a great the whole time of the most interesting conversation and was of the making stuff. After he left we had our usual dinner from the car but we did not receive any particulars about it. My only other memory of this day was that I had decided to have a washing day and that I had to change and have a bath as well in a faint jungle. It was probably funny to have my dobbing about the night on the desert. A tanking patrol was arranged and two platoons of ours were motorised, four pioneers were attached and two hundred pounds, some RT guns and part of the K80s to make up. The idea was to leave at night go about 50 miles forward and into Tripoli and lie up and catch the enemy tanks or Armored Cars on the way. In fact an ambush. They lay up most of the day but were unfortunately spotted by a plane late at night. Next morning they were attacked by planes by machine gun fire and one of our trucks was destroyed. Not by fire but by explosive bullets. Our troops rather expected an early morning show and were

skulking away from the trucks. The prisoners were under a  
 culvert on the road and you can imagine their surprise to  
 discover that it was used for demolition and that the explosion  
 was in position. Having been discovered there was no further  
 use in the parcel which returned towing the damaged  
 trucks. Some miles from home it failed absolutely and  
 had to be abandoned. We later sent out and stripped  
 it of all its worthwhile parts. I inspected the second  
 30cwt and it looked a mess although not hit in any  
 vital part. The running board on one side had been  
 shot away, there were numerous bullet holes through  
 the bonnet and where the driver sat the back cushions  
 had been riddled with bullets. It was not sitting there  
 at the time. It was really marvellous that this truck  
 had not been hit in any vital part. During the 4<sup>th</sup> one  
 of our plans had been out on reconnaissance and had  
 got a bit too cheeky and flew to low to observe. Some  
 small arms fire from the ground had held his truck  
 and he succeeded in getting as near home as Clay's area  
 again and had to crash land in the best piece of ground  
 he could see. He was an Australian named Rowinson  
 I think a Sydney rider but he was a very happy jolly  
 chap. He was brought to OTHQ and we fed him - by the  
 way he was unharmed - and was chartered by Hallelujah  
 "Hurricane Joe" both from his way of meeting us and  
 from the plane he flew. We could not send him back  
 immediately as he was being relieved by the 5<sup>th</sup> br  
 and going into reserve. I went back to reconnoitre the  
 new positions and was coming back just at dusk when  
 I hit Thea and Crocks. The plans had been changed and  
 I had to lead the Battalion into a position we had  
 occupied before but by a route I had not before been over.  
 I had a helluva time and finally got them in not  
 before I had driven my trucks into a couple of slit  
 trenches in the dark. Late I missed by a foot going  
 into a six foot deep and round circular hole dug for  
 a Bren after position. I went back and reported to Theo  
 and found they had left me one bottle of beer. They  
 had a party with Hurricane Joe whilst the relief was  
 being completed and about midnight I finally left the

5<sup>th</sup> to our positions and went into reserve - the first time we  
 had turned our backs on the enemy for 70 days. I had had  
 a couple of tanks with Henry the first time I had seen him  
 since we met on the road to Giovanni Centa. It was full  
 of his fumes at Brens and how beautiful the place was. On  
 the 5<sup>th</sup> we found ourselves in our new position and some  
 small adjustments were necessary from our occupying it  
 in the dark. It was actually a position we had dug and occupied  
 I think for two hours. In the night of 6<sup>th</sup> the desert changed  
 color. All the beauty of the flowers and any greenness were  
 absolutely wiped clean like a slate by a hot wind and  
 when we got up it was just desert - sandy color and grey.  
 In no hands the 6<sup>th</sup> of 8<sup>th</sup> were all quiet as far as tanks  
 were concerned. On the 6<sup>th</sup> there was a rumor we were to be  
 relieved and on the 8<sup>th</sup> an advance reconnaissance force from  
 a Battalion which was to relieve us came up. They we know  
 we were really for a brief touch. The C.P. of the 17<sup>th</sup> br spent  
 all the 8<sup>th</sup> suspecting our positions and obtaining all the  
 information he could give him. We particularly warned  
 him about trucks standing together, movement and  
 tracks, whether he took it all in or not I do not know  
 but I know that when a further reconnaissance party  
 came up on the 9<sup>th</sup> they were told but took little notice.  
 The period of six months has elapsed since last I wrote in  
 this as the first six books were taken away during a  
 search of my room for censoring and I have just got them  
 back with the "Gepuff" stamp hereon. To continue about  
 one o'clock on the 9<sup>th</sup> two of the new British trucks were  
 standing together with half a dozen men around them -  
 all this absolutely contrary to our advice and practice  
 when two German planes came down the road from  
 Bengasi on the way home. It was like a drill. As  
 soon as they saw these two trucks one plane fell  
 away from the formation they were in - flew the  
 half mile from the road and dropped a bomb  
 into these two trucks as target. It was the best  
 lesson they could have given the newcomers as  
 fortunately the bomb missed its target but was  
 close enough to be very uncomfortable. Fortunately  
 also there were no casualties. During the day we

received our final orders for the handover. This was to go ahead on leave and I was to bring the Battalion down to Alessandria. Both he and the Brigadier were going ahead together and the relief was to take place at midnight on the 9/10 March. Before I go on to the actual handover here are a number of isolated things I want to tell you of our stay at Kerena Baza. I don't know when they occurred chronologically so they will be haphazard. I cannot remember whether I have mentioned Camethons or not before. Its a little dry brush scattered all over the desert rather sparsely and at all sorts of intervals from a few yards to hundreds of yards. I do not know whether Cameths actually eat it or not but it gave me a small feeling of invisibility when checked out in its very short shadow if you were caught out in the open with planes overhead. Rather like the ostrich I fear but it helped I can assure you. I grew only about a foot high and about the same around. I have cursed it heartily when I have fallen into it. During our stay here I was able to get the radio into Bengasi and to other A.S.C.'s. This work we were able to keep the men supplied with cigarettes, chocolate and toilet preparations very well as well as surrounding small suits. Two British Tommies walked 12 miles to us for tobacco. The brush telegraph worked even in the desert. I was also able to bring up limited quantities of beer and whiskey for the boys and so we were not without some luxuries. As I told you before the Italian mineral water "Kecora" was as good as soda water. One of the surprises of our stay was the provision of fresh meat by the Army Service Corps. This finally paying all our accounts and trading in the desert realized over £200 profit and that on an original capital of between £2 and £6 Egyptian. Another surprise for us at Kerena Baza was the supply by the A. S. C. of fresh meat - a thing we craved for. Not always tender but very good. It was done by the discovery of large quantities of meat in the refrigerating chambers at Bengasi. These were soon put into operation again after the capture of the

town and as far as I know meat was continually kept here by us. By this time our C. Cookson - that is our supply and carrying and cooking part was up near the Battalion. Instead of dividing his meat we were able to save some cooking on the primus stoves and instead deliver at least one and usually two hot meals at Kerena and Kerka - each Company's cooks operating for the second time for their company. All our tradesmen were up with Cookson and everything purchased as if we were in a training camp except that our vehicles were very orderly disposed and to save the engines the whole radiator was dug into the ground. Thus the truck was on anchorline with the nose into the ground. It had to be done carefully as too steep and incline drained all the oil out and damaged the motor. I had to be very careful after the first air attack in getting the drivers to dig their trucks in however which ground they had to shift. Trucks a lot had to be dug out for a 30 cent truck - most drivers soon became expert in unleaving any small hill or fold in the ground as it took less digging than on the flat. Following on anything about vehicles we were absolutely sold on track ~~and~~ discipline - that is to say we were allowed to drive any where we pleased and make numerous tracks to show up from the air and disclose either the size, the importance or the position of any part of the Battalion. For instance we made a circular track around our Battalion Headquarters. Any Car approaching had to keep to this track. The balance of the distance had to be done on foot. Otherwise if allowed to drive anywhere right up to the door and stop the tracks would all show up to aeroplanes as finishing in one spot denoting a Headquarters of some sort and therefore worthy of attention. During the whole of our stay our Headquarters position was not completely necessarily shifting it and better still we were not bombed. This success was not easy and earned us a lot of hard work impressing our views even more particularly on the cars and trucks of other visiting units.



This was a good test for the Regimental force and even then Theo, the Adjutant and I were always taking someone off for not subscribing to orders and advice. Later that of travelling too fast and raising a dust cloud which also gave positions away. We also received a large batch of over a hundred Reservoirs of a mixed degree of training. Some of our old hands both wounded and sick had returned after recuperation. On the other hand and very much to the other extreme we now had spent Christmas Day in Melbourne and consequently was absolutely untrained. On the way up and the day before they were delivered to us they had had their bladders of fire as they were machine gun strafed from the air. One man was killed and another slightly wounded. As they were only a draft in transit they had no picks or shovels or such equipment and they had to make best they could do with bayonets and tin hats and scraps of shallow holes for themselves. - after the horse had bolted of course. Anyway as soon as they arrived and had reported we dispersed them in an area for the night - gave them picks and shovels and made them dig us to our standard pattern. During the early hours of next morning I drafted them to the various Companies in accordance with requirements and special capabilities and sent them off. I really deserved the kicking off Theo gave me for sending Coy's men off without arranging to transport their blankets. It was a bit much for unseasoned troops to send them off on a 10 kilometre march loaded with their blankets. Fortunately for them I was able to arrange a truck to meet them on the way and recover my mistake. A very amusing incident occurred during the night with Theo. I don't think I have told you about it before. If I have well skip it. When we were sending out our tank hunting patrols the Officers were called in during the night to receive their orders. On moving from one Company area to another at night in the desert it is best to follow the phone line. Even with a compass your

might miss your destination by passing a hole in the ground and camouflaged - by not seeing it two yard away. Anyway both Officers picked up the wire and followed it expecting to end up at signal headquarters where the phone exchange was located and from here to get directions as to the CO's whereabouts. What actually happened was that the signallers in laying the wire attached Theo's own phone between the Coy and the exchange and tied the wire to one of the poles holding up his ground sheet. Both officers and Theo were not so appreciably entertained as they each met by falling on to Theo on his back and through the roof of his dugout. The first time was taken for bad luck but Theo's language in the middle of the night was blue when it happened a second time when the second patrol commander arrived half an hour after the first. His small dugout was completely ruined, as most of one side was trampled down onto his sketches or notes. Another incident connected with Theo was or should be given the title "You can't miss it". Invariably we found that when receiving directions as to finding someone that your informant usually ended up with these words. And invariably some important but small piece of information was left out and you did miss it. It hit Theo very badly. The Brigadier on our last night decided to leave for Alexandria on leave with Theo before the relief was completed. During the day Brigade altered their position and Theo had not travelled over, the new route as he was busy handing over to the new Cdr. Mr. Halliday had however been sent there as Liaison Officer for the day and he knew the route. When the Brig. phoned giving the altered timing he only allowed Theo about an hour to get ready and travel to Brigade. It was just dark then so Halliday deserted the route and ended up with the fatal words "You can't miss it". Theo in his excitement and urge to get away did not query how and set off. About a quarter of an hour later Halliday said. "My God, I did not tell him there was a

slight bend in the track where the barrels which mark it are broken. I hope he does not keep on along the barrels. It was too late to do anything about it so we hoped for the best. Of course they made the wrong turns and travelled fairly on before discovering that he was out on the track. On trying to locate it by a shot out his car broke into asphalt tracks and went ashle deep. He and Pacey his batman spent about an hour digging it out with this cursing like hell as he was already late. Then they discovered they were lost and felt worse. Then by a stroke of wonderful luck they saw a large shape moving slowly against the skyline about half a mile away. It really was wonderfully lucky to see a truck that distance in the dark. They halted after it and further luck found that it was one of Brigade's supply trucks going to Brigade. They followed it in and to Theo's relief found that he was not late as the bus had finally decided to await the completion of the relief. All this we found out a fortnight later when I next saw him. On the subject of losing yourself at night Russ Godby provided our star turns at least three nights a week. I have mentioned before how easy it was to lose your direction in the desert at night and it became a standard drill before darkness set in to pass your blipping hole and line it with a star as well as counting the number of paces on the way in to the mess. If you had a compass it took the bearing. Russ soon established a reputation for leaving the mess trucks in the dark about eight o'clock and arriving at his slit any time between 2 am and the worst 4.30 am. On this particular night he walked in circles and arrived at every part of his slits at least twice and at signal tops three times setting a direction. He only had to walk about two yards from the mess trucks and in the end was almost afraid to go home. He used to start him off alright but

never knew until that morning whether he had slept well or not. I know how easily you could pass your camouflaged hole in the dark. Twice I passed mine within three yards and missed it. Jack Cook also passed me an incident of the same kind. After dark and quite early in the night he left his office to go some short distance away. Whether he was overconfident or not I do not know but he lost his way and kept wandering around all night until at dawn he found his bearings. He was near an old Turkish castle about a mile away from Brigade. He was very annoyed. In writing all this for your darling I have found that one and then 2 years of prison life has dulled my memory and in a book I am reading today I find a passage which puts the case in words much better than I can so I shall quote it. "In looking back now I find it extraordinary how little I remember vividly. There are a dozen clear pictures; there are hundreds of blurred and misty ones and many others so dim as to be no more than the swiftly passing shadows of shadows; but how few are the vivid clearly drawn pictures and how trivial! The trivialities that hook themselves into our minds and remain lasting memories when more important matters have long faded. And the few vivid memories I have I am quite unable to place in chronological order; they are just a jumble dredged up haphazard from the subconscious shoals during thoughts in the dark phases of my mind." That is what this life has done to me. Memory is dead and I cannot remember things clearly and only after an effort. There are times when I have been sorry I have not kept a voluminous day to day diary but in the aggregate I am not sorry for I feel it would have been only sporadic with large gaps. Therefore I have adopted this method for you and whilst lots of the things are not so clear as I wish I think that at no other time will I have the inclination or the leisure. So you stand the chance. By this way of getting at least 90% of my travels and adventures and best of all - all at once.

The Pioneer Platoon at <sup>23</sup>Maraca began justified robbery  
the work put into their training and the value set  
on them. Apart from the routine job of digging for  
logs. Battle had here they really came into their  
own as the Battalion engineers. We had to lay a  
minefield in front of B. Coy's position protecting  
the space between the trenches and the road. As  
the march drew up the minefield had to be extended  
and they were constantly on the job. In the early  
stages we had Italian mines they and even drew  
rows out of detonators for these. The second-in-command  
of the Div. Reconnaissance Regiment who was  
visiting Brigade asked Theo if there was anything  
he could do. When we explained the position he  
offered to drive back to Belmont Hall where we  
knew there were large stocks from the deloused  
minefield here. His offer was accepted and he  
set off. He did the round trip of over 300 miles  
in under 2 days. This allowed the Pioneer to  
complete the urgent job and making us feel  
safer as I would remind you of the reports of armoured  
enemy vehicles moving towards us. Later we  
received about 400 British mines and these we  
used to thicken up our present minefield and  
also to mine the tracks through the marshes and  
on our flanks. Very much later - I think in  
France & but it could have been here we read  
of the diary of a German officer - in it he  
complained of the desert and flies and life in a  
tank but worst of all of the cunningly concealed  
mines the British had left behind at Maraca  
even along the tracks and which caused them  
great difficulty. These were the mines our Pioneer  
Platoon had laid. They further had to furnish  
details for the Tank Infantry fabric of which I  
have already mentioned. At Ogishia India work  
at Fortruk and here was highly working. The  
band instruments which arrived from India  
harmed just as we left Carce where a great  
nuisance to us as they kept a truck fully  
occupied and loaded and of course could not

<sup>23</sup>be used and were an incumbrance. The day before our  
relief I received orders to take some representatives of the  
Dre Brants company who were operating with our brigade  
on the same reconnaissance as I had done previously  
with a view to showing them any suitable country I  
had noticed to enable them to establish an anti-tank  
barrier to cover the relief. They were sent over from Carce  
and the party on arrival consisted of an English Captain  
Rose and a French Lieutenant in a little baby Fiat.  
They arrived in time for lunch and we took them into  
the mess trucks - fed them and gave them a couple of  
drinks for which they were truly thankful. The Englishman  
told us that he had been attached to the Dre Brants by  
a liaison officer as a penalty for a misdemeanour on  
leave. He said he had in a moment of mental exuberance  
brought a flower to a superior officer without taking it  
out of the vase. It was either the desert or his job or  
court martial. After lunch we got into the car - went  
into the back seat amongst a lot of miscellaneous  
gear and we started off. Rather abruptly I found that  
parts of the floor moved and an investigation found  
about two dozen live fuzes stuck in pairs just  
knew anywhere. It turned out that on the way in  
they had bought them from an Arab. We did our  
job and after a final drink they left - just on leaving  
the Frenchman offered me four drinks but I turned  
his offer down with thanks. The only other episode I  
want to tell you is of one day when I was writing letters  
to you and being and sitting out of the wind in the  
cabin of the six stops trucks. It was a bad day for our  
alarms and I think in the time it took me to write  
these letters we had six or seven alarms and I  
had to drop every thing and dash for a slit trench  
about 20 yards away. You had to be sleepy as the  
hazards of time between an alarm from our sentries  
and the planes overhead was very small. I think  
that is all the incidents I want to tell you about  
and I can now get on to the actual relief. As I  
told you Theo was to go ahead on leave with the  
brig and I was to bring the Battalion back. He was  
called over to brigade at 9 o'clock on March 9 and

from then on as far as I knew I was in command. Actually they did not leave until the relief was completed. It was scheduled to be finished at midnight the 17<sup>th</sup> but coming from Adjabah where they had spent the day they departed. Their CO expected them to arrive at about 10 o'clock and from then on I was very much on edge as I wanted to get away on the way back to Adjabah where I was to spend the rest of the night with the Co. and move forward in a Brigade Convoy next day. As time went on and there was no sign of the relieving Co I was getting very anxious and upset at their non appearance as every minute counted in getting our men about 40 miles and some sleep as well. To cut a long story short they arrived about an hour late. It appears that their second in command had on his own responsibility, delayed the start of their move anyhow later than ordered by his CO so that they could travel by moonlight. That was all very well for them but it left us little or no time to do the 40 miles to Adjabah before daylight. Anyway we completed handover and I assembled the Co by 1 o'clock on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>. As the Brig had finally decided to wait until the Brigade changeover was complete and Brock was picking up every 10 minutes after I had advised the progress and arrival of the 17<sup>th</sup> I can assure you that my remarks were very terse and to the point to the CO of the 17<sup>th</sup> particularly on the matter of timings. Just before I packed my trucks I made a gift to him of two Italian Spring mattresses I had been using and for which I could see no further use and as well would be a nuisance in the special packing of my trucks we had to adopt. Incidentally there are some other things which I shall have to tell you verbally which occurred on his last day to remind me. I can tell you I was a very relieved man when I finally reported the changeover as complete and gave the signal in the darkness for our Co to move off. I should forget the drive to Adjabah very quickly. Chapman was in the front with me and the drive O'Kelly and Chapman's batman in the back of

the truck. Due to the late arrival of the 17<sup>th</sup> we had lost any chance of travelling by moonlight and we had to travel very slowly in the darkness with Chapman hanging out one side and I as far as possible out the other so that we could see the edge of the road. Our progress was a series of sways from one side to the other and when the cold got to much and we closed up the windows and drove along a straight stretch we were so tired that the warmth made us go to sleep and twice we nearly went into the ditch. It was only the slight bump of the headstone and before the ditch that saved us some and time again. It was nearly three am before we met our guides for the Bwona area and four trucks before every one was in and I was able to get one hours sleep before dawn at 5 o'clock. It was truly a nightmare night. During the time I was getting the Co. dispersed I received brigade orders for the move on the next day and I think appointing 6 am as the time we would pass the starting point - a kilometre roadpost about three kilometres ahead. They also stressed very heavily the importance of keeping to time and I made sure my convoy passed the starting line absolutely on the dot. I wish I could have had Brock with me when about a kilometre past our starting point we were held up by Brigade C bachelors coming on to the road about half an hour late. We had to halt and unfortunately the troop carrying vehicles piled up nose to tail. I had a lot to say later about that and about Brigade. Anyway I can assure you that I absolutely soaked overhead and about half a mile to the left. I did not give the order for troops to jump out of their trucks as I felt any movement there would be fatal. I lay watching those planes with my heart in my hands expecting them to turn rather magically and then give us hell. We were in an absolutely perfect position as a machine gunning target and apart from my fears of their attacking us thoughts of the casualties to men and vehicles which would

occurs if they did attack. <sup>226</sup> made that few minutes some of the most unpleasant of my life. And what was left of my brain consigned the Colgado Transport Office to Sector 15 all the tortures of the damned for long late and causing us to be caught in this position literally with our pants down. It was the Colonel that gave again except that this time I was in command and responsible. I can assure you that I lost no time in stretching out on the road and moving at a good pace as soon as it was clear and the planes gone well out of sight. It was some miles before my anger and nerves settled down. After that came the monotony of driving at convoy pace mile after mile across uninteresting landscape with only the customary habits of very short detours for lunch etc. The troops did very well at these habits and showed their truck discipline was high. The only break in the day was a big detour we had to make around a land mine dropped on the road. The detour was about half a mile radius around this mine on which work was going on. Off the road we raised quite a cloud of dust but it could not be helped. It was not until we reached the right belt that Jack Young told me that during the time we were passing over the detour a flight of a dozen enemy planes passed along the road just over a ridge on the other side of the road. They fortunately did not know of its investigation and left us undisturbed. Probably they had as bombs or ammunition to waste as they were on their way home. It was as well I did not know about their presence as I was going on as another scare so close on the one I had just had would have been very bad for my heart. I have just remembered one last thing of Sector 15. During the whole time we were here we had attached to us for our area protection a troop of three Bofas guns. These are light anti aircraft artillery and know a shell about 2 lbs in weight when they explode or incendiary at the planes. It is rather wonderful to watch the shells travel through the air and explode around the

planes but they have to get a direct hit to be dangerous. They went very close many times but the crew had the joy of seeing a plane crash near us. The area was so large that they could not be used correctly but they nevertheless gave us a feeling of confidence. Enemy planes did not like them and immediately rose to over 5000 feet at which the Bofas is ineffective. They are an automatic weapon. Clips of ten fed in and pressing a pedal fires them at the rate of 120 to the minute. We drove in at dusk into the scrub at the side of the road where our intelligence section who had gone forward much earlier with Jack Bishop had laid out our company signs and all slept well. On the way from Adgebar to this place by name Socra we had passed Bengasi this time correctly taking the by-pass around the town. Therefore we did not see the town again except in the distance - a fact of which I was glad as at all times during the day the town and fort were subject to raids. The last seventeen miles to Bengasi from Semins were rather beautiful as we travelled along the avenue of Gums the Italians had planted. It made most of us homesick. Around the few miles of the by-pass they had planted thousands of wattles and although they were not in bloom we could appreciate what a wonderful sight they would be. At Socra I was able to go across and see Henry - the 5th being on the other side of the road. Nothing else occurred except that later in the night a truck we had dropped off on the way to go about an extra 15 miles to pick up some stuff arrived with chocolate, cigarettes and tinned fruit from the Australian Company Dunk. O'Reilly I think was able to buy a few eggs from an Irish family nearby and we had them for breakfast. We started off at dawn next day with our night stop to be Serna. He passed through Baraca and Barce and all the towns I named on the way up. At Barce I met Jack Bishop at the burn off and with him was Jimmy Lyellor Barportane who was a private in a Light A.C. Coy. His troop had a part in the defence of Barce whilst Jack brother

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Chilipe was still in Palestine as far as I know at this time. We stayed a short while chatting and as soon as the Car caught up, for Jack had sent me a message to hurry on so that I could spend some time with them I took my place again and continued to lead the Car on our convey. My return to Barce convinced me that the tale of Barce was the prettiest little valley I had seen since leaving Anahata. The rains had freshened everything and a green carpet of grass and fruit trees stood out against the chocolate colored earth. Altogether after the desert one of the most pleasing of sights to our eyes. At Barce too we picked up knee sabres who I ought to mention had been evacuated about a week ago from Sierra Gorda to hospital with bacilio - a very irritating skin infection but easily cured under proper conditions. He had made a round on the Australian bankers store and had two or three bottles of whiskey and some sherry. Strangely enough one brand of whiskey called Old Angus was far and above the best I have ever tasted. It was absolutely liquid gold whilst the other - quite a well known brand called Highland Queen tasted rather like a mixture of ketchup and redogated spirits by comparison. Our days trip was only interrupted by two things - one a halt occasioned by a blow up on the carportment. This time from Barce we took the coast road to Umana and instead of the road we came in by, a few miles out of Barce we halted on the road which ran alongside of a rocky and very deep wadi. It was rocky and about as far as we could see. Just opposite to us on the other side we could see little caves on the side which had been strengthened and rocks erected for the defence and so cleverly done and sighted that they were hard to see. If the Italians had defended this place as they had intended it would have been extremely difficult to winkle them out. To get to him it looked that only a mountain goat could do it. Having advanced along the Inner Road made the whole position unshakable and we were lucky. Six normal horses two mules spanned this wadi further on and during their retreat the Italians had destroyed

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them as well as making other effective destructions on the road particularly at hair pin bends. After a wait of at least an hour we were able to continue and found that the time had been taken in clearing away or trucks which had gone over just at the turn off from the road where the temporary tracks left at a very steep incline. All our convey successfully negotiated this and we took the tracks which wound down the side of the wadi - along the bottom and up the other side. Most of the motor were nearly boiling before we crept over the lip so the whole climb had to be one just gear - the grade was so steep. During our crossing of the wadi we came across parties of the 1st Australian Pioneer Battalion who had recently landed and were on their first job. It was rather a surprising one and from the bottom ~~of~~ it looked like months of work. Jack Sandcastle was not with any of the parties I was able to speak too as it was impossible to stop or the convey behind we would have stopped also and a steady stream had to be maintained at all costs. It was only once or twice whilst halted while the truck ahead - a very big one was negotiating some of the steep patches that I was able to look around. Over the top we came out again on a beautiful macadam road and kept on at a steady 23 miles per hour speed - which allowed us to average our ordered 20 miles in the hour convey speed. Further on we passed the turn off on the left to Umana and approached the center of the ancient Roman civilization. Umana was here for a time and he like others who had been there was full of the remains of the place which had been carefully restored by the Italians. They had a museum there from which they had been successful in removing some of the world famous statues to Italy only a few days before our arrival. Both Umana and I would have liked to have turned off and driven the 3 miles only into Umana but you cannot lightly toss your responsibilities aside and do so. At least I couldn't. So we continued on and for rather cold comfort saw a Roman of perfect masonry

alongside the road absolutely dead straight for at least six miles - built of stone and it looked as if it would function beautifully were it only cleared out. We also saw sites which we fondly decided were the ruins of old Roman villas. Chapman always liked to be definite about everything so I let him walk away whether I thought him right or wrong. The enforced halt just outside Basel had thrown our march table right out and it was not until nearly dark that we approached the summit of the escarpment leading down to the little plain around the mouth of the Wadi Berna and at the other end of which lay Berna. The escarpment was between 200 and 300' in height and the Italians had again demonstrated their road building genius. It was a beautiful road winding round with ~~the~~ many hairpin bends that I lost count. The road was so well crowned and the curves so well banked that it was a pleasure to drive on it. It did not arouse any fear, as it was rapidly becoming darker we were unable to enjoy the view and just carried on, as on the day before a specially selected reconnaissance party had gone ahead under Brigade arrangements to choose our bivouac site and a couple of miles further on we saw our unit signs stuck in the ground. We turned off and shortly the whole bus was dispersed among the rocks against the side of the road. After a cold meal we turned in and slept. I would not allow fires as we were still within bombing distance. Jack Bishop came over just as we were going to bed and I shared a bottle of cherry brandy which had given me. He was very fed up with Brooks who was interfering in the Convoy. Briefly to explain going towards an enemy a Convoy is under G arrangements which is Brooks' job. Going back it is G or Jack Bishop's. It was not until later that I fully realised that Jack's eyes were opened to his imperfection by his attitude on the way back and he also realised that there was a good deal in the reserve and suspicion

with which we viewed Brooks and his orders and actions. He always found some scapegoat for his mistakes and never would be near enough to own up if he was wrong and would have to take the blame. These remarks my dear are very very subjective and are only put in to give you some explanation for any coolness you may have showed whenever I referred to Brooks. As to date this halt was for the night of 17/18 March, next morning our position in the Brigade Convoy was altered to last and I think it was about eight o'clock before I moved off. We travelled the few miles to Berna and there had a halt as the traffic ahead was not moving. Berna was noted as the most beautiful climate in Italy as well as I think having practically the only running water. It was really a colony for the rich and in normal times had a very good hotel and all sorts of amenities. All I saw of it was the few yards of the street where we were halted and it showed only a few signs of damage. All the houses I saw where typical Italian villas surrounded by trees. The harbour was only a small one and could not be seen from where we were. Our Convoy halted at its regular intervals but it was not half an hour before every available road space was jammed with trucks unable to back and unwilling to move conceivable unit. More and more trucks too were committing the sin of hunting but because a Convoy or line of trucks were halted that they could themselves do better and get through. Heaven knows how they imagined they were better able to do it than halted trucks who not know! All they did was to make an appalling congestion at the traffic blocks and make increased trouble. He spent time nearly 12.30 in the streets of Berna moving forward only a few yards at a time and not knowing what the trouble ahead was. With my past experience of trucks jammed nose to tail I was all the

Some worried as to <sup>whether</sup> whether we would be attacked from the air. As usual in these cases we were particularly vulnerable and I am afraid I was never phlegmatic enough not to worry about it. Each minute seemed an hour to me and Messers who had no responsibility need to wonder at my edginess. Anyway slowly the jam ahead thinned out and I had stopped all traffic trying to pass so that round about 12.30 we were able to move on. The Italians had blown up the road down the escarpment on both sides of Sena as they retreated. These hemisthons had been repaired and frankly in the dark I did not notice where they had damaged the road when we were coming down the night before. So I mounted the escarpment fully as steep going up as coming down the night before we passed the scene of the battle. Coming down a huge supply truck had travelled to a bend and to skid. Unfortunately it was a repair at a demilitarisation and the road was narrower. So save going over the side he had turned into the cliff and skidded sideways across the road very nearly doing what he had tried not to do. It had taken a long time to pull it aside sufficiently for us to negotiate the road and get around it. Upon leaving this area I remember that on our trip to Sena from Teora we had passed through the settlements of Luigi di Savoia (mentioned in connection with "Electric Chair" Bergonzio) and again Giovanni Berio where we had rested overnight during our long marches around Sena. As the car flattened out onto the level after the escarpment we saw the defences of Sena which had held up the 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade and occasioned our enveloping marches - it seemed ages ago. The Wadi Sena was a magnificent spectacle and easily defended. The stone defence wall ran along the side and I was glad we did not have that job. On the left was the abutment across which the 11<sup>th</sup> Cn of 19 Cdo had had to

advance and you only have to see it to realise that the expression "as flat as a billiard table" was very true particularly of this escarpment. After passing the escarpment the fear of an attack very rapidly left me and it was rather amusing to see how the rest of the convoy seemed to surge it as they gradually drew closer and closer and the interval between trucks decreased to almost fifty yards in their unconscious eagerness. The journey was uneventful from then on except that near Tobruk our journey was enlivened by an unusual and amusing sight. I have mentioned before the roadhouses placed by the Italians at various points along the road. They are square white buildings with a flat roof and designed I imagine as rest houses for travellers crossing the desert. How they were staffed and what facilities they offered I cannot say nor do I know of anyone who could give it me. I read of a motor journey across the same road made a year before war and they do not mention them as they arranged brief stops in such towns as Benghazi. Anyway wherever of the A.I.F. who occupied this one must have had a lot of paint plus a lot of time, a skill in commercial advertising painting, a sense of humor and probably a Victorian although this deduction may be wrong. Anyway the side of the building was one huge sign. It consisted of a beautifully drawn and painted bottle of Abbot's Lager with the words "A good desert drink - But bloody hard to get." Underneath and along the bottom was the old homelike sign "10000 miles to Griffiths Seas". So I think he was a Victorian. It livened us up and I think as each truck passed the sign its occupants gave a spontaneous cheer. We finished our days trip quite early as it was only a little short of 100 miles from Sena to Tobruk and when we finally picked up our signs found that Engdell had allotted us the same area in the Wadi Zeboun as we had occupied after his battle of Tobruk. So it was rather like coming home if



you can call arriving at forward places that.  
I think that was rather painfully quiet after our first  
 hectic day. This brought us up to Sants. On the morning  
 of the 16<sup>th</sup> we settled down generally for a rest and more  
 particularly some of us for a lot of hard work. The troops  
 cleaned up and I arranged for them to repeat their  
 program as far as our last visit and go swimming. We  
 cleaned out an old store hut and established the mess  
 here and gave the Padre a room from which he  
 operated his canteen. This gave the troops their much  
 needed smiles but I could not arrange beer as the  
 A.A.C.I. said that all beer beer shops were earmarked  
 for the troops at the front line. He was rather a bad  
 joke on us. Still we succeeded in getting a few bottles  
 of beer and whiskey for the mess and so made life at  
 least tolerable. That I think summarizes the general  
 time. Dr. the Adjutant and I, the Quartermaster,  
 and the Transport Officer the first two days were ones  
 of secret activity. I was more or less known that we  
 were only on our way for a rest with a view to use in  
 some other sphere. Many were the ideas and con-  
 -jectures as to where and for places polar apart. We  
 had to make a list of deficiencies of stores - clothing  
 arms and ammunition and also go over all our  
 transport recommending those trucks for replacement.  
 We had some Italian trucks which had to be handed  
 in to Sants Headquarters as well as the old trucks  
 carrying a wily tank. Originally this had been  
 loaned to us for a short period but we were never  
 asked for its return and very sensibly kept quiet.  
 All these meant endless returns and finally to cut  
 a long story short Jack Brody went ahead with  
 our final returns to arrange for the stores to be  
 available. There are a number of events which  
 occurred here but I cannot remember in which  
 order so I shall just relate them. During the latter  
 part of our stay Brock was receiving all sorts of orders  
 preparatory to our move for an unknown destination  
 and from them arose the suspicion that our destination  
 was to leave 17 Cde and be replaced by the 11 Cde which  
 was also at Sants. It was very singular that as at

least six orders all be other Cds. including the 11<sup>th</sup> was  
 named but not the 7<sup>th</sup> Cde. Which made me feel but we  
 would at least leave them. Anyway I finally decided  
 probably to cross the bridge when we came to it. And  
 in the end nothing came of it although it was only once  
 more that we really were under Sants command.  
 I arranged with Brock that as Jack Young was showing  
 signs of strain that he should go on leave ~~as~~ perhaps  
 as it appeared that he would be busy as soon as we  
 arrived in Alexandria with new transport. I had to  
 press the matter fairly strongly and at last he agreed  
 to let him spend some days in Berna. We had  
 not received and did not anticipate any movement  
 order for the 7<sup>th</sup> Cde as they had been conspicuously  
 left off all the orders. Strongly enough the next  
 day I had to send a motorcycle orderly to Berna  
 recalling Young as the Correction had been made.  
 Jack spent a very pleasant night in the hotel with  
 Baxter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Cde who was acting as Down major  
 and incidentally I think was very handsomely  
 at poker after looting everything but his last pound.  
 So, chance how your memory comes back. We lost  
 badly at poker and then they imitated two  
 Englishmen to two-up and recouped themselves  
 and a lot more. Twice I went into the town of  
 Sants. The barbers still had not changed minds  
 and the town was absolutely dead except for  
 area shops. Soapy I know got a bath and I had  
 arranged one for some of the others when we had  
 to leave. On one of my visits I know I bought a  
 shirt and some underclothing and on the other  
 I went in to have a look at the Corps order ammuni-  
 -tion decorations. Word had reached us at Berna  
 Braga after Theo left of his D.S.O but none of the  
 others. I was hoping I may have been on it but  
 the only ones were Halliday, Davis and Caporale.  
 I still did not give up hope as there were only the  
 immediate awards and it was not till some  
 time later that Theo told me that all I could  
 hope for was a "mention" and that I was pretty  
 certain for that. Later he told me some of the

inner details as I could understand. Sam's story  
not quite clear and one of these days hope to get  
the complete explanation. We celebrated the liberation  
at dinner one night. Donnell and Jeanette also  
received M.M.'s so we did quite well. One thing I  
remember quite clearly. Jack Bishop arriving one  
day and saying the noble's Oak Unit for the A.S.F.  
would be arriving in Tabarka and the 7<sup>th</sup> Co was down  
for a bath of the 27<sup>th</sup>. He left before that. Theo later  
told me he met the C.O. of this unit in the Canal  
in Alexandria and that he was an old friend  
of his. He had an air alarm one night and could  
not quite plainly see one plane in the moonlight over-  
head whilst we could hear others. At the same time  
a flashing red light was noticed in some direction  
and immediately we thought it was signals to the  
enemy plane. We took compass bearings and  
reported to Brigade and arranged to send out a  
patrol the next night in our endeavour to locate  
and capture it. Just before the patrol was due to  
leave the next night it was stopped by Brigade who  
had found out the light came from our aerodrome  
at el Adem some 15 miles away. So a very fruitless  
task was stopped. It was here too that I promoted  
Baker our P.O.M. to get rid of him to Transjordan.  
Sounds very Irish by a W.O.I. was called for and he at  
the time ranked as W.O.B. Another incident was recalled  
to me by Johnston. It seems that at some party on the  
beach Dickson lit his revolver off through the  
roof of the shed. I have absolutely no memory of  
it, so can only conclude I was at Brigade at the  
time. There was a conspiracy of silence about it for  
I never heard of it. I expect the washing I gave Sam  
Swigg at Helwan was still remembered. I can  
really think of nothing else that occurred here except  
to say that all the time in our dealings I had with  
Beck, I watched my step, went very warily and spent  
some time in consideration before coming to any  
decisions in which he was involved. It may sound  
strange all this harping but I think I can explain  
this situation much better verbally than in any

other way. Finally our orders <sup>249</sup>arrived and after a  
bit of scurry and bustle in having to return our  
Italian trucks into an area in Tabarka we were packed  
and ready to move. I believe that no captured Italian  
equipment was allowed to cross the Egyptian border  
but for what reason I do not know. Possibly the order  
was to prevent the Egyptians having any claim to any  
of it but that is or was only the popular guess. We  
started early in the morning and travelled over the  
road to Bardia which we had travelled before at night.  
Memories are with me for all parts of the road. We stopped  
for lunch in Bardia jokers - the road of course runs  
through it. But what a different desolate place it  
looked now, no life anywhere except a single Italian  
soldier guarding a dump of salvaged equipment and  
he looked as miserable as the dump. As we passed  
we could see our old Headquarters and I remembered  
again my feelings here. We passed the dump of wood  
through which we first advanced into Bardia,  
and here our first position - now on our right  
and here our <sup>249</sup>camping site with its water point. A few  
miles further on we passed the Egyptian - Italian  
frontier - still marked by barbed wire. I think  
Halliday and Swigg were annoyed with me when  
I did not give them permission to leave the convoy  
and visit Sol Green's grave which was about  
five miles off the road. Swigg's truck conveniently  
broke down further on and I think he asked to  
breakdown to get his own way. I was very short  
with him and his part with both of them and told  
them that memory in the heart was much more  
than empty visits to a grave. Particularly as we  
had a job to do. So was you cannot afford to dwell  
to hours on Caenottes. And I think Sol himself  
understands my rather involved sentences. A  
few miles further on we came to the edge of the occupied  
Arab Salun and his home we went down the beautiful  
made road dropping 1000 feet quickly but not so  
rapidly as the Derna one and having more  
straight stretches and less humps and bumps. It was  
a bright sunny day and we had a marvellous

28  
view of the Kaddarvans and the trapping of persons  
barbaric which, as a game and for use meant so much  
in the campaign. Most of these places would be a great  
disappointment to you if you could see them now. You  
probably have a very wrong perspective of what they look  
like from all the blarney in the newspapers and  
wordless. We continued on and found the road even  
worse than when we first travelled over this section  
three months ago. The traffic it had carried had  
cut it much more and because of the traffic it  
could not be effectively prepared and finished, so  
much so that it was a dust, dirty trip and the  
troops were covered in dust. We stayed for the night once  
again opposite Bug Bug and nothing happened here  
but I can remember, last morning we continued on  
passed through Sidi Barani and about five o'clock  
we arrived at Heron Bahari which was our  
destination and also the assembly point for units  
of every conceivable description. Going forward and  
coming back. One thing I forget at Bahari. We saw  
24 British Colon patches going past our troops carrying  
trunks but we were too far away to see anyone.  
The thought struck me as we entered Bahari was  
that it was being abandoned as a fortress now  
that we had pushed the enemy so far back. The  
Anti Tank ditches seemed to be nearly all full  
of wind blown sand. We contacted our advance  
party and they led us past the barracks which  
I confidently expected would house us for the  
period we would stay and about four miles  
further on we turned into a bare wind swept  
hollow and immediately dispersed and the  
troops following neural practices dug in. I can't  
remember but I think Brock said there was no  
need to but I would not depart from our passive  
our defence measures even if the danger was  
small. It turned out very fortunate for us that  
we did so for a sand storm brewed a couple  
of days later and the dunes were of immense  
benefit as shelter. Most of the incidents that  
followed are just as I remember them and not

in order. We received <sup>another</sup> draft of reinforcements  
needed - but in order

\*  
Duffell tells me he rejoined  
us at Ameyya a little later so  
to make this list correct I shall  
have to check the field return  
of the day to get the officers name  
who I have missed in my list.

members of the British Army  
whom we badly needed.  
I was with the British  
officers. Bradford, Captain  
Corrie, Godfrey, Duffell  
no journal so used to  
documents will be  
my memory is a little  
or into Companies and  
has the remaining members  
of strength plus first  
of strength. It is usual  
to the first reinforcements  
left in a depot camp  
no time every truck was  
and we had as well  
sold replaced by 1 ton  
Some of the mechanical  
is with the differential  
they proved as far as  
as many crows for they gave us  
absolutely no trouble in Greece. I will admit that  
we were only there a fortnight but they got such a  
rough handling that the fault they forecast would  
soon have appeared. We also had issued to us  
Thompson sub-machine guns and Smith and Wesson  
Revolvers which were the same ammunition as the  
Tommy Gun and were much lighter than the old  
Webley. The Tommy Gun was issued at one per  
section and had two types of magazine. One  
holding 20 bullets and the larger drum. They  
are very accurate up to 50 yards and are designed  
for very close work as you can spray bullets into  
a mass very easily. The troops liked them immensely  
and I ordered a beach range to be prepared  
and after initial instructions in the mechanism  
the whole Battalion fired. The revolver was not  
quite so popular as to use the Tommy Gun drum  
"skins" or circular plates had to be inserted. These  
were for easy ejection but it was damn difficult

new of the Mediterranean and the happening happen  
 harbor which as a base and for us meant so much  
 in the campaign. Most of these places would be a great  
 disappointment to you if you could see them now. You  
 probably have a very wrong perspective of what they look  
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 destination and also the assembly point for units  
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 24 Bar color patches going past no troop carrying  
 trucks but we were too far away to see anyone.  
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 of sand blown sand. We contacted our advance  
 party and they led us past the barracks which  
 I confidently expected would house us for the  
 period we would stay and about four miles  
 further on we turned into a bare wind swept  
 hollow and immediately dispersed and the  
 troops following usual practice dug in. I can't  
 remember but I think Crook said there was no  
 need to but I would not depart from our passive  
 or defence measures even if the danger was  
 small. It turned out very fortunate for us that  
 we did so for a sand storm brewed a couple  
 of days later and the slits were of immense  
 benefit as shelter. Most of the incidents that  
 follow are just as I remember them and not

in order. We received another draft of reinforcements  
 mixed - but no old and new members of the 6th Army  
 there were some new officers whom we badly needed.  
 by new I mean fresh as fresh as they were with the 6th  
 before. I think they were 10th officers. Bradford, Captain  
 Dillard, Chandler, Neil - Morris, Godfrey, Fairful  
 Kerrigan, Batchelor. If ever his journal is used to  
 work a Battalion history then documents will be  
 needed as to his names as my memory is a little  
 bit clouded. I drafted the new into Companies and  
 the numbers of reinforcements plus the remaining members  
 brought the 6th up to full war strength plus first  
 reinforcements - that is 10% of her strength. It is usual  
 for a 6th to work if possible with its first reinforcements  
 to a theatre of war. Here they are left in a depot camp  
 and replace casualties. All this time every truck was  
 being overhauled by a Workshop and we had as well  
 a large number of 1500 cc chevrolts replaced by 4 ton  
 chevrolts and lost all Orks. Some of the mechanical  
 engineers forecast great trouble with the differential  
 of these ~~and~~ one-tonners but they proved as far as  
 we were concerned so many crows for they gave us  
 absolutely no trouble in Greece. I will admit that  
 we were over here a fortnight but they got such a  
 rough handling that the fault they forecast would  
 soon have appeared. We also had issued to us  
 Thompson submachine guns and Smith and Wesson  
 Revolvers which use the same ammunition as the  
 Tommy Gun and were much lighter than the old  
 Deley. The Tommy Gun was issued at one per  
 section and had two types of magazine. One  
 holding 20 bullets and the large ~~one~~ 50. They  
 are very accurate up to 50 yards and are designed  
 for very close work as you can spray bullets into  
 a mass very easily. The troops liked them immensely  
 and I ordered a black range to be prepared  
 and after initial instruction in the mechanism  
 the whole Battalion fired. The revolver was not  
 quite so popular as to use the Tommy Gun ~~as~~  
 "thru" or circular plates had to be inserted. These  
 were for easy ejection but it was damn difficult

To get the empty shells<sup>250</sup> of these shells. The revolver  
had been designed for rim cartridges and this new  
ammunition was useless so some means had to  
be found. This was the answer. We found the revolver  
fired alright without the shells but the exploded  
case swelled and stuck in the revolver. So we  
reasoned that if necessary we could fire six shots  
very quickly with the shells and then load  
and fire without them and so get off 12 shots before  
having to stop and spend some time reloading  
that we would by then be either dead or had  
carried our objective. They were a beautiful light  
and very accurate weapon and being American  
was only a stop gap and the only equipment (was  
obtainable in middle East. What the G's were  
shooting Chapman Gaby and I went a bit further  
along the beach and had a swim. I could not  
allow the G's in as there were some very treacherous  
currents and it would have been too easy to  
lose a number of men with G's in the water. Just  
as I came out and we had been very careful  
a runner arrived with a message that I was  
wanted at Brigade HQ, which was in a  
barracks at the entrance to harbor Kabul. I  
went down and Brock sort of apologized for us  
having to sleep in the open but said it was  
unavoidable as the whole of the barracks was  
in occupation by other troops. I rather doubted  
him but the upshot was that the 19 Bde were  
moving out and we could move in. We marched  
carrying all our kit about four miles and  
for the first time since Carl slept under a  
roof. I doubt very much if any of the 19 Bde had  
been in the barracks we were allotted as they  
were so filthy that they had to be absolutely  
cleaned out thoroughly before I would permit  
anyone to open their kits. There must have been  
hundreds of empty beer bottles thrown out a  
dump. We only occupied them for two nights and  
they were left speckled when we left. I purposely  
inspected them myself and found my standard

251  
much higher than anyone else. It was different I  
admit as we had no brooms or barrack furniture  
but something was found and the job done to my  
satisfaction. When we were in barracks we were  
near the 2 1/2 D Coy - How Young was 2 1/2 so I wandered  
over in a spare moment for a drink. They had been  
here some time and established a mess. I also  
found they still had two Italian prisoners they  
were cooking around. Strictly suburban - but one  
was an excellent cook and the other equally so  
as a tailor. They had got them at Bardia and  
had them ever since and finally lost them I  
believe in Alexandria when someone caught on.  
Whilst we were sleeping out I believe I told  
you we suffered a sand storm and it was  
the father and mother of them all. I think for  
nearly four hours all we could do was to stay  
under our brown sheets and suffer. We had  
a number of members of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division as they  
were passing through and the only two I can think  
of that you know were Charlie Wier who was here  
on 9 D's days and Shehan whom you mentioned  
in one of your letters. Wier discussed Brock with  
me and he fully understood from his previous  
knowledge of him how we felt. He also told me  
that Brock was the supreme spirit and brought  
of one man only - himself. And all his actions  
and lack of actions in the past amply bore this  
out. Once again I want you to promise that these  
things are for yourself only and not to be repeated  
as at present I feel nothing can be gained. The end  
I am in complete agreement and I only write these  
things of Brock as his journal is designed to  
tell you in writing many of the things I should  
tell you verbally. There are of course many  
incidents and things I have missed out but at  
the present I think I have most things in. The  
others will no doubt come out in conversation  
or suddenly spring to mind. There was a spate  
of adventure in driving around Kabul. It

had of course been fully <sup>252</sup> prepared as a fortress when  
the Italians first advanced and a very large  
and very thick minefield had been laid down.  
Some trucks of other units were laid around and  
seemingly were open and unworked  
ground promptly drove onto it and threw the  
front of the leading truck disappeared into the air.  
The story goes that the plan of the minefield had been  
lost when the danger of use was over but I cannot  
quite believe it. Anyway quite a number of trucks  
were blown up and I can assure you that we did  
not go off the road. Heron Watkins was one of  
Aleopatra's old haunts. I think she and some  
of her lovers used to come by sea from Alexandria  
for a long weekend - whether a long weekend in  
three days stretched to three weeks or so I don't  
know but Lake Airway marked the place. I can  
never understand the Padre who asked me for some  
hours leave the day before we were leaving - he  
the morning we were leaving - for the hours were  
late - so that he could go and bake in the  
same place as Aleopatra baked in. I shall am  
not sure whether he wanted to feel wicked by doing  
so or just to add another incident for a lecture  
when he gets back of places he had been to. Anyway  
I refused and lost some more marks with him.  
Anyway to get on we received our marching orders. The  
marchers to go by road and the 5th Bn by rail to  
Amoyga - the next station past Stampi Kanyut.  
The 5th Bn marched out overnight as they were to  
go first very early in the morning. We were to  
leave the barracks I think about 6.30 and  
march to the station. Anyway after cleaning up  
and ready to move we heard that the 5th Bn were  
still on the beach where they had bivouaced for  
the night as with the unfamiliar regularity of Egyptian  
Railways their train had not turned up. They  
were lucky for they got a swim in the only safe  
place in Aden. It was the wart that made the  
Padre ask for leave. He always wanted to go somewhere  
the Bn. could not go. Anyway we finally got the

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