

SIDI BARRANI TO DERNA, BY COURTESY OF FISSOLINI.

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The first Western Desert campaign, directed by Wavell and executed by O'Connor, which began <sup>in early December</sup> ~~at the end of~~ 1940, has tended to become submerged in the subsequent tidal waves of warfare that swept up and down the much disputed stretch of country and forgotten by comparison with the vaster operations and greater victories of later days. For my part, it brought me my most interesting job of the war, which I now venture to put on record; combined operations when that expression was little more than a definition in a military text-book, and the sight of a sailor in khaki was still a strange one. That is my excuse for writing on a subject which has long since lost its news value.

My ship had put into Alexandria with a large hole at each end, the result of a couple of hits from torpedoes dropped by Italian aircraft <sup>in Crete</sup>, and very soon news began to come through of the Western Desert Force's spectacular offensive. It was news which thrilled every body, and I was therefore highly elated when told that I was to be Beachmaster at Sidi Barrani where the Army wanted supplies landed and prisoners evacuated. A few hours' notice was all that I was given and, with a small party and a scratch kit, I sailed westwards in HMS "Protector."

Arriving on the following morning, we found the swell too bad for landing so decided to carry on to Sollum which we thought was already in our hands. Our intelligence however, turned out to be false when we approached and were fired on. We turned back and, before dark, my party and I were transferred to a X-lighter which had arrived with supplies during our absence. After a bitter night, getting what sleep I could in a Carley-float on deck, we closed the land at first light. There is no harbour here, just a cove breaking the low cliffs, and the sight from seaward is in no way inspiring - merely sand and yet more sand varied by slight rounded hills with a general rise inland. Every where could be seen the strange litter which a battle leaves behind.

X-39 was a relic of the first war - the Dardanelles I believe - and her maximum speed was 3 knots. As she had dragged some miles during the night we had plenty of time to contemplate the view. Eventually the cove was reached, having successfully weathered the swell but, owing to the gently shelving beach and the deep draught of the lighter, we could not get close in. Our attempts at overcoming the landing difficulties were encouraged by a large muster of the military, amongst whom was a cinema unit. Being in battle-dress I suppose I must have appeared a new sort of specimen for, as I prepared to take the plunge with my trousers rolled up, the camera was trained on me. I felt I was not looking my best so it is perhaps fortunate that all evidence was destroyed a few days later when the film-unit's car received a direct hit.

Soon a semi-floating <sup>gangway</sup> ~~gangway~~ was rigged but proved far from satisfactory, merely providing comic relief by turning over from time to time and tipping some unfortunate off. However, the unloading of the badly needed petrol, provisions and water was soon underway in fairly quick time using a chain of some 500 prisoners from the several thousands waiting, with the end ones up to their necks in water. The Italians did not seem to mind: most welcomed the work as a relief from boredom.

By this time I had been to visit the local Army Commander, the Brigadier commanding the 16th Infantry Brigade. His H.Q. was some miles inland, reached by the roughest of tracks from which I could see the legacies of the battle - guns, rifles, equipment, wrecked lorries and, here and there, a body still lying where it had fallen. As we rose from sea-level the village could be seen at the top of a slight hill. This cluster of buildings thrown together like a small citadel was shattered and disfigured and not one house remained intact. A little further on we drew up opposite a small hummock in the desert and I was told that we had arrived. A military looking head appeared out of the sand like a Djinn of the magic lamp, and beckoned me down. Here, in the ready-made bomb-proof shelter of an ancient Egyptian tomb, I found the Brigadier and his staff. Introductions over, I was sent back to the beach where there was plenty to keep us occupied.

Improvement in the landing arrangements was badly needed. A bridge of ships' boats and life-saving rafts facilitated matters to a certain extent but was still unsatisfactory so, with the help of a Bren-carrier and large gang of prisoners, a big broken-down Italian truck was laboriously hauled through the soft sand down to the beach and into the sea. The gap between it and dry land was bridged by planks secured over empty oil drums filled with stones. In this work we were greatly assisted by a company of the Queen's Regiment who, from their aptitude for the task, seemed not to have forgotten their service as Marines nearly 200 years ago.

Our lack of kit embarrassed us in this wet and rough work, until we discovered an enemy naval clothes dump which made good many of our defects, although in a somewhat unorthodox fashion.

Meanwhile my party had taken over an imposing tent near the Beach that suited admirably for our quarters. Close by was a dug-out in which to sleep. These proved to have been previously used by the enemy H.Q. and, inside, we found much of interest including many complete sets of maps and hundreds of thousand liras in notes. A signal station was established in a small building overlooking the beach.

Everything was unloaded by shortly after sunset and, work over, we set about making ourselves comfortable. It was hard-tack for supper, but Italian M & V ration found in the desert was useful supplementing it. This M & V was similar to our own except for "M" read "Macaroni" instead of "Meat." Many soldiers gravitated to our tent where they enjoyed tea, which they had been unable to obtain for some time owing to the acute water shortage.

Our tent was one of the few in the desert for, as we discovered, the modern soldier near the front line is better off in a slit trench. We, therefore, slept in our uncomfortable dug out, feeling less conspicuous therein.

The night was bitter and we were unprepared for it. We had only brought one blanket each, there being no space for more in our packs, and mine had been stolen by a prisoner employed in cleaning up the tent. But worse than the cold were the uninvited guests who made their presence felt each night. I thought at first that they were merely sand-flies <sup>but</sup>, "No Sir," declared my Petty Officer philosophically in the middle of the night, "if you give a sand-fly a good wallop it packs up, but these don't and a flea don't!" Acting upon this theory I eventually tracked my bed-fellows to my comfortable mattress taken from the Italian H.Q. tent. Into the sea it went.

The following day dawned too rough for unloading further supplies. In the wake of the wind came sand with heavy rain showers and thunder, thickening until sometimes one could not see more than a hundred yards, driving across the desert out to sea, penetrating into one's lungs, clothes, tent, food, everywhere. We did not enjoy our first sand-storm. Goggles, anti-gas, however, saved our eyes.

Throughout the day more prisoners were coming in whilst others, although not so many, were being evacuated to the rear in captured M.T. There was no cage for the 10,000 or so miserable Italians massed together making a blue-grey smear on the desert face, crouching to get what little protection they could. A small guard only was required, and in fact was all that could be spared, because they had no inducement to escape.

Next day the weather had improved but the ships had not yet returned. Consequently there was no work to be done and we took the opportunity of looking round the battlefield. The enemy's main defences had been further to the Eastward so here there was not a great deal to see beyond innumerable derelict trucks scattered all over the desert, guns, small-arms, ammunition of all sorts, dug-outs and, here and there, machine-gun emplacements. Every dug-out was strewn with letters and with picture postcards which were either of a most amorous nature or else childishly lurid propaganda. In the post-office tent sheets upon sheets of stamps and hundreds of stamped envelopes still remained.

Dogs who had lost their masters and stray horses and mules roamed about. The enemy had left almost everything behind and the quantity and diversity of what was found, coupled with the number of prisoners, was positively embarrassing to the army. Many maps and papers of the greatest importance were captured. These included plans of the Libyan defences, and even a tracing of the enemy's intended dispositions after capturing the Canal area.

Feeling that my party should be mobile I tried to get a captured truck allocated to me, but without success. The following day I resolved to carry into effect this intention of obtaining M.T., but this time without asking permission from the military authorities. Assisted by our friends the "Queens" we found a fine, nearly new, Fiat diesel 10-tonner; its only defect was that it had to be towed to start, a failing common to nearly all captured transport. My Leading Signaller acquired a motor-cycle ostensibly so that he could act as dispatch-rider. I had almost got hold of a staff car when we received orders to move on to Sollum.

It was just as well we had our own transport, for that provided by the Army was far from adequate. Moreover, subsequently, both the truck and the motor-cycle proved absolutely invaluable, and we even found ourselves performing services for the Army with them. That afternoon we broke camp and at tea time set out in company with a R.A.S.C. convoy. We hoisted a boat's Ensign at the fore, and our progress could almost be described as triumphal.

The main road had been still under construction by the Italians when they were driven back, and was of unmetalled rubble now furrowed by the heavy traffic. Frequent diversions were necessary to avoid obstructions or craters, and these were my undoing on several occasions. Swerving to clear them, I was apt to get bogged in soft sand and mud at the road side and there was a great "to-do" whilst a Carrier or Tank was found to haul me out, my truck being too heavy for the average army vehicle. After this journey I felt qualified to drive a General omnibus!

Darkness overtook us when we had but half completed our voyage and it was decided that the night should be spent at Buq-Buq. This meant forsaking the road for a vague track and the last few miles with no lights and no moon made black-out driving at home seem easy. I found it comparable to being in a destroyer at night trying to keep station on one's next ahead who is zig-zagging violently. On arrival we camped, on, under and alongside our lorry.

We embussed, as the Army would say, early the next morning and set out with our convoy. There was considerable traffic on the main road, including an Infantry Brigade moving forward, and in the confusion of joining them I lost my next ahead. Imagining he had got ahead I pressed on, overtaking vehicle after vehicle until, to my surprise and consternation, I discovered that I was in front of the whole British Army - or at any rate, that part of it. And so, in solitary state, we continued on our way.

A little beyond Buq-Buq we passed a sad spectacle: the burnt-out remains of a squadron of our light tanks which, mistaking their direction, had blundered into a salt-marsh commanded by enemy artillery on the surrounding highland, and been bogged with fatal results. A measure of compensation was provided by the sight of the numerous derelict Italian tanks we passed on our way.

## II. SOLLUM.

We sighted Sollum when it was still some distance off. This Egyptian frontier post lies in the northern corner of a fine sweeping bay at the point where the escarpment converges on the coast. The road approaches through an ever narrowing plain separating the sea from this forbidding 450 foot high wall of sand which supports a desert plateau stretching, so it seems, to the limits of eternity. On the left a rough road winds upwards: it is the notorious Halfaya pass, a name strangely appropriate because it lends itself so well to the expressive nickname of "Hell Fire." A few miles beyond this turning the main road enters the village of Sollum. Of the row of buildings along its length, each side, none but the mosque was standing whole. There was not a soul in sight: It was a scene of utter desolation. Close to the pier was a rather mean-looking

Here we hoisted the White Ensign and painted "Admiralty House" on the door.

The work of unloading supplies began immediately. Labour was provided by a few prisoners and the remains of a company of the Argyle & Sutherland Highlanders who were picqueting the harbour. Liason with the Army was provided unofficially by the Scots Company Commander who called himself the "King's Harbour Master." He wore an Italian Brigadier's uniform with sea-boots because none of his proper clothes were in a fit state, and he was a great help. More assistance came a few days later in the form of a company of Commandos who for the time being had nothing better to do.

These Middle East recruited Commandos were, I believe the first of their kind in this war: volunteers of all nationalities, commanded by a Colonel from the Greys, and with one officer to every six men, they were intended for any desperate undertaking, and were waiting at Sollum for such an occasion to arise. In one platoon sixteen different languages were spoken and most racial types seemed represented.

In these comparatively early days of the war the Army had not quite learnt the art of taking over, rehabilitating and working captured ports in quick time so as to cope with a fast advance and therefore, at first, we found we had to organise everything ourselves - unloading, transport, labour, etc. After three days a detachment of Cyprian Pioneers arrived, but it was still necessary for us to organise their employment. Meanwhile the transport had begun to function efficiently, thanks mainly to the highly efficient New Zealand R.A.S.C. M.T. Company concerned. A little later some stevedores turned up, the Army Docks Staff began drifting in and, after a week or so, there were almost enough officials to work a port as large as Alexandria. This gave us an opportunity to relax a bit for the first time.

At Sollum I was able to appreciate the tremendous task of supplying an Army's needs. Everything imaginable passed through our hands - provisions, equipment, bombs, ammunition, and even Canteen beer. Latrine paper was the greatest nuisance because the bales invariably broke open and their contents were

blown all over the harbour. There was an element of irony in this for, originally, there had been a marked shortage of this commodity.

The most difficult part of the task of providing for an Army in the field appeared to be that of transporting the supplies from landing-place to dump. An efficient organisation and an enormous number of vehicles were required to ensure a continuous stream of M.T. under the difficult conditions prevailing; and the individual efficiency of drivers, especially in night work, was of even greater importance. Supplying the Armoured Division was the biggest problem of all: so as not to hinder the mobility of this unit, which was often operating behind the enemy lines, supply convoys had to follow out into the desert making dumps sometimes situated ahead of them, working always by night and navigating by compass.

The enemy, needless to say, did not leave us undisturbed. During the first fortnight there were thirty odd air-raids while, in addition, we were periodically shelled by "Bardia Bill" - a long-range 5.9 inch gun. All inhabitants of Sollum had perforce to become troglodytes at night, although none of us enjoyed sleeping in our cave cut into a cliff 15 feet below the surface. Attacks took the form of single raiders paying successive visits on moonlit nights, dropping a bomb then going away only to return when sufficient time had elapsed for people to think it was all over and come out into the open. Or we were treated to combined torpedo-bomber and high-level attacks at dawn and dusk against which the ships in the Bay always put up a fine firework display, and which generally ended with the torpedoes exploding harmlessly - although somewhat disturbingly - on the beach. And we had daylight visits from armadas of a dozen or more bombers escorted by three times their number of fighters.

This period before Bardia fell was the only time that the Italian Air Force enjoyed air supremacy. The reason for this was that most of the Hurricanes had been used up during the offensive and re-inforcements had not yet arrived. A few Gladiators comprised ~~comprised~~ all the fighter protection that could be spared for us, while no A.A. guns were allocated to the area until nearly a week had elapsed.



The approach of one of the bigger attacking formations was an impressive sight. Flying at a great height the bombers would be in groups of three with, seemingly, countless fighters clustered around. Sometimes a flight of Gladiators would turn up but, being slower and often in an unfavourable position for attack, they would be ignored by the bombers and a superior force of enemy fighters would wheel out to deal with them. A spectacular dog-fight, almost in the last war tradition, between the highly manoeuvrable Gladiators and P.42s might then follow, ending with several of the enemy being shot down without loss to ourselves. Such a spectacle was staged immediately overhead on ~~Christmas~~<sup>Boxing</sup> Day and provided a much needed tonic effect, for we had all been rather shaken by an attack from a large formation on the previous afternoon. On ~~Christmas Day~~<sup>Boxing Day</sup> they had come in flying high in a clear sunny sky and unobserved. Below, the work of unloading lighters at the jetty was in full swing. Suddenly bombs began to fall all around. Lying on my face it seemed as though they would never stop coming down and that, sooner or later, one was bound to land on top of me. But eventually all was silence, an unnatural quiet disturbed only by the cries of the wounded and the patter of falling sea-water. The aftermath was an altogether grim and chaotic sight. Those of us who escaped unharmed were drenched by the water churned up by near-misses. The wounded were evacuated to a vessel in the bay the same evening, but she ~~was~~<sup>has been so</sup> shaken by the severe attack on ~~Christmas~~<sup>Boxing</sup> Day that the unfortunate army casualties decided they were better off on shore and were therefore landed again.

During one heavy attack an officer and a signalman were away in a small boat which received a near-miss.

"Are you married Sir?" asked the Signalman. "Yes," the officer replied, "Why?" "Well, Sir, your wife and mine were ruddy near widders that time!"

The daylight attacks were most frequent during the periods of moonless nights. Italian airmen, apparently, would never venture forth at night without a moon. A policy was, therefore, instituted at this time whereby dangerous cargoes were only unloaded after dark.

General O'Connor came down to see us several times. The conference on the attack on Bardia was held in my "office" and was a most interesting experience. The General impressed us all greatly, and he always had a kind word for my sailors.

At the end of the month I was relieved as N.C.I.C. by a bigger and better man. I was then sickening for Tonsillitis brought on, I imagine, by sleeping in a cave where the atmosphere was hardly of the best. But until then I had not had time to think about being ill. However, I was required to fly to Sidi Barrani to become a lighthouse for the Fleet to fix itself on whilst on passage to bombard Bardia on the morning of the attack. A Swordfish was sent for me and very naked and alone I felt high over the desert unescorted and unarmed except for my revolver; I had visions of C.R.42s with twice our speed swooping on us from all directions! But all went well, as indeed I should have known that it would. Arriving, I found that our old tent was being used as the Officers' Mess by the Durham Light Infantry who were most kind to me in my rapidly sickening state. Whilst walking round in the evening, their O.C. pointed out the lorries in the sea and remarked that he wished he could find the fellow who had put them there, as immense and entirely unsuccessful trouble had been taken over trying to get them out!

My duties as a lighthouse presented no great difficulties, apart from the necessity of turning out indecently early on a bitter morning, and the fact that it was so dark that I had to steer a compass course over the featureless stretch of sand to reach the correct position. All I had to do was flash an Aldis lamp through an arc of bearing at certain intervals for an hour. But it was rather eerie, being there all alone with my winking light seemingly so ineffectual in that overwhelming darkness and emptiness, and without a visible sign of the battle-squadron steaming past away out to sea. No reply could be expected of course, but this did not prevent thoughts of "Was I in the right place?", or "Is it the correct night and the proper time?" However, a <sup>few</sup> ~~couple~~ of years later in a London Club I met the Admiral who had been commanding that Squadron, and was assured that my light was sighted and was of use.

Back at Sollum I had to succumb to my sickness and was invited by the Sappers to stay at their billet in the Egyptian Barracks on top of the escarpment, where it was quieter. As I rode up there I passed Italian prisoners streaming in by thousands, for the attack on Bardia was by this time in full swing. For the most part they were entirely unescorted and when they got down to the harbour they sat about smoking and waiting to be rounded up. Eventually they were caged. It is of interest that the number of prisoners here amounted to almost the same total as that of our entire force engaged in the operation.

My Sapper friends made me very comfortable. The bed they gave me - mattress not included - was truly magnificent and had come, so I was told, from the local Italian Army brothel. It appeared that an axiom of troops finding billets was "For the best beds go to brothels!" I made a good recovery on army rations, No 9s and Italian gargle: the proper medicine only arrived just as I was getting up.

One afternoon, sitting out of doors for the first time, I was surprised by a near-by explosion and, looking round, saw a drifting haze and a figure on the ground. It turned out to have been a Thermos bomb about which an unfortunate aircraftsman had been unduly inquisitive. These bombs, which did slightly resemble a Thermos Flask in appearance, were rendered alive by impact with the ground and, as a rule, became so sensitive that a good look, almost, would set them off. The Italians had an unpleasant habit of distributing them round the desert at night. They were such uncomfortable things to have about that I wandered round in the vicinity to see if I could find anymore, and located a dozen.

Another legacy of the Italians which caused a great deal of trouble was their hand-grenades. These, painted an attractive chromium and red, looked not unlike the top off a Thermos Flask; quite pretty toys which, unfortunately, frequently blew the hands off the inquisitive. Everywhere there was any number of these.

The whole area round the Egyptian Barracks was most battle-scarred. One could not walk a yard without seeing a bit of a bomb or shell, or some other relic. There was even one whole 15-inch shell, looking rather lost I thought.

A few days later I returned to duty, this time joining the staff of the Senior Naval Officer Inshore Squadron. We had plenty to keep us busy administering the numerous Auxiliary vessels working along the Egyptian and Libyan coasts, and in planning the next moves. We lived in a delightful, although unfurnished and windowless, bungalow on the top of the cliffs overlooking the sea, and enjoyed my greatest comfort since leaving Alexandria.

Our domestic staff was augmented by a charming Italian lad of northern stock who seemed glad to work for us. He was alleged to be a chef, but all he could actually qualify for was pantry hand. One of his chief spare time amusements was taking hand-grenades to pieces and rendering them harmless. Everybody employed Italian prisoners: they rarely turned out to be cooks but invariably made admirable, if rather offusive, waiters.

My work took me to Bardia, which was being used as a subsidiary port to Sollum. The harbour is in a little bay cut abruptly into high sandstone cliffs. Ruins and crumbling cliff bore testimony to the effectiveness of the Fleet's bombardment, while the masts of several wrecks reminded one of "Aphis's" daring exploit. One dark night this gunboat had crept in and, with her guns, sank three ships anchored off the port, causing the utmost consternation and panic amongst the garrison. The coast-defence guns could not depress sufficiently to reach them and they got away unscathed. Their only regret had been that there were no troops on board, for they were sure they could have captured the place there and then.

111. TOBRUK.

All this time the military situation was developing round Tobruk. The Armoured Division had pushed beyond, cutting off the town from reinforcement or retreat, and the rest of our forces had taken up positions for the attack. The advance, which commenced on the 20<sup>th</sup> January, was opened by tremendous sea and air bombardment, and met with immediate success. Enemy artillery provided the only really resolute opposition.

On the following forenoon the Italian Admiral commanding at Tobruk and his Chief of Staff arrived to stay with us until they could be sent back to Cairo. They were brought by one of the Naval Liaison Officers who had known the Admiral under somewhat different circumstances when visiting Venice in a Cruiser of the Mediterranean Fleet some years before. The two Italian Officers were more than a little dazed by the turn of events, but were determined to put as good a face on it as possible. Neither bore any animosity and both were almost pathetically grateful for our small courtesies such as the loan of razors, a brush for their clothes, or the offer of a glass of wine.

That evening S.N.O.I.S. and the Naval Clearance Party sailed for Tobruk following a coastwise route obtained from captured charts. The leading Sweeper had on board the Captain and some of the crew of an Italian coaster which had been sunk by a destroyer a few days earlier: it was their job to show the way in, and to encourage them in this they were stationed right up in the bows! One of these unfortunate prisoners had, apparently, spent the last eighteen months working the gate in the boom and, when captured, was going on leave: now he was being sent back to work the gate again.

We made our landfall at dawn, and the unpleasantness of approaching a mined port was not lessened by the difficulty of fixing oneself off a strange and featureless coast. But fortunately no mines were encountered, although a fair number were swept subsequently. There was a pall of smoke over the place which, as we got nearer, could be seen to be issuing from the still burning "San Giorgio," and from oil-fuel tanks onshore. The old armoured ship made a grotesque sight with masts and funnels sagging at different angles, guns pointing

in strangely unreal directions, and a column of smoke rising over all. On the other side of the harbour the large two-funnelled liner "Liguria" lay beached and burnt out, while near-by was a large freighter in a similar condition. In the fair-way a cargo-liner was lying on its side just awash with, as a neighbour, the remains of a destroyer marked by her masts above water. All these, and several others, were Swordfish torpedo successes. Actually the total number of wrecks was, I believe, eighteen or nineteen.

The former Italian Naval Offices were appropriated ~~as~~ Admiralty House. This was a large, imposing building as yet not quite completed, standing in <sup>Commanding</sup> ~~imposing~~ position on a slight hill rising direct from the harbour front. Internally it was in a terrible state, everything all over the place, while the ground outside was thick with refuse. There were two levels of basements and a passage leading to another shelter at the level of the quay, quite sixty below, where there was another entrance. From the state of these places it seemed as though the former inhabitants had spent most of their lives below ground.

There was an abundance of work to be done. The clearance Party made a quick survey, proclaimed the port open within three hours, and then began their formidable task of salvaging, repairs and demolitions.

Unlike their military brethren, the Italian Navy had carried out extensive sabotage. Oil fuel had, of course, been dealt with, as had most naval stores: the naval distillery (water not whisky) was completely ruined, while essential components of the Dockyard power station had been removed. All piers were damaged to some extent but only the biggest and best was unusable. None of the cranes was left servicable. Fortunately a number of lighters were found in good condition.

One place left untouched was the combined cold storage, victualling store and bakery. The inhabitants could have been in no danger from starvation for a large quantity of meat, flour and a variety of other provisions remained- all of which came in most useful relieving the drabness of Army rations: some of the Italian food was really excellent. As always, there seemed to be plenty of lime and orange syrup, some of the best I've tasted, and Vichy water too, all admirable for improving salty water. Chianti and Cognac were to be found everywhere: the former varied from reasonable to putrid, but the latter was mere firewater and an absolute menace on account of the regularity with which it was discovered by thirsty troops. There were cases of lemons by the hundred, very welcome: it looked from their wrappings as though they had originally been intended for export but, that being impossible, were being used up on the troops instead.

My chief concern was producing order out of the shambles in Admiralty House. It was an uphill job but, fortunately, I managed to obtain gangs of prisoners and, before very long, we had the building and its surroundings quite presentable. There was plenty of good furniture available, and I think our Ship's Company's quarters must have been unique in their appearance. No two rooms were alike, but all might have been called over-furnished and each had much in common with milady's boudoir.

Transport, as usual, was greatly needed and I immediately set about obtaining some. This time I was more successful than on former occasions and we eventually obtained a staff car, a 10-ton truck and three smaller trucks, all of course Italian. They were not in good order, in fact we had <sup>to make five</sup> ~~two to ourselves~~ by cannibalising others in worse condition. We were fortunate, too, in having an Ordinary Seaman who could drive, although his enthusiasm was greater than his experience or proficiency. ~~How different all this is these later days, and one now finds adequate R.N. transport provided in captured ports.~~