

FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER

FORT MECHILL

For you, the war is over. Put down your arms & follow me. In accents clearly spoken English, the young Flax-haired German N.C.O. delivered this little speech at the end of his paynet. It was as though he had been trained to say these few words - part of his equipment as it were - for the glint in his blue eyes left no doubt of his intentions had we not conferred with his officer.

Including myself, we were a party of five on the Orderly Room back. There was Cpl. Hulsberg, commonly known as "Hubb", as calm & nonchalant as ever. Nothing ever seemed to stir old Hubb, not even my post-attempts to speed the Weekly Returns. He was a good chap to have around in times like this. Then there was Lt. Zarr, my driver. Sleepy-eyed through endless hours of continual driving, he had curled in true Army style when the General trotted out the white flag. I believe old Sammy

would have driven non-stop back to Cairo rather than suffer such humiliation at the hands of the Japs. The other two were passengers from other trucks which had been abandoned during our journey. Squire, Capt. the Don R., who nearly swallowed his tonsils at the sound of machine gun fire - ours or the enemies. He had aided us much amusement during the siege on the previous day. And lastly, there was Driver Dunkeld, in every life a happy-go-lucky fatwore boy, aged 19, who with his usual smile rebated the whole matter as a huge joke.

Will put up our heads, as we stood by the truck & it was with aweseful feelings that we were watched away by the young German paynet.

Firstly, there was the sense of relief which was shared by each one of us. For eight days before our arrival at Mechill we had been hounded about the Desert like a fox in the hunt. It had been a period of acute anxiety & uncertainty.



We had known all the time that the enemy was on our tail but when and where he would pop up and show himself - no-one had had the least idea. If the Officers had any ideas on this matter they had kept them very much to themselves, in fact, I am certain they had been kept just as much in the dark as we were. It had been a hectic 3 days, indeed. Travelling at times far into the night only to be on the road again early next morning. Whenever we halted we knew not for what period; whether there was time to have a fry-up of tinned bacon & perhaps a cup of tea or whether once again it must be that bully beef and biscuits which we had got to know so well. Our road had taken us across the desert wastely; over rocks when the trucks had given a performance which would do justice to any rodeo display, across flat unbreasting plains & through soft sand like snow in places axle deep. It was this latter which I think caused us the chief anxiety. To get stuck in the soft sand meant delay whilst sand-chucks were brought into use under the offending wheel & then all shoulders to the front and heave! - would she make it? Meanwhile, the remainder of the Convoy was leaving by & the unfortunate vehicle would find itself left behind with a mile or two leeway to make up - a neither pleasant or easy task in such conditions.

Thanks solely to Sammy's driving efforts & remarkably sound judgement, we in the Oberly Room had not on a single occasion found ourselves in this unenviable position. Before leaving Egypt,

someone had told me that he was the best driver in the Squadron and his skillful effort during our withdrawal confirmed this fact.

We were fired! Dog fired!

Mentally & physically it was not surprising therefore, when we sensed this feeling of relief on being taken into the custody of the Germans? Perhaps we should have been able to have the fact which we all longed for, whatever else was due to us.

Interwined with this relief was an element of surprise. Captured? Prisoners of War? Was it possible that this could happen to us, a Royal HQ of an Armoured Division? Whilst we had known that the enemy had been on our tail for the past two or three days it never occurred to us that we would be caught. Even on that fateful morning when the Convoy had been mustered together for a final dash through to Tahrif, did we realise that our effort would be thwarted. It was all so unexpected and somehow the last outpost which a soldier expects to befall him. When the white flag was put out, the philosophy of Sammy's remark was very apt.

And finally, we all had a feeling of disgust that we had allowed ourselves to be captured. Why hadn't we foreseen all this the day before and made a dash for it, each and every truck for itself? Whatever fate had so befallen us surely it was better than having to suffer this humiliation of loss and defeat. Our period on active service had been so short. We had done nothing yet. It was a worth-while to the day, on March 2nd, we had left Tahrif in Egypt, a newly well-

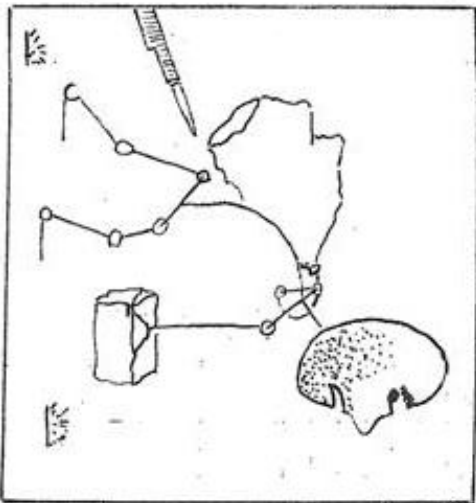
found Unit with brand new equipment which was to replace the famous 'A' Armoured Division and early on the good work they had started. We were nearly all Territorial who had been with the Unit since the outbreak of War. For fourteen months we had been steadily training in England.

In November, we embarked at Liverpool for the Near East & after six weeks of final preparation in Egypt we were all keen and ready to do all the big things that were expected of us.

But some-thing had gone wrong somewhere, we all had our own opinions on that and in this the record of my life as a prisoner of War, I do not propose to probe any further into any judge-went I made on the matter. The milk had been spilt and we now had to make the best of it.

All around us were the vehicles of the Division which, five weeks previously had been involved in one last dash for freedom. Like a herd of cattle being rounded up, only to be brought to a sudden & unexpected standstill when they realised that their way had been cut off. The escape was blocked. The crews of each vehicle were being guarded by Jerry guards to a point where apart

a quarter of a mile away. We followed in turn. The events of the past quarter of an hour had passed so quickly that we had little time to attend to ourselves & we realised for the first time that we were almost completely sans kit. We were our K.O. slacks, shirt, steel helmet, carried our water bottles - that was all! Certainly documents in the Oberly Room had had to be fired as soon as the white flag had been put out, else it may have been possible to gather a few things together.



Mechill, Misery!

reared the fast-growing crowd of prisoners. It was easy to discern the red caps of the Yeomanry but before we had a chance to converse with them, we were taken in three ranks, then counted and re-counted. Then came an order to discard our ammunition or arms if we still held the latter into a central dump. After that wait ensued whilst more trucks were made. Italian soldiers sprang up from somewhere and were out of curiosity than anything else, followed the Germans up and down our ranks. We were to have many more examples of this Italian curiosity in the days to come.

After waiting around for about an hour an order was given through our own officers that we were to be allowed to return to our trucks for the purpose of collecting our Kit. Glad as we were, we were very glad to have this opportunity I can tell you!

We found our officer leaning against the truck where we had left them. This was a great relief for in our hurry to leave, they had been left complete with bolts. A quick glance round and it was the work of a second or two to whip out those bolts and put them in the sand. We felt that we had achieved something over Jerry. Then came the job of going through our kits and deciding just what we should or shouldn't take with us.

Complained with this talk was the uncertainty of what was to become of us and since, of this, we hadn't the least idea, our job was indeed a difficult one. Fortunately, the day before, I had been through my kit not with the idea of packing assistance for the problem on hand but for a general clear out in case it became necessary to sling anything overboard.

So I had a slight advantage over Hutch & the others in having my haversack & Kit bag packed with a representative selection of clothing and other necessaries. In the former were washing & toilet kits, handkerchiefs, a pair of socks, a small first aid outfit and few other odds and ends. The haversack contained two shirts, one pair underpants, one vest, two pairs of pair socks, one Isalohawa helmet, one pullover, a ground sheet and spare pair of pants, which contents I left little room for any additions from my kit bag. It should be borne in mind that none of us had the least idea of what was to happen to us. Mechill was to write from Derna which distance may have to be done on foot. Alternatively we might have to suffer the humiliation of being driven in our own trucks to a f.o.w. Camp somewhere. I decided to prepare for the hike & to travel as lightly as possible. So I removed the boots & groundsheet from the haversack and substituted a pair of gym shoes and a blanket - the latter in case we spent a night in the desert. A lot of

essential items in the Kit bag had to be abandoned. To keep the weight of the pack down to the minimum.

We then packed our provisions box, made a hasty meal of sardines & biscuits and divided the remainder of the biscuits between us. Other provisions - the dozen tins of bacon we had collected on the withdrawal, milk, bully beef and sausages we decided to leave behind. Surely there would be a hot meal "waiting for us". You see we were very new to this "business" of war rackets.

Our attention was called to the truck behind us, by the shout "Anything want any bags". It was an AFMC truck with a few thousand cigarettes on board and the crew, having satisfied their own requirements, had decided to throw open the remainder of this stock to the public rather than let it fall into enemy hands. We stuffed all odd spares, pockets etc with packets of tin Woodbriar just before our Sudan friend with the bayonet reappeared to inform us that our time was up. Dressed in Khaki drill slacks, ballistics cap, steel helmet, and carrying pack, haversack and water bottle and grommet we made our way to where the remainder of the unit.

make our personnel were already congregating.

Yes there were the boys of No. 2 Squadron - Phil Lewis, Jack Ketcher, yes! and there was old Bill (Pl. Bedford) I how nice it was to see them all safe and sound. This good, merry reunion of the Yeomanry had a streak of sadness, however; there were some who were not there and who were known to have been killed or wounded. Reports still awaited confirmation in one or two cases but it was known definitely that Sgt. Lush (No. 1), Pl. Grant & Pl. Bolton (both of No. 2) had gone and that Pl. McCoy and Lieut. Phidostable were seriously injured. Sgt. Lush had been my own partner's pal in Egypt and of the Sergeant in No. 1 Squadron he had without a doubt survived the hardest during our operations. Grant and Bolton were those of the best. One couldn't help wondering why they had been singled out. Apart from this shadow, it was for me a joyous occasion indeed being with the boys of the old Squadron. Still first watching since that night at Derna on the way up, our thoughts did not require my lastings. We could not tell just enough our adventures since our

lost meeting at Derna on our way up, nor could our speculations of our coming fate have been more actually nor thoroughly discussed.

All told, I suppose we mumbled about huddle handed. We were indeed a scruffy-looking lot; dressed in all manner of Army issue clothing and, what was far more noticeable, wearing anything up to a week's growth of beard. During the last days of the withdrawal, water had become very precious and it was an unwritten order that no man should wash or shave. At some time in our lives I think we all wonder what we should look like if we grew a beard; well, Mechill provided us with the opportunity.

Under the jurisdiction of the Italian guards who seemed to have popped up from nowhere as soon as we were disarmed, we were soon on the move again. They watched us for about three quarters of a mile and then we were told to squat down and take off our kits. Hitherto, the morning had been bright and sunny - just typical of the Libyan Springtime. Later on in the day, no doubt, it would be very glad of them.

We were situated in the desert. The name "Fort Mechill" applies to a small desert outpost which, I believe, was built by the Turks. It was a kind of block house and had been enlarged and reinforced by walls of Sandbags. This unimposing edifice was situated some three

hundred yards from where we were now sitting. Flurry over to the South West was the low ridge of hills which we had spent the previous day defending. Our immediate surroundings were flat desert consisting of nothing but sand and an occasional scrub.

We were glad of the opportunity to lie down and gradually, idle chatter was replaced by yawns and snores. We were all a few hours sleep in arrears. But our bliss was short-lived for a few minutes later with characteristic suddenness, a wind sprang up and with the wind - sand! of this we were in for a good old sandstorm.

put this time we lacked the protection of our trucks or tents. There was no alternative but to "stick it". Gradually the sand penetrated into the innermost recesses of our clothing, our hair and our kits. It clogged our ears and nose, sealed our eyes and clung to our lips. After the first shocks of this sudden, climatical change, we turned over, hit our heads under our greatcoats and returned once more to our slumbers.

Morning we got into afternoon, the sandstorm still raged but there was no sign of us moving. It dry was forced that some water was available from a German water-cool which had just arrived. Had they announced gold insects the result could not have been worse, electric. Water was in fact very precious to us than gold and in a few seconds half the camp was on its feet and was rushing madly towards the water-cool. Cynicism was nonexistent and it was purely a case of every man for himself. However there

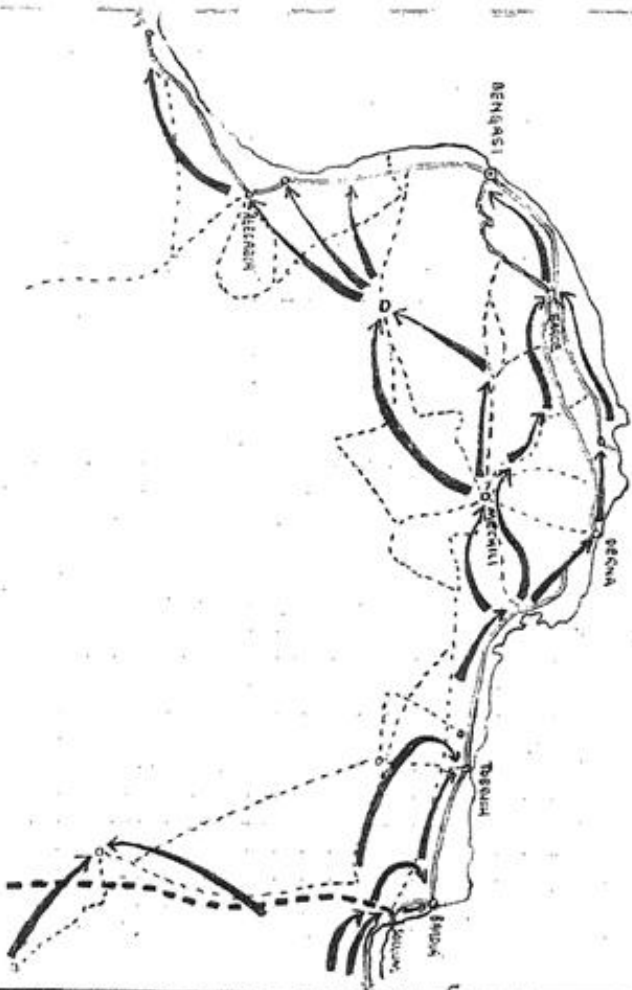
seemed to be enough to go round.

Then Major Galt and Captain Willis came round and told us that a wire was very unlikely that day, and that efforts were being made to open some of the radios which had been left on the trucks. Apparently they were in the same boat as ourselves. The Officers were grouped together about a hundred yards away and had only such kit as they had been able to snatch from their vehicles; a nice change for them, we thought! Some attempts to explain the situation to us were made by Major Galt. The Germans, it seems, had cut right across the desert from Agadaba and had headed us off. (See map on Page 11). Col. Kenneth, the Unit C.O. had apparently disappeared and with his knowledge of the desert, it was assumed had got away. Various others including Captain Gibson and Lieutenant and Quartermaster Yates were stated to be "missing" and much speculation followed as to their ultimate fate. A first warning of the Galt's Red Cross was made as Major Galt's wife is a leading light in that worthy organization and we were cheered by the thought of receiving some sort of comfort through his medium.

As the afternoon wore on the storm gradually subsided. The camp slowly stirred itself, shook itself and attempted to remove the sand from the flour and oat and inaccessible places into which it had lodged. There was a sudden burst of activity amongst the enemy transport and equipment and it seemed a wave of interest to see the enemy "shift up". Whistles were blown, jeep engines given and officers and men were jostling about as

well they might be, with great enthusiasm. Their plan - I surmised by Major Galt - it was said and with the 2nd Armoured Div. out of the way they were on their toes to carry it out. It was interesting to note the contrast between their departure and the way in which we had struck camp during the preceding week. It provided food for thought and in our present low condition quid a few of us would have wondered whether our lads would be able to thwart this ambitious plan. Inside a very few minutes the column was formed and amidst a great roar of diesel engines and a cloud of dust, it was away en route for Tobruk. German guards had now almost completely been expelled by their former in crime - the Italians; and we realised for the first time that we were to be Italian prisoners. The Germans were doing all the dirty work and the Italians would take all the credit. However it seemed to show what the enemy thought the Italians were fit for!

By this time, night was approaching, already the sun was low in the sky which meant that within an hour it would be dark - and very dark. We sat about arranging ourselves. I had been placed in charge of the first few rows of prisoners, scarce as they were. I was very busy so I did not much and saw and was very glad to see in the morning. We were, had an impressive and "M.A.V." and "M.A.V." in the first few rows. It is in various parts of the camp and in a short while most of us were parking in a very swampy mud. With our blankets and garments wrapped round us and smoking a last cigarette, we had ourselves down under shade and desert.

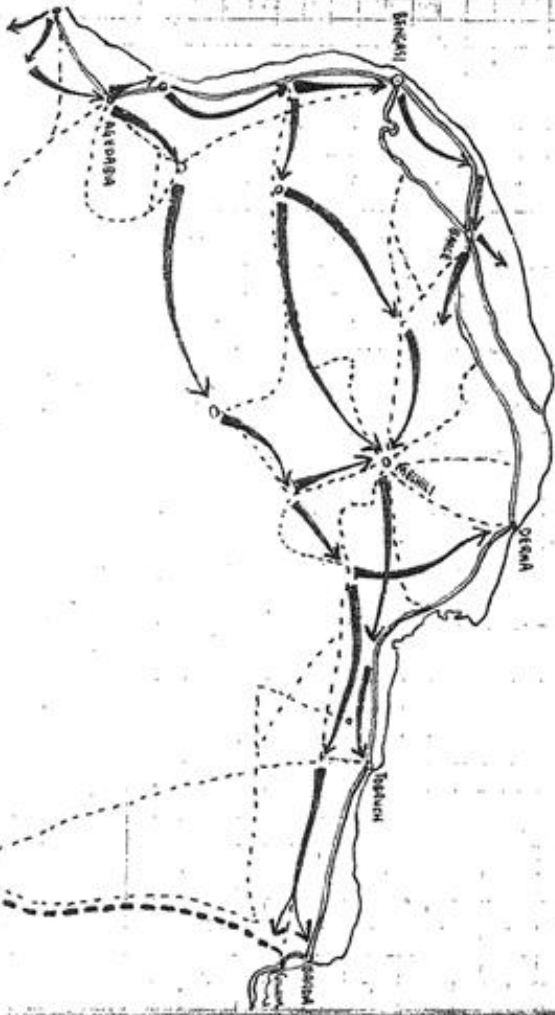


OUR ADVANCE ~

BY THE SEVENTH ARMORED DIVISION
FROM 9-12-40 to 9-2-41



THE ABOVE MAPS OF THE
OPERATIONS IN LISIA WERE
REPRODUCED FROM THE ITALIAN
MAGAZINE "L'ILLUSTRAZIONE"



~ AND THEIRS

FROM 31-3-41 to 13-4-41.

stars, and it was not long ere every man back was freed from captivity and into the realms of slumber. So ended April 3rd a sad and memorable day for the 2nd Airborne Division.

On waking next morning, we were thankful to see the sun shining brightly. Thank goodness, we said, the sand storm had subsided. Today we would be free from that infernal evil and no doubt we should be moving off somewhere. Everybody was remarkably cheerful considering the lack of food and water. The camp had divided itself into little groups some of which had had the flashlight, or perhaps I should say, had charred kyaning some limited food off their trucks. I very much regretted leaving our falcons behind; after all, had we come to a watch yesterday we could have dumped them had the wagner proved troublesome. However, we had our supply of biscuits and off these we had a frugal breakfast. We found that the various groups were always ready to trade or even give away cigarettes, but food was held at a very high premium.

During the morning, one of our officers appeared and said that an unit of water would be made shortly. In fact, the water situation was very serious. There were two wells in the fort - one had dried up and the other had been poisoned by the Japanese before it was taken over by the Germans. Nations were also "in the war". It was stark when had that the war was as bitter as we are.

Previous day and in a very few minutes we were sure again involved in a similar storm of dust and sand. There was nothing to be done except to lie down and expect such protection as was possible with our great coats. Gradually the nature of the situation was fading and we were beginning to realize our true position. We were prisoners of war and, for the time being at any rate, the property of the enemy. In the days to come we would have to suffer privations of which we had never given a thought. We would be reported lost home as "Missing, believe killed" and there would be a heavy price set on our heads for our dear ones in the front were known. We had seen the last of Ohio, for which I for one was sorry, and again from my own point of view the possibility of fast up at Giff's was gone for all time. Such were our thoughts as the 2nd Airborne returned and we just had to lie there and peer it with our half-crazy spectacles.

In the midst of these awful thoughts came a call for a funeral party. The following day was a funeral for a man shot or murdered, or something of the sort. They managed to get a coffin for the whole lot, I believe. It was said that the enemy had plenty of arms and ammunition with very few exceptions as far as we were concerned. It was said that the Germans had taken the view. I shall not forget, for instance, the view in which had "going for war" had tumbled into our hands on the previous day; it was pretty obvious that

that long trek across the desert had left them very short of supplies. We worried when it would occur to them that they had some prisoners who were very hungry. The burial party went off and was a fair start. It included the body of an Indian which had been allowed to lie throughout the previous day about twenty yards from the camp. This, my first sight of a dead body on the field, did not add to my present state of happiness and I was glad when the party fellows was put away.

The morning dragged on. Major Ruff came to see us again and reaffirmed his previous statement about water & food. He also told us that we would continue to be credited with our pay less 1/2 per day to be paid towards Red Cross services. The latter statement led to a discussion between old soldiers of the last war; some said the Red Cross was a waste of a week and others that we would make no such contribution. To me uninitiated it was a small comfort to know that our pay would continue and that we would have some money to go back to on our return to Gulpki.

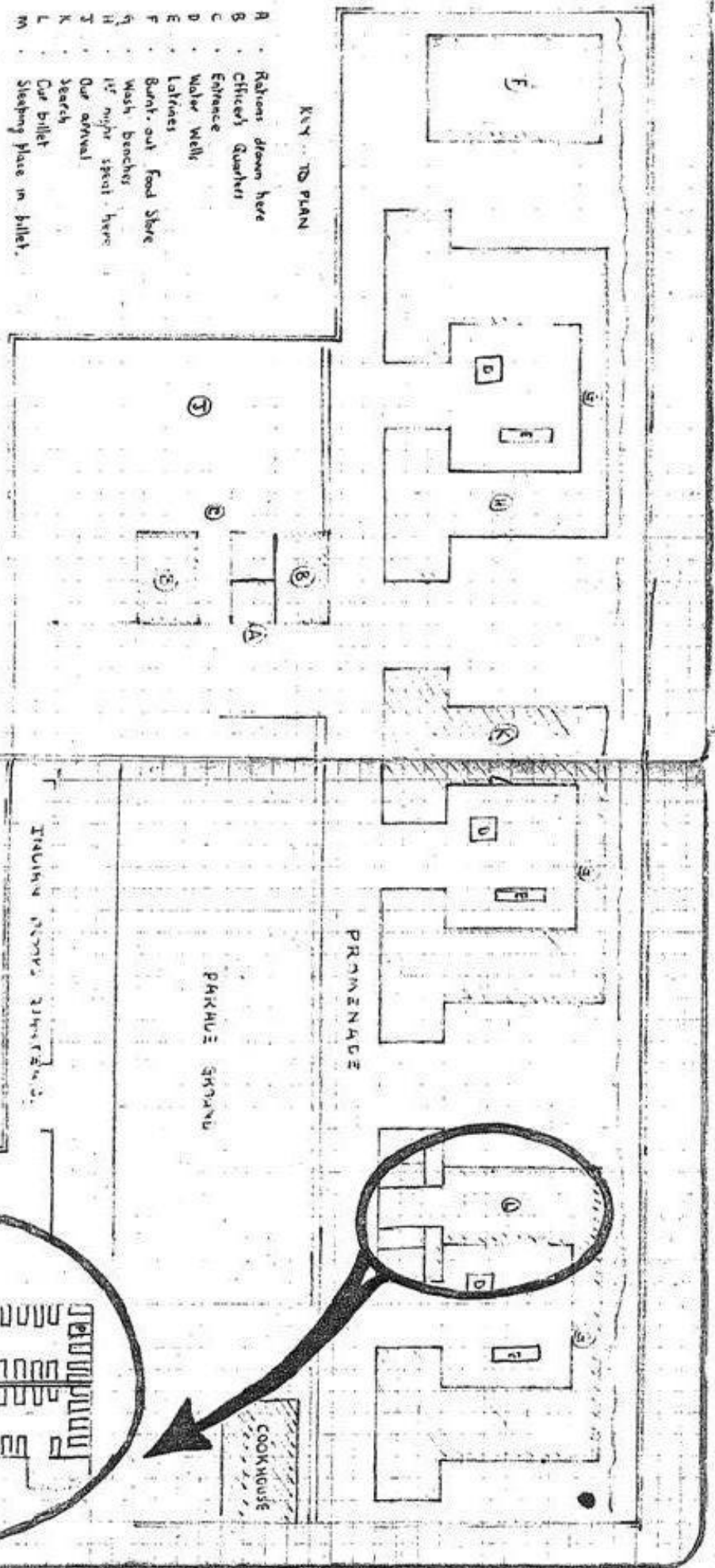
To the reader, this chapter must be indeed cheerless. Throughout this book I shall endeavor to recapture the atmosphere of our military life at the time. In years to come, it will assist us to appreciate the good things of home life or the trials of the conditions in which we were situated. It was certainly more than a mere existence.

In spite of very severe conditions, our camp was very comfortable. I was never short of food since we killed them. I can well remember the

reaction that shortage had on our minds. The work of the Madras Police was good at home had never received such praise. Unfortunately, the supply of water to be had by the form of a tap. Never again would we waste that precious liquid by leaving the taps running or over-watering the lawn.

Wish is rather to be the moment and in the midst of our longings a cry of "water" went up. Fortunately some attempt at organization had previously been made. Each flight was to send an M.C.O. and party in turn to the water cart with sufficient containers for the unit's needs. Sgt. Cox (1st Lt.) was appointed for our unit and equipped with a bucket which had his party departed on their necessary errand. The shoveling out was done by troops and careful watch had to be maintained against "dunking-up". Half a pint per man was the ration. The sandstorm didn't suspend things and the winter had a strong halo of dust all. It was water for all that.

This small action secured to cheer us somewhat, and our spirits rose again during the afternoon with the issue of an M.C.O. ration. We discussed once again the circumstances of our capture. It was yesterday's sandstorm had struck a couple of hours earlier. The enemy's hand would not have been laid on us with such a heavy reduction in the region of the water cart; quite a number of our men would have been killed. The water would have kept that while they in our hands and for even we would have been given a full amount of it from the M.C.O. ration. At the last word, as it were, of our camp, we had a small supply of water.

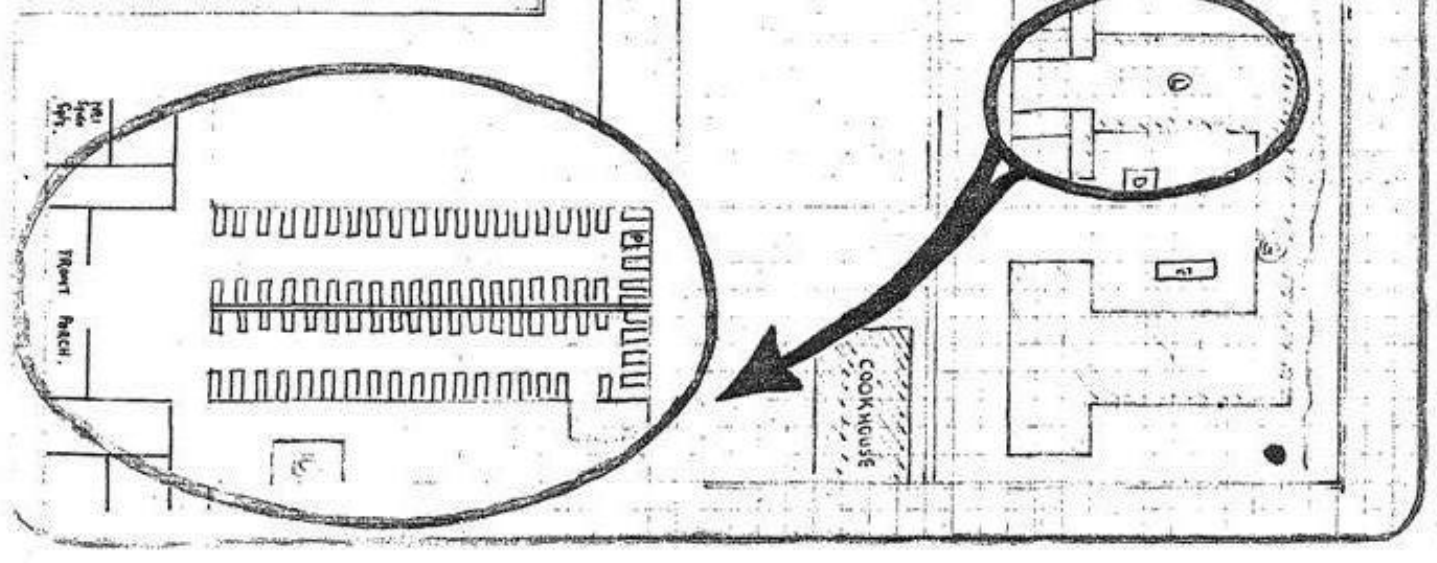


DERNA - APRIL

The so-called chest-dealer's name, to Derna was completed without incident. Needless to say, everybody was in high spirits at seeing Mezzalana. Whatever was said in the past we could not possibly be worse than our experiences during the past week. It seemed on one side, the day we were captured - just 6 days ago, the line

had changed with the conditions. The camp consisted of some dozen or so vehicles, each with a complement of thirty-five to forty men and two or three guards. At first we found lack of space very uncomfortable for we had all our kit with us including such things as tents and a spy pistol, two wheelbarrows

we of use at some future date. But, as in the case of the hospital crowd, we decided to hit it after a while and once settled down the journey was fairly comfortable. I should say that one point we do have is not just the fact that the kindness of the Arab Bedouins in the Sudan made us the



role of a fishing smack in a North Sea gale. If anything this added to our quartermen of 4 sports.

Until we reached the aerodrome 3 miles from our objective, the road lay across uninteresting, desolate flat, the very flat west side of the German advance have an operational M.D. Truck or tank and the occasional glimpse of a post, whether English, German or Indian. We passed an R.A.S.C. dump which, judging by the amount of equipment lying about, had been abandoned in a great hurry.

All the aerodrome we passed had been burnt food stores. It was a long, long road that we had only toiled on for weeks beforehand. The aerodrome had then contained a handful of British planes, but now had passed quite a number of German Stukas. It was quite a relief to be on the level unobscured surface of the main road, but in spite of this we now had another concern - how would the 14 driver negotiate the hairpin bends down into Derna, just made some bends that had nearly split the driver for one of our trucks on the way up. It was the height of that unobscured escape which made the doubt of the ability of our present driver to creep into our wind.

I should explain that the hairpin bends in question are situated a mile or so from Derna where the road turns some 2000 feet from the top of the escarpment to sea level. A view of the world is now for those

road waking and this road was an achievement worthy of that distinction. Not so steep was the step that at the bends there was very little room for a large vehicle to get past.

The same is the top of the escarpment. Derna was found out before us with the ever-fine Mediterranean in the background. To our relief the driver changed down and in so doing he perceived our situation confidently. The descent was safely accomplished - of course and we were soon straying through the streets of Derna. The powder we had with Italian and German troops. The Italians behaved like wild animals, waving their arms about and howling. Ahead in our path, but the situation perceived us with cool reserve. We noticed this difference between the two nationalities for the first time and in days to come we were to have many more instances of it.

The way passed through the centre of the town and then turned into a side street passed several buildings the white walls of which had been peppered with machine gun bullets. It then turned into a gateway and on this a sort of square where it came to a halt. (See "J" in plan on page 167).

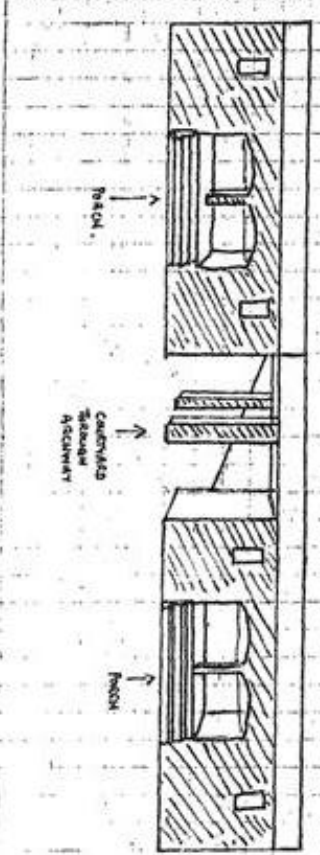
A quick look round and we concluded that this was our destination. For on our left was a row of what looked like stone-pull barracks. Directly before us was a gateway just across from a building which seemed to work the entrance to the "prison loop" (a). Some fifteen minutes elapsed

while many Italian officers and officials dashed wildly here and there until we were pulled out of the trenches in units. We were then watched in our sections through the gateway and up a slight incline to the door of stone barracks.

It was now quite late in the afternoon. The four-hour journey had tired us in our present order - nourished elate and besides which we were beginning to feel thirsty and very, very hungry. With a feeling of relief we changed our kit and set down on a kind of promenade overlooking a parade ground. From this point we had a fine view over Derna with the Med in the distance for these barracks were situated at the beginning of the escarpment which flanked right along the back of the town. Found other units in front of us we got word that they had the It's had started a man to work

search. Well, this was to be expected but I thought they might have given us something to eat first. All the various units in front of us were searched, so we moved up into a courtyard surrounded on three sides by the barrack buildings. From the plan it will be seen that there are three complete buildings each containing a courtyard and it was into the middle one that we gradually made our way. The ground about twelve feet deep and surrounded at the top by a high stone wall. Yes, and on the well were many men with empty

wings, mess hats and water bottles drinking the water in a half-pint tin on the end of a pipe. We might have been old prospectors sitting there. There was no



FRONT VIEW OF A LARGE BARRACKS.

holding us. We drank that well nearly dry.

Very slowly the long column filtered its way through a door on the left into the building (K) whose the search was being conducted. There was little in my kit that I was afraid of having confiscated; perhaps my knife, a small pair of nail scissors. We learned from ships who had already been through that pepper knives were permitted provided the blade was protruding. There was still the hammer with it, but to break the blade of an English heavy knife unless taken suitably is no weapon. I had and after several unsuccessful attempts I decided to leave it and chance it getting through.

No difficulty owing to the fact that they had already delved into some hundreds of kits and found very little worth confiscating by the time our turn came. Our kits were passed without any mishap. We were then ordered by the guards along the promenade the way we had come and into another building (H).

At some time during the search I noticed a German had been subjected to a shell by our naval forces. Quite a large penetration in the shell with some 1000 lbs. of building (H) and nothing had been done about it. There was no pass in any of the windows, the floor was strewn with debris and the whole place was generally in a hell of a mess. This, we were informed, was our period down and so we had no alternative but to set to and clear the work before the light began to show.

It was obviously too late to start issuing patients now, but if they had only the issue, so most of us were on improvised ward of biscuits. Now that we had ample supply of water with which to wash them down, the biscuits did not hurt so much to our now almost completely empty stomachs.

Others were perhaps worse. Fortunately in having with them a little limited stock which they hoarded over small fires in the yard.

And as the time came to turn in, at the back of the building (G on plan) we had found a sort of wash place. No water but still it was no odorous task to carry it from the well in order to enter our first wash for over a week. His night fall it proved decidedly chilly owing to the close proximity of the sea. Ground sheets and blankets were laid down and as we lay waiting for sleep to overtake us, not a few would have thanked God for that Easter Sunday and for the roof over our heads and the cheerful prospect that there would be no more Sandstorms. The third floor was found after the soft sand of the desert but in a short while, nobody noticed that not anything else, once more the pressure wide of free in the picture of sleep.

Next morning, we were awakened at quite early by the sun streaming in through the window. Fresh breezes wafted in from the sea causing a very invigorating atmosphere. I never got to know how the time compared with Greenwich Mean time of D.S.T. It must have been about the same as the latter for the sun set at about six o'clock.

It was quite dark at six thirty - a very sudden twilight - while in the morning the sun was always shining when I went out at seven o'clock.

It was difficult to realise that this was the winter season - or at least the fall end of it. At Derina, the wind had been tempered by breezes from the sea without which it was very warm, and at the odd day when there had been no sand storm, at least, we had felt the full force of this waddy heat. If it was like that in April, what was it going to be like in mid-July and August? We hoped to be out of the country by then.

I never realised what pains a bedded man must have when he shaves off his beard. A bedded man cannot realize the experience either unless he is of the type who just shaves the beard for the sake of expedience. That wonderful feeling. Never did the Kilt's razor do a more admirable job of work for in the space of a minute or two I was transformed from a ginger-whiskered hobo into a young clean-shaven young man and I felt it. Never have I known anything so refreshing as to be rid of that fuzzy growth. A generous wash followed and I was ready for any eventually.

We didn't have to wait long for something to turn up for an afternoon. I went to waste that we were in the rear, but were to neither further. Afternoon, some of the units had it split up and it was now the intention to get us separate quarters in tents. This

was very necessary for administrative reasons of course, including the all-important ration issue.

However, the result was that we were moved along a couple of buildings to building L, a formidable bit of steel, because not only was it much cleaner than the other place, but it had succeeded in avoiding the activity of the British Navy. I looked myself up with Bill Hodson and one or two of the other lads from No. 2 Squadron and we installed ourselves in one of the corners of the new building. The Yeomanry now occupied the building we were in and the one across the courtyard - both Squadrons mixed together.

The rest of the day passed by quietly as did all the days at Derina. Owing to lack of notes it is not possible to give a day to day account of our activities. So I propose to recall our daily routine and then make mention of any special incidents.

As on the first morning, always these days, the fresh Mediterranean breeze at that time were always most invigorating. My bed consisted of a great coat spread on the hard floor. For I was still very clean. I always dressed for just by putting on my fallow underneath my kit's cover and then pulled myself up to the great coat and then fastened the surplus. It was a very simple. A wash basin, a tin of toothpaste was always the first before going out on to the promenade for a stroll up and down. This walk was fairly good in spite of the fact that it embodied a terrific epidemic.

Shipping Expedition. One of the first items that sprung to my mind was boxed sweets - oh for a tin of hamburgs to remove the ever-present bite of M.V. Clothing, it was well to the fore, for I now realised how badly equipped I was in this direction. The letters were collected and we subsequently heard that they were destroyed by the Italians. Months later, however, when we started to receive mail from home, we were to learn that the letters were delivered after all.

Our Officers, who had accompanied us from Misaki, were all housed in a small building B on the plan. The food was 'revolting', visits when we would discuss and reassess our prospects. Apart from the fact that they were able to purchase a few oddmeal items of food, they lived pretty much the same as we did. It was amusing to see them lining up completely with guests for their 'Swaddy' meals. Major Galt showed his considerable wealth by supplying sweet water almost daily by supplying sweet water to the squadron with an extra 'feetwash'. There had been an 'issue' of hand lotion for troops - so many lines to wash Troop - and the 'illness' the women, we perceived at the 'illness' which occurred in the 'illness' the last time we saw a 'illness'.

All this time, the letters, though a very little, were being sent to us. They were very full of other spheres. They seemed quite satisfied so long as the daily working parties were

at hand in the mornings. But they didn't worry about any sort of short parade of sweets. First attempt at a 'parade' was a failure, however.

There were two occasions when, when Italian officials did appear and demanded a parade of everybody on the parade ground. What for we had not the faintest idea, although there were plenty of suggestions from a tall, tall, stout young fellow in a uniform of a pair of sweets and on troops. After much discussion and exchanging during which skydiving in the tanks was prevalent, all troops including the Italians, were paraded on the Square in Uth's. A car then appeared on which was strapped a few coppers and a green-stinking Italian. Only I thought it was down on us that we were treated for their own propaganda, having our photographs taken for the down. They were at least have given as a dog of sweets each.

Reading when it was possible to obtain a book, cards and sleeping were our chief occupations. On the Friday, George with words, difficulty obtained an Italian plan for me. It was a real blessing on those slave trusts. Rumours in pier, followed in. The James had been halted at Tobruk and were actually being driven back. The navy was supposed to be somewhere close at hand ready to raid the coast and take us off. There could have been little justification in any of the stories

which recited us, but they did assist in keeping our spirits up in these early days of our captivity.

The view from the Government over Derna was always attractive. It is a nice, clean-looking town, the majority of the buildings being of white stone and red-roofed. In times of peace it is an important window resort at which most Mediterranean cruises call. Outside the town there is very little except the barren rock of the escarpment - almost as barren as the desert itself. We could see the coast road winding its way through the town and the continuous convoys which were being supplies up to the enemy lines. In the distance, some two to three miles away, was the deep blue sea on which we looked in vain for those streaks of grey which were to save and rescue us.

Sunday, April 2nd and we had been at Derna just a week. I was by this time beginning to feel, through my 'chess' set with the piano, for that they had not yet been taken. It was a great relief after our 'day' days in the Orsenly Room. The novelty of being prisoners of war was beginning to wear off and we became very discontented. The lack of solid food and exercise made us feel very weak. I felt so weak on this Sunday morning that I lay in bed water until 11 a.m. usual. I was completely fed up with sponging on my friends and made up my mind that, Sergeant or no, I would volunteer for the

working party the next day.

At about ten o'clock, an announcer came to us and said that a Col. in the Service would be tied in one of the other buildings in about half past five. This was quite a long time to wait. The old 'red' up, was a snare, drawn up the post to join the service, just as it was starting. It was a simple affair. The post, one of our own officers, played for peace and all the while his voice was drowned by the noise of the aircraft flying over the building. I tried to find that something would happen to me to get me out of that place. Surely something would happen soon.

When we came out from the Service we found a group of men gathered around some of the guards and officials, near where balloons were drawn. The officers were gestulating and discussing something in a noisy street. One fellow in particular, a white man, looking in appearance with a row of medals on his chest, was getting very excited. He seemed to be in charge of whatever was going on. Out of sheer curiosity and because we had nothing else to do, we got crowded round to see what it was all about. Suddenly, 'coming' turned round to us and said in a very loud English, 'I want to hear the English'. I went to hear. The Englishman proceeded to pick them out from the crowd gathered round and it was with some astonishment that I found myself one of them. I was joined by SS.M. Phillips of the Squadron who had been in charge of the drawing

of our fathers, and Sgt. Cosgrove. When the party was complete, Gorman explained in his unorthodox way that we were going away from the camp. On hearing this, Phillips pointed out that as he was the Senior N.C.O. of Melinscott and in charge of the rations etc., it would be better if someone else could go in his place. This point of view was met by a hostile Gorman. He argued that Gorman for two weeks at the end of which time Phil gathered that he must go. Major Galt appeared on the scene in the midst of this conversation. He also asked that Phil should be allowed to remain behind which started off the Gorman effort again.

At last they had us sorted out and lined up and we had orders to go back to barracks, pack all our kits (and parade again in ten minutes) and blanket it up in my pack.

Whilst packing up my pack my prayer had been realized and although I was to break away from my little circle of friends, I was indeed very thankful. Whatever we were going to do and where ever we were going to go it, perhaps it would be possible to win a little extra and to be less dependent on other people. That had been my chief concern in the past few days.

It did not take me long to collect together all my worldly possessions. Certainly not as long as I had found to bid all my comrades farewell. They were as surprised as we were. When we were off to bed why had we been packed out for the trip? Whatever was the answer, it was on the cards that we should not see our good friends again. So it made me feel sad to have to leave of Gill and the others.

And in fact was waiting at the entrance gate C and in we all got - twenty mile of us including three officers. No time was lost in starting. The whole garrison turned out to see us off and there was much waving and farewell shouting.

In the morning we turned left on to the road and Gorman's road. So our destination was west. Maybe Galt, Gorman or even Tripoli - the provocative Gormanville men but to us whom it concerned, it was a deadly secret.

Once over the steep bank of falling leave of all the beds I was glad to be in that track. It was farwell to Derina, with its fires, wherever our ultimate destination may be. We could count those pests as good names with the Senosoforus of Mechin. Also every word along that road was a wild cheer for the army.

Over Now

BARCE

Unlike the road from Mechin, this road was not ground to us. It was along this road that we had travelled on our way up less than a month previously. We passed the disused brick works which had been out of use for a day and a half when we had our search.

Mass in an old brick kiln and sausage, bacon and eggs cooked warty over a smoky wood fire. Then followed the long zig-zag climb to the top of the escarpment. Whatever may be the shortcomings of the Italians, they can build wonderful roads. The escarpment at this point must be 2000 feet high and at no point does the road become steeper than 1 in 12. There was more evidence of recent operations. Half way up the road had been covered by slushed sand, leaving just room for a single stream of traffic to get through. Wheels of two British 8-wheeled trucks were seen on the hillside. We hoped their crews had escaped injury.

Once on top of the escarpment, it was very cold and we huddled ourselves together in our greatcoats to stay warm.

What was worth, we could. It was a cloudy day and looked as though we would encounter a shower of snow before long.

We discussed at great length this our sudden departure from Derina. The officers were just as much in the dark as we were. The most likely solution was that we were a kind of advance party to the main body left at Derina and were to prepare a camp before the others followed on. This would be at Rote Camp or Tripoli. But why single us out at Derina as they had done? We were a mixed lot including 8 from the 'Forward' of which Phil, Jimmy Cosgrove and I were the Senior N.C.O.s. It made us hungry talking about it so we took stock of the goods we had with us. I had four lbs of the maverick M+V which I had acquired by divers means during the past week, and a few biscuits. Phil had M+V and biscuits while Jimmy pulled out a tin of British Bully-beef which he insisted on opening up and sharing. Between the three of us rice and M+V.

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The mythical horn and eggs would not have met with more appreciation (not much!).

The meal refreshed us considerably for it was now early afternoon and we had not fast during the morning. We sifted ourselves down to enjoy the mystery ride.

The distance from Derna to Cape is about 60 miles, and it is about the pleasantest 60 miles in the whole of Libya. From the wadi, it will be seen that the coast line juts in a Northerly direction. The scenery accounts for the change in scenery and instead of the flat uninteresting fat pebbles, plains of desert, there were rolling hills covered with olive, and small trees between which grass and a few flowers grew. The ground was mostly rock, however, and the soil appeared to be no worse than a few inches deep. The hills, very often revealing itself like a snake's tail of three wadis ahead. We passed through small villages every few miles. These villages were part of a colonization scheme started since the last war. The houses were all oval, like - single story, stone built about the size of a small modern English bungalow and containing about four rooms. Each had its plot of land of one or two acres in area, in which wheat and vegetables or other crops were being cultivated. These villages were all very shabby owing to the open pits of the ground over the course.

The centre was usually visited by a cluster of Roman, African, design, stone modern, with very little foreign and painted white to match the other buildings. Shops were non-existent and we wondered how our own supplies, particularly at wartime. This part of the country had seen the same of the advances in recent months. Firstly we returned had passed the English pack route and then the German pack route and passed the English pack route. So I expect the road through the mountains to London, who would eventually find them. They'll see soon know. On the side each house were displayed the Italian and German flags; obviously displayed under instructions. We had speculated as to the attitude of these villages to us - the prisoners. Passing through the first of the villages we were not left with in doubt. Being Sunday afternoon, as in England, the only sign of the inhabitants seemed to be walking up and down taking the air. On catching sight of us they immediately went quite wild, yelling, cat-crowling and making all manner of wild and threatening signs. It caused us no end of amusement, and went to confirm the opinion we already held of this scruffy people. After all their setbacks in various parts of Africa, the bluntness of their troops, the German control, and their these part of the Italian side, a faint glimmer of hope, and the eyes to "open", "on top of me

world". I wondered if our prisoners in Italy, the Australian and Canada were anything like this. If so, I had no wish to war them, but I can hardly believe it is the case.

The sun shone and we progressed very steadily and pleasantly at a speed of 20-25 m.p.h. The Italian trucks we had seen were much bigger and heavier than the English 30-cwt. There were fewer on the road, but the result that, while rather slow on the level, they were better on hills and very little changing down was necessary. All these trucks, like Jerry's, is diesel and runs on crude oil.

After about 30 miles interest in the journey was suddenly revived when we passed a German motorized infantry brigade travelling in the opposite direction. I'd rather our lack than theirs although they were "free". The convoy did pass in a very silent and orderly manner, and if the troops raised us, they made no sign of it. Their travelling cookhouses seemed a good idea and an improvement on ours, which would ensure a hot meal at short notice.

As we neared Barce, the country became more wooded until with Kilos to go we came to the top of the escarpment and commenced the descent into the town - another superb achievement in Italian road engineering.

It was about 4.30 p.m. when the truck swung off the main road into a small side lane and pulled up by

Some single-storied buildings. A string of Italian soldiers immediately appeared. One who appeared to be of senior rank, I immediately took an instant dislike to. He alternately spoke to our driver and then bowed at us. The body understood him so we just took no notice. The driver, he terrible guy, half the. It's then departed to the bungalow leaving four or five scruffy individuals to stare at these new first British prisoners. We tried to tell them that we wanted something to eat and drink but they didn't say, it - worse luck for us, for we were poisonous.

Ten minutes later our driver re-appeared and made signs for us to drop all our kit off the truck on to the road. He became noisy when we tried hanging on to our small haversacks. This was not satisfied until all our kit, including that of the Officers, was piled in a heap in the roadway. We made to follow but were roughly pushed back and in less time than it takes to print it, the driver had jumped in his cab and we were away. Only then did we realize what had happened. In fact before we turned the top of the road, these fascists were already closing in on the kit.

We drove around the town, eventually pulling up at an imposing building half-observed by some sentries. The usual supply of goods appeared and we were made to wait and walk through the sentries into a small courtyard at the rear of the building. A