

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt.R.A.,
I Section
M.E.F.

18/6/41

Dear Mother,

A full-length letter for once, but Lord only knows what I am going to put into it; I shall have to hope for imagination as I go along.

We were, of course, very encouraged by the King's wireless good wishes for 'the forthcoming operations.' Until we heard the Broadcast, we did not know that any operations were forthcoming, so it may have caused a little apprehension among our weaker brethren. Even now, after three or four days, we only hear vague rumours and reports, but as they all tend to indicate smashing victories all along the line, we are all quite happy.

I read an extremely sound article on this kind of thing in one of the dozen 'Economists' that I recently received. It pointed out the ridiculous tendency of most newspapers to give falsely optimistic reports about campaigns and then suddenly let their readers down with a bang. This was particularly so in the Norwegian and Jugo-Slav campaigns. No-one expects the Press to print defeatist stuff, but it is absurd for the BBC and the newspapers to underestimate in such a fashion the moral fibre of the 'man in the street'; or should I say 'the man in the tent'?

We are all very pleased that at last we have taken a firm step into Syria. As a matter of fact we heard Hiram Q. Hamburger of the New York Times broadcasting to his paper from Ankara some four or five weeks ago; he said then that such a step by us was expected at any moment, so naturally I for one was not very surprised when it was finally taken.. Incidentally, those Ankara news broadcasts to the New York Times were very interesting as they gave us the first neutral news that I have heard during the War. The NY Times is, I believe, an Isolationist paper and this was reflected in Hiram's comments.

The Economists have been keeping me in touch with Stock Exchange matters, but as I get them some months' late, I can hardly give you any red-hot tips. I noted that Emmies were about 8/- in January; they have a long way to go yet. Incidentally, I do not suppose you have much spare cash nowadays, but if ever you have a small amount to invest, I should have a look at Tube Investments if you can get them at 80/-. They seem certain to pay their 23³/₄% dividend for the duration and they are a remarkably fine company. The value of investing in that sort of share nowadays is that it is a "hedge" against inflation or depreciated money, because you are investing in the factories and plant of an indispensable industry. I am afraid this reads like the City Editor of the Sunday Express, but I hope it is not as bad as that.

It is awful to think that we have already missed nearly half an English summer. It was bad enough last year in exile in the Scottish Transit Camp. But do you remember this time two years ago? It is two years ago next Friday that I heard the result of my Final [actuarial examinations]. Then three hours in the Falstaff in Eastcheap; the L.S.E. dance until five the next morning; up again at seven to catch the Continent train from Victoria; and ten incomparable days in the Swiss Alps. I think I miss those mountaineering trips almost more than anything else, especially out here where we are surrounded by an unrelieved desert waste. Funny now to think that such a short time ago I was on top of the World, both metaphorically and in actuality. I wonder how long it will take to climb back again!

No more news that I can think of; or should I say no news at all? I have grown a horrible-looking moustache through pure laziness and in no sense of vanity. It is a miserable thing, for some

of the hairs go up my nose and other flavour my soup, or would do so if we ever had soup.

I have written to Dr. Winter and Bert Joseph. I wish I could give up calling him 'Uncle Bert'. I shall never allow my children to call cousins 'uncle'. What they will call Alec I cannot bear to think; I doubt if it will be 'Uncle.'

Do you remember Patey at Euston, the man with the porter? He left us at Gales, being too old and infirm to come with us. We received a most charming and quite affecting letter from him recently; he was most upset at not coming with us. He can have my place in 153 if he wants it. We also heard from Edgington and St. John of the Welsh, both of whom you may remember.

We have had no mail for about a month; but when it comes there should be a lot of it.

Fondest love

L[?] Whitehead [censor]

Henry

Gnr H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.,
I Section

20/6/41

Dear Mother,

Just received your letter of 24th Feb, cards of 18th & 24th May, and your cable. You will hardly be surprised that I looked at the signature of the cable more than once! Need I say how very happy I am and that I wish you every happiness. I suppose that I do not know the gent otherwise you would have mentioned his name. Whoever he is, he does not seem to place much faith in Mr. Tony Waller. I am looking forward to a lengthy description by a later mail. What I shame I cannot be in London on the 29th; this makes the second one I have missed!

I suppose by now you have received my three Airgraph letters. I am rather surprised that you had not received one when you sent your card of 24th May. Like most good things in the Army, however, something has soon gone wrong with the works, for we have had no forms given us for nearly a month.

I was rather amused that Chester took you to see Max Miller in Apple Sauce. His taste has probably a greater affinity to mine than to yours, for I remember him at a very tender age taking you to the Prince of Wales. I have been looking through a few of your old letters, and it seems as though he has seven days leave every five days or thereabouts. We have not had any since last August, nor is there much prospect of any in the near future.

I wrote a full length letter two days ago and am rather sterile of ideas.

Fondest love and best wishes,

Henry

P.S. I would have cabled by return, but we are now restricted to phrases compiled by the imaginative brains of the War Office. They mostly consist of things like:

I have two medals and a pain in the neck

I want money

I want much money

Send me some money.

As they are not very adequate, I thought it best to rely on the speed of the Air Mail.

Love

L [?] Whitehead [censor]

Henry

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.,
I Section
M.E.F.
30/6/41

Dear Mother,

I am afraid this letter is addressed wrongly, but I do not yet know your proper one. We received two more cards and a letter the other day, the last card being dated June 10th.

We had a celebration last night as a joint birthday & wedding party. Your health was drunk in here (one can among four of us) and toasted in toast, porridge, tunny and peas, and coffee. For the first time for six months I really felt blown out, or more vulgarly, satiated.

There is very little news out here at all. This mark [*a curved arrow drawn on the paper*] indicates the remnants of a fly whose kind is very numerous out here. In fact, there is little I can say beyond the increased heat of the climate, the increased stewiness of the food and the increased density of the flies. Middle East flies are entirely different from those in England although from their appearance they may appear prima facie identical. The M.E. fly has little other interest than the infuriation of mankind, which it affects by dancing all over one's ears, eyes, nose and mouth, which no amount of rebuffs can repress. The only effective method of repression is extermination which may be rather painful to oneself when the fly is performing on the organs mentioned. The M.E. fly also has another peculiarity; no matter the speed with which one's swat or hand descends, the fly is never underneath it at the termination of the stroke. It has its Achilles' heel, however, or rather two of them in fornication and twiddling. Taking advantage of the former heel not only kills two with one blow but also thousands of prospective ones. The latter habit is a peculiar one, the fly whenever it thinks itself unobserved stands on its back four legs and rubs its front two with imaginary soap, like a Sergeant Major devising new fatigues. This needs so much concentration that a sharp blow with a swat is nearly always effective.

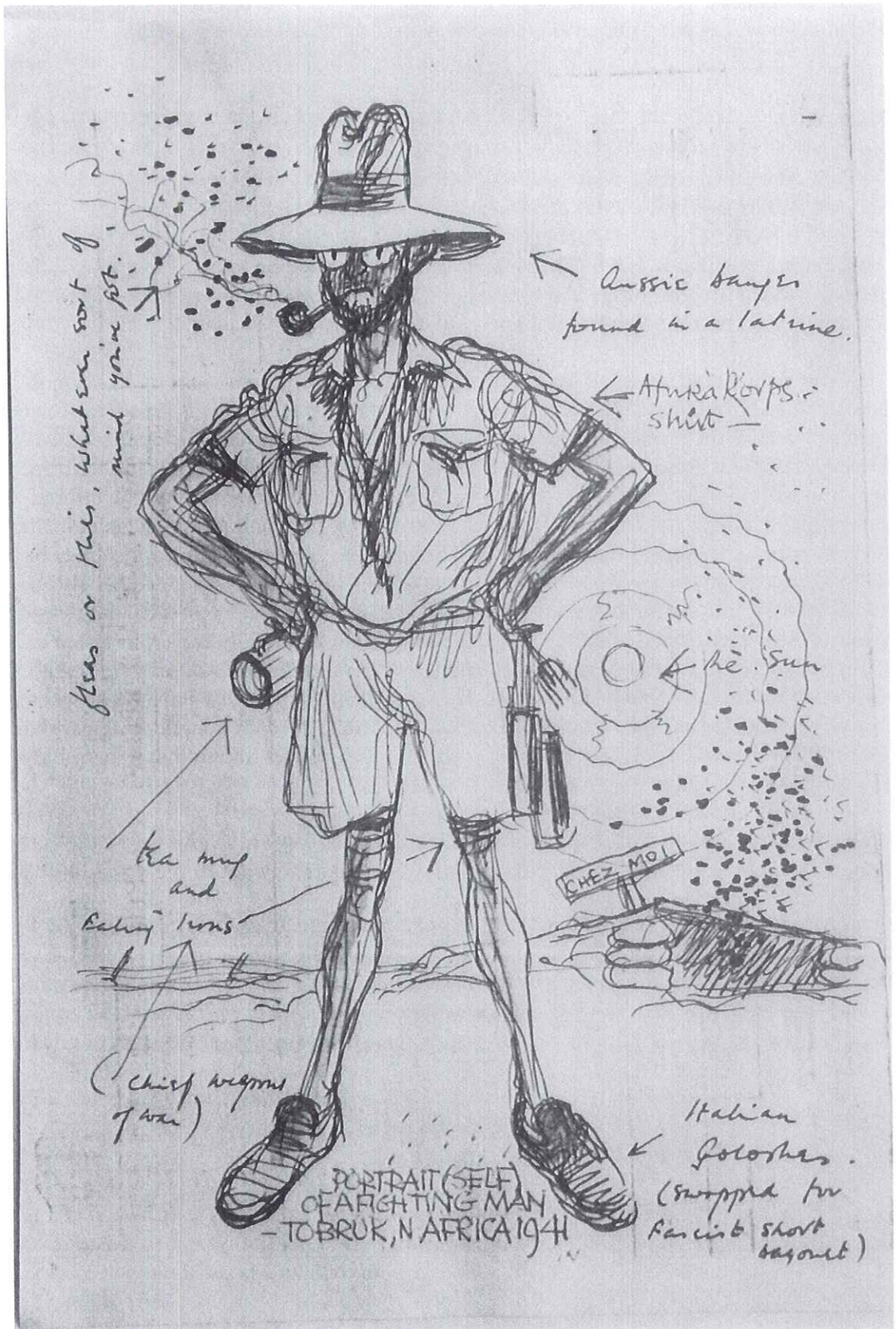
I cannot think of any other matters worthy of my pen. We are swimming nearly every day; this is the only exercise we get. The pyjama cord has worked its way out of the trousers, and I have had no Lilliput for months.

Fondest love
Henry

P.S. It is a poor child that does not know his mother's name!

PPS. News flash! Just eaten figs, green, seven, and grapes, very green, two bunches!

Censor HE Collins



Drawing by Jack Daniel ('Dan')

Extract from 'Top Hats in Tobruk'. Entry for 3rd July 1941.

"Woke up to the sounds of artillery fire again and had to deal with a D.R. [despatch rider] from Regiment shortly after seven o'clock. Handed over to Jimmy at eight o'clock and returned to my old home at 'D' site to try to get some peace and rest.

"A dull depressing morning in which I lay on my bed, worried by flies and fleas, a dull tired ache in my head. Unable to sleep and weighed down by the oppressive heat. Outside a sandstorm was blowing; in fact everything was about as uncomfortable as possible. When on earth are we going to be relieved? Perhaps the arrival of a new General will accelerate matters. We are all getting tired and fed up.

"Artillery fire continued in spite of the sandstorm. After lunch staggered down to the beach and just flopped down on the sand in a state of semi-collapse. Two hours later I realised my clothing had got soaking wet, so took it all off and lay in the nude. Had a bathe and felt better by the evening when I returned to camp for a cup of tea and some tinned turnips (some supper!). Learnt that the activity last night was when the Jerries attacked in the early hours, penetrated a mile and were repulsed at dawn. The sandstorm had cleared up.

"Had a big flea-hunt, flitted my bedding, got into pyjamas tried to get to sleep, but it was very hot and stuffy and I still had a headache. All kinds of battle noises continued round the perimeter keeping me awake wondering what was happening.

"One of our Sergeants had gone sick and been pronounced T.B. Another had a duodenal ulcer. Many of the lads were none too well suffering from tummy and other troubles, but mostly carrying on in spite of it. We have been here too long."

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
I Section
M.E.F.
6/7/41

Dear Mother,

I received your letters of 25th March and 15th January (two) about ten minutes ago. The two of the latter date had been fished out of the sea; the envelope does not mention which sea, but judging by the smell, I should think it is the Manchester Ship Canal. I also received a note from Lilliput asking me to renew my subscription. Could you do that for me, please? The special rate for the Forces is 9^s/6^d per annum.

Your letters mentioned our communication from the boat and, worst of all, the fruit we bought in Cape Town. This was a hard blow, for we have had no fruit issued to us for months although we have managed to obtain some at great personal danger to life and limb. This local fruit consists of grapes and figs jealously guarded by Australian guards. I picked an enormous bunch of ripe grapes the other day during an air-raid while the guards were taking cover, and I also climbed a fig-tree with my labour well rewarded.

I discovered a topic for correspondence today which should last me for many months. When cleaning up my bivouac this morning after yesterday's sand-storms I discovered a hedge-hog buried under my kit-bag with four young ones, so young indeed that they are blind. The mother is very callous, and utterly refuses to have anything to do with them. This heartless conduct so infuriates some of the men that they want me to bake it – on second thoughts they are probably more hungry than furious (so am I!)

I heard from Estelle Pappé (née Stone) by the same mail. Arthur is now a captain.

Censor
HE Collins

Fondest love
Henry

P.S. THE HEDGE-HOG HAS ENCOURAGED SOME NASTY REMARKS ABOUT MY BIVOUAC AS A BREEDING-GROUND FOR ODD CREATURES – NOT ALTOGETHER UNWARRANTED BY ITS APPEARANCE.

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
I Section
M.E.F. 16/7/41

Dear Viviane,

Many thanks for your April letter which has just arrived. I had a sudden burst of letter-writing in May and the beginning of June and wrote you three which I hope you have received, although you will not be much worse off if you do not receive them. Incidentally, if you send a postcard marked Air Mail with a 3^d stamp, it would reach me in about three weeks. It would also save you the trouble of thinking out long letters, although this would be no saving as of course you would write many more of them.

Alec had a very mild attack of dysentery and has gone back to the Big City. He was not very bad, and when I last saw him he was wearing the sort of ticket that child evacuees have pinned to them and also a three inch beard, with a grin from ear to ear. He has now been discharged -----
----- [*words blotted out*] days leave. (Please do not spread this around as I do not want mother to know.)

We have been out in the Desert for well over six months, and our wild nomad sheikh existence is beginning to pall. Not a dancing girl for miles. I picked up a few pages of a book "Allah's gift" the other day in that part of the camp where you always find torn pages of discarded books. Imagine my interest on reading the following:-

"Do you realise, Ermyntude, that this is your last night in the desert?" he said, etc. "Don't rub it in," she replied RUEFULLY!

This shows how little the author knew about the desert, because the one thing you need not do with the desert is rub it in. It rubs itself in. When I return home, I shall be leaving a trail of sand behind me for months.

Another peculiar thing about the desert is that when you step outside your bivouac to tread some tins or refuse into some loose sand, by the morning all the covering sand will have disappeared, having been carried off in a sandstorm. Oddly enough other sand is never blown to cover your tins. This is a mystery of the East. As a matter of fact, most gunners rather like to see empty cans of beer and fruit lying about, as it probably reminds them of home, but I have never met the Commanding Officer who liked them.

I never quite realise how I manage to write three pages, as I never have any news. All my military revelations will have to be related after the War; they are too near the truth perhaps to bear Censorship.

We are still swimming nearly every day, and eat so many grapes as to obviate the use of "numbers 9."

Don't forget to write

H.E. Collins

Henry

P.S. I recently saw an advert by a Maisel in Palestine. Have you any relations there?

AIRGRAPH

Dear Mother,

Just received your letter of the 5th May together with papers of the middle of May. Post is coming through now both regularly and abundantly. Alec is on 7 days leave; rather a shame we could not have it together. Still they must have one Kassman fighting the War. I sent his Will to you in a green envelope last week; when you receive it, please destroy his previous one.

Gnr. H.H. Kassman

14747509

153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.,

M.E.F.

20/7/41

We are having rather a lot of night duty nowadays, and although we have plenty of spare time I find myself going to sleep unless I adopt an attitude of extreme discomfort. Nevertheless, I am managing to read quite a few books. I have just finished Essays of Elia and Carlyle's lectures on Hero Worship and am now reading a very good one by John Buchan. Incidentally, this Russian business makes the reading of War and Peace almost coincidental and all the more interesting. Napoleon of course gave the Russians a hiding at Smolensk, but it did him no good in the long run. It is far from impossible that Hitler will make the same mistake, especially if the Russians last out until the winter. (I would much rather be reading about this in fifty years time.) This is my 4th Airgraph; forms are rather scarce and the third was many weeks ago. Still very fit.

Love

Henry

AIRGRAPH

P.S. Does this arrive clearly written?

Dear Mother [*now Mrs. Eibuschitz*],

We have just received four cards (19th June – 2nd July) and two letters of April & May. I cannot say how much I envy your trip to the Lake District; the contrast with the scenery of our present position cannot be exaggerated. Needless to say, Alec and I are both delighted at the step you have taken and that you are so happy. We have both been rather worried at your living alone in London, and a great weight has been taken off our minds. We are both sorry you have not told us more about Mr. E; naturally, we have not yet received his letter (nor, by the way, that of Mr. Malikont).

Life is not altogether unpleasant at the moment. Although our camp is in the desert, we have very frequent bathing. There are two very interesting men here, one a Balliol scholar the other a sub-editor of the Field. Periodically we cook an improvised supper and then sit chatting about everything under the sun (or rather moon) until well into the night. We all find it quite stimulating. Books are rather scarce here; I wonder if you would mind renewing my subscription to "World Books" and get them to send me their monthly book. It is only 2/6^d per mensem. You should find their address in the Press.

Fondest love,

Henry

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
24/7/41

AIRGRAPH

Dear Mother,

Just received your letter of May 20th for which many thanks; also a letter from Bert Joseph and a note from Readers Digest about the subscription from "A Friend of Mother's", presumably Mr. E. whom please thank. I have not asked you to send any parcels (a) because I thought they might not reach us and (b) because, really, you probably are shorter of the stuff than we are. However, if you feel like sending some cans of beer or some Bovril now and then we should be very grateful. One man had some beer sent and received it short by four cans, so please see that there is no indication of their contents on the outside wrapping! If you could mark them "Histories of Ancient Greece" or something similar, they might arrive intact. We should also like an Xmas parcel in due course although it may be a bit early to mention this. I hope all this does not give you too much trouble. The weather is becoming very hot now, but we can still go about bare-headed and must be acclimatised. The frequent swimming is a great relief. Alec has just had seven days leave in Tel Aviv as I presume he has told you. In spite of the horrible warning we had in England, I have had nothing worse out here than toothache and a burnt leg. I hear from Bert Joseph that you are very well and are a good girl.

Fondest love

HENRY

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
31/7/41

AIRGRAPH

Dear Mother,

Your card from Keswick has just arrived. I am told that the photograph represents a thing called a "waterfall", although I cannot remember what such an object looks like.

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 Regt. H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
8/8/41

Alec has just returned from his leave and is very brown, if not handsome; although handsome is as etc. and he did bring back a bottle of sherry. We had a sherry party? last night and then went down to see a concert that some of the fellows are putting on at the local Hippodrome. Most of the turns would have been considered indelicate of the Holborn Empire, but the show was vastly superior to any Army concert that I had seen hitherto. Last Monday was August Bank Holiday and we had an impromptu party in the evening. We thoroughly enjoyed it and stayed talking well into the night. Sic transivit gloria Monday.

Please thank Mr. E. for his notes on your cards. I am awaiting his letter; I can never think of anything to write nowadays except as a reply to a letter received. I wrote to Mrs. Goodman the other day.

Fondest love

HENRY



"Sherry party Tobruk 8/41" [*Alec is at the back on the right*]



Drawing by Jack Daniel ('Dan')

Extract from 'Top Hats in Tobruk.' Entry for 12th August 1941:

"12th August 1941 – Quite an exciting time around 1.00 a.m. to 3.30 a.m. when nine planes dropped long sticks of bombs, nearly all in our immediate area. One lot passed by very close to us, much too close for comfort. Another lot whistled low over our heads. Still another lot straddled us, and others passed within 400 yards and stretched out as far as the town, where quite a healthy fire was started; the glow from it lit up some clouds in competition with the bright half moon.

Got in four hours sleep to be turned out at seven-thirty for two planes which turned out as Hurricanes, and we felt cheered by the sight of them. But they did not stay longer than they could help – circled the aerodrome and immediately went off again, with a healthy roar, out to sea. They were greeted with ironical cheers.

Took a look round some of last night's bomb craters. Found no sign of any damage or anyone hurt. The bombs were mostly 100 pound or 500 pound weight I should say.

After breakfast we engaged a Ju. 88 which dropped a big stick of bombs and, this time, achieved some measure of success, hitting an ammunition dump. There were occasional huge explosions and a non-stop cracking of other smaller ones, accompanied by dense clouds of white and black smoke. Bits and pieces could be seen flying up into the air and verey lights shooting out from the middle of it all. So I suppose our N.A.A.F.I. supplies will be cut down owing to lack of shipping space, much needed for ammunition; someone has been careless in leaving too much ammunition in one place!

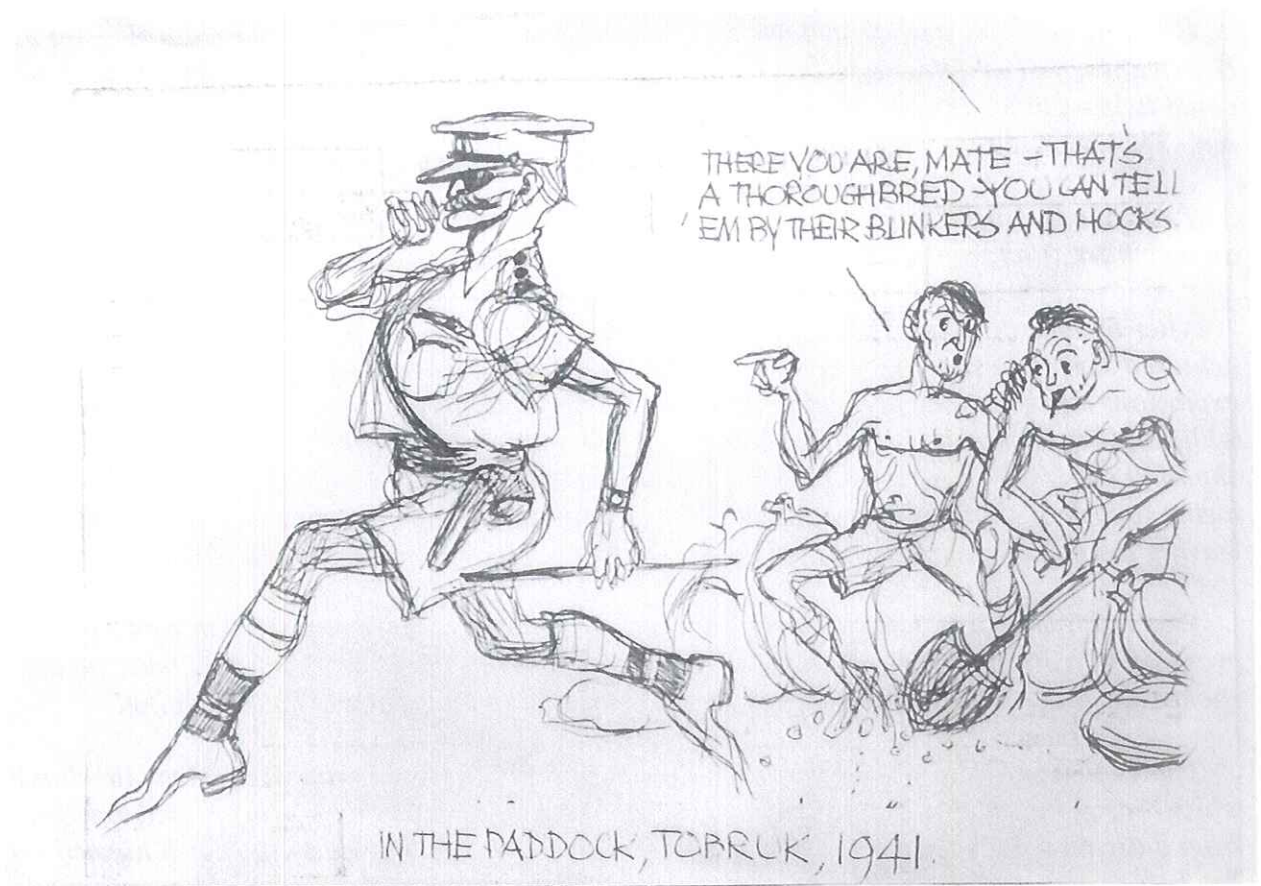
Was relieved by Bill, late as ever, after laying on a lot of cleaning up work in view of the prospective visits by the Major and a new Brigadier later in the morning. Came back via the cookhouse to see if they were getting themselves tidied up and a hearty bonfire going.

Talked to a Sergeant-Major in the local ammunition supply column. He told me the dump which was going up was Italian, but was useful nevertheless and had been collected together from outlying dumps for use by us. So it was all very sad. He was working near it himself the day before, and was worried about a lot of men working there today. There was every cause for worry as explosions went on all morning, and one D.R. [despatch rider] came in with gruesome stories of bits of bodies picked up half a mile from the dump. To add to confusion the swine started shelling the area where rescue work would be in progress – typical of the German mentality, of course! The Sergeant-Major said we were actually using as much Italian ammo as British, and the R.H.A. [Royal Horse Artillery] were making good use of the 149 mm., recent stories of the shortcomings of these guns being nonsense. The stories of loading and recuperator problems came from some old Italian howitzers which were being used more as a joke than anything else.

Had a sleep after lunch and then went down to the beach, feeling tired still. Had a few figs on the way. Had two bathes finding the water beautifully warm and then got in conversation with an Aussie, who told me all about Melbourne – good climate, good jobs, good scenery, good sport – made me wonder about going there some day..... She [bis wife] would be astonished to see me now – a deep brown all over, most of my day being spent with only a pair of shorts on.

A raid by a Ju. 88 which dropped bombs right over our gun position and landing within a short distance of our cookhouse. There is no doubt they are after something in our immediate vicinity, and we are getting bombed day and night.

Collected some prickly pears at the little oasis on my way home, had some supper at 'H' site and on to my dug-out at 'D' site to hear some very amusing stories by the lads there, all sitting round a table by the starlight. Was interested in the news which talked of heavy raids by us on Bardia three days running. Perhaps a pointer!"



Drawing by Jack Daniel ('Dan')

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.
16/8.41

Dear Mother,

Many thanks for your letter (Air Mail of the 27th May) which has just arrived, enclosing photograph of Mr. E. You do not save much time sending by Air Mail except under the Letter Card & Airgraph systems and the time saved hardly merits the extra cash. The Letter Card & Airgraph are as speedy as the cable, so I am not sending further cables especially in view of the fatuous messages to which we are restricted. Many thanks for your offer of cash; fortunately we are in no need of it as our joint credit amounts to about £100, although unfortunately we are in no position to spend it.

We are both sincerely delighted that you are so happy and in view of your description of Mr. E., neither of us has any doubt that you have done the right thing. What a shame we were not home. I can imagine Jeaves announcing "Mr. E" followed by a nervous young man fingering his hat.

"Come in, my boy, what can I do for you?"

"Well, sir, Mrs. K & I are very much in love, and wish to get married."

"Oh, yes. Take a cigar. What do your parents think about this?"

"I daren't show 'em to 'em, sir."

"Hm. Have you met her relatives?"

"Not many of them, only about thirty."

"And you still want to marry her! What is your financial position?"

"Very sound. £250 a year and excellent prospects."

etc.

Alec was green with envy at the button-hole in the photograph. He does not wear flowers in his button-hole any longer: although there are plenty of pansies in the camp itself. Did you ever receive the photographs of Alec and myself that I sent you seven or eight months ago? I cannot remember you mentioning them. Perhaps the censor destroyed them as likely to cause despondency on the Home Front.

By the way, while on leave Alec met quite a number of L. Welsh men drafted out here in another unit. It is exactly two years today since I went to Aberporth for a month's camp (extended so far to 24 months). What a pity it is that we ever left the 99th. The more we see of other units, the more we appreciate the good time we had with them during the first nine months of the War.

A new item has appeared on our private menu, the prickly pear. This tastes like a sweet cucumber and looks (and feels!) like a porcupine.

W.J. Parge [*censor*] Have you told the various companies whose shares you hold (and also the Equity & Law) of your change of name?

Love Henry

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.
M.E.F.

21/8/41

Dear Mr. Eibuschitz,

Thank you very much for your Air Mail letter of the 2nd June which we received yesterday. I had, of course, already had a good few letters from Mother on the subject of your marriage, and I can assure you that we are both very happy indeed that she has re-married, for she must have been in rather an unsettled and lonely state living by herself in London in the present conditions. Naturally we should have liked to have been with you in June, but both look forward to making your acquaintance, although I am afraid this will not occur for rather a long time.

We also received by the same mail a couple of Air Mail cards from the Lake District. The scenery certainly contrasts strongly with that of our present surroundings, which is ugly in the extreme. I am afraid that the Cumberland hills must appear very mild after your spectacular Austrian mountains, which I have had the good fortune to visit. Indeed, as you probably know, it was on one of my Central European mountain holidays that I met our friend Dr. Winter. It is a very peculiar twist of Fate that a casual luncheon acquaintance at Cortina should have been the indirect cause of Mother's re-marriage.

I cannot think of any news to write as no doubt you see my letters to Mother. I can only hope you do not rely too much on Mother's opinion of us, for I fear that you will be greatly disappointed when you do meet us.

Hoping you and Mother are both very fit,

With kindest regards

Censor's signature (unclear)

Henry Kassman

Gnr. H.H. Kassman
1474509
153/51 H.A.A. Regt. R.A.,
M.E.F.
28/8/41

Dear Mother,

I hope you are receiving these Letter Cards and Airgraph letters, one of which I send every week (except when I forget). We are getting your Air Mail cards, but otherwise mail is non-existent; we have had no papers or letters for over a month.

A few of us are toying with the idea of the production of a magazine. We have had a few contributions (literary, not financial) but I find it dreadfully difficult to become enthusiastic about anything nowadays. Actually, we do not intend to publish it with a view to a record certified net sale, but rather for our own amusement and as a souvenir of the place where we are stationed, (as if we wished to remember it after we leave). One of the editors had the horrible idea of each of us writing an impression or appreciation of a celebrated musician, poet, artist, sculptor, etc. Having recently read Bleak House and Great Expectations, I have been pinned down to Dickens. My appreciation so far consists of three words "I appreciate Dickens" beyond which my mind is a haven of ideas.

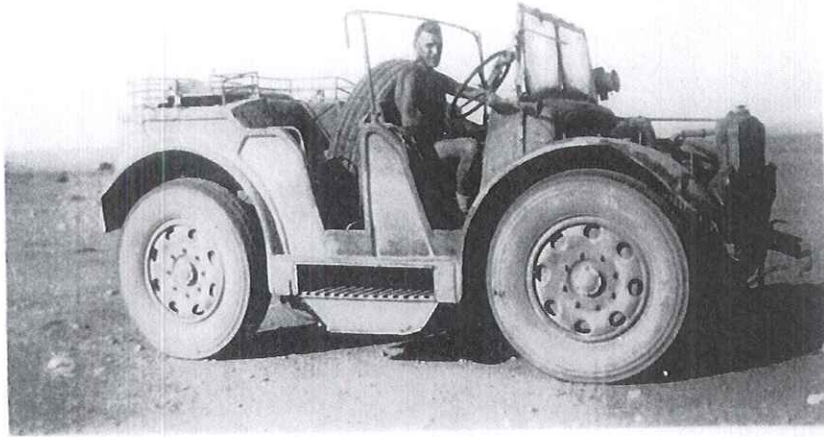
I answered Mr. Eibuschitz' letter last week, and I must say Alec and I both thought his letter very charming, certainly more so than my reply which was written in my usual bluff soldierly manner.

You will be interested to know that the green fig harvest, like the grape harvest before it, is now finished. The only one left for us is the prickly pear harvest; the prickly pear has a delicious taste, (half strawberries and cream and half chocolate ice-cream soda), but after you have picked one you feel as if you have been stroking a porcupine. For this reason it is none too popular.

I have written all the news of breath-taking interest.

Fondest love
Henry

P.S. Chester had any more week-end leave? According to the last letter, he had had none for a fortnight.



"Ganner in Italian Lorry Tobruk 9/41"

ARTICLE & PHOTOS FROM 'PARADE' MAGAZINE, MIDDLE EAST WEEKLY, OF 6TH SEPTEMBER 1941. [The magazine is in too fragile a condition to scan]

MEN OF TOBRUK

"PARADE" WENT TO TOBRUK TO GET THESE IMPRESSIONS OF THE ORDINARY LIFE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GARRISON WHICH HAS LIVED FOR FIVE MONTHS IN SAND OR IN THE COLLECTION OF SHATTERED HOUSES THAT IS ALL THAT IS LEFT OF TOBRUK — IMPERISHABLE NAME WITHOUT A TOWN. THE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE BY LIEUT. NORMAN SMITH, PUBLIC RELATIONS UNIT, AND GEORGE SILK, OFFICIAL A.I.F. PHOTOGRAPHER.

TOBROUK GARRISON. Many newspaper readers far away from the scene of this epic action probably imagine a bomb and shell shattered group of buildings beside a harbour full of foundered shipping. Actually, Tobruk Garrison consists mostly of an undulating, wadi-cleft desert about the same size as the Isle of Wight.

Tobruk itself—as big as a small English market town—seen from the rising ground to the south seems in an interlude of calm between bombing and shelling scarcely to have been touched. From the church tower dominating the piazza to the docks below the bright white houses terrace down in apparently unbroken succession to the harbour, where the superstructure of the LADYBIRD is the only prominent wreck that catches the eye.

Inside, the town is another matter. Splinter-scarred walls, roofless, sand-bagged. Here and there, poking from paneless window or parapet, dark against the sky, lean barrels of Lewis and Bren guns.

Driving over the segment of sand between the sea-coast and the outer defences, never for an instant is there absent the grim reminder that this is no sleepy pleasure resort on the North African littoral. True, you will find an occasional oasis with a few prickly pears, date palms and fig trees. On

the sandhills by the shore there are even sparse growths of leafless white flowers, narcissus-scented, sticking out of the sand. And there are quiet-looking bays, fringed with fine, white sand; rocky coves by a sea that ranges through all shades of green and blue, smeared with dark, seaweed patches.

But the crevices in the rocks overhanging the sea are sandbagged (by the Italians). Stone sangars rise like giant mole-hills all over the rocky parts of the coast. Slit-trenches alternate with bomb and shell craters everywhere inland up to the perimeter. The whole area is hived, pocked and pitted with man-made marks of war.

And all over, it is strewn with the stark bones of General Graziani's mechanical array. The area is a cemetery of Italian mechanical transport. Charred, overturned skeletons of lorries, the twisted ironwork of burnt-out Italian planes, lie bleakly over the valleys. In the frequent sandstorms that fog the clear air in some parts inside the perimeter these shapes loom up at you like spectres.

SAND, SAND, SAND

It is difficult to imagine the life of the Tobruk Garrison. It is dominated by sand. Troops live dug into the sand. A day or night is either fine or "sandy," according to the dust weather. If men can be spared a few days

relief from duty, they proceed along the sand until, within some distance from the sea, desert becomes by convention rather than anything else "beach." There they spend their leave on the sands. And speaking of conventions, a few men valiantly maintain them here by wearing slippers for bathing. Perhaps in this way they create an illusion of being on the beach of some far-away English or Australian bathing resort.

Sand, bombing, shelling. Besides fleas and flies, these are the main pests that afflict the garrison. There are two kinds of bread in Tobruk—"ordinary" and "blitz." "Blitzbread" is filled with bomb splinters or shrapnel when supply lorries are caught in a raid.

With the experience behind them of nearly a thousand enemy raids over Tobruk area alone—and no-one has

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TRIBUTE TO A TOBRUK HERO. AUSTRALIANS VISIT GRAVE OF A V.C. COMRADE GRAVEYARD IN TOBRUK IS TENDED BY OFFICER AND MAN, WHO KEEP IT TIDY

MEN OF TOBRUK — CONTINUED

troubled to record how many before in Mersa-Matruh, Libya—the men of the garrison have ears attuned to the intermittent drone that means an enemy plane overhead. With a glance skyward and a muttered "the visiting team again" they go on with their job—if they are not ack-ack gunners, then they begin on it. During visits by

single raiders the signal to take cover is generally the whistle of a bomb. Drivers of transport have only one way to tell if an air raid is about to develop immediately above them—the sight of men dispersing for shelter. A few seconds and the *strafe* is on.

NEW USE FOR OLD TYRES

Certainly, enemy bombs have destroyed some things in Tobruk. But they have also been the causes of construction. One gunner in a target area has made for himself a small, sturdy concrete house, tastefully though sparsely furnished with chest of drawers, bookshelf, desk, chair, and since this man is called Anderson, on the outside of the door you read *The Anderson shelter*.

Some prefer to rip the top off a petrol tin, fill it with water—naturally, not drinking water—and boil their clothes in it over a wood fire. Or there is sea washing. You will come across a man who seems at first sight to be fishing with a line tied to a rock on the water's edge. But it turns out that at the other end of the line on another piece of rock where the waves are breaking is a pair of pyjamas (one of the sticklers for convention again).

"Let the surf do your washing for you," is evidently the slogan.

In the front lines round the perimeter living conditions are even more uncouth. Here, either in the concrete Italian underground positions or in dimly lighted caverns, the men live some 800 yards away from the enemy. Reading by night, sleeping by day, often with nothing to read, nothing to do, their existence is grim indeed.

Conditions are much the same as on the Western Front in the last war. Only there has never been anything on the no-man's land between the two lines of posts to devastate. A featureless waste by day, a void by night, lit up from time to time by green flares from the German lines, red flares from ours, the stillness punctuated by the rattle of machine-gun and mortar fire behind the front line men.

APPRECIATION

In a number of the Tobruk paper of a South Australian brigade, dated May 8, 1941, messages of congratulation were published from General Wavell and General Blamey. The editor made this comment in his paper: "While these messages are appreciated and a balm to our vanity, we must not lose sight of the fact that strips of praise for anything that we have done is due to British artillery operating here. They have done a magnificent job. While we are not a P.M. or a C-in-C. or a G.O.C., we would like to express our most sincere and heartfelt thanks for what they have done for this garrison."

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Tobruk trades spring up. Beside the makers of camouflage netting working in caves, there are Indians who have become cobblers. For a few pence they will make you a fine pair of shoes, soles cut from old tyre covers, uppers made from strips of Aussie felt hat. There is nothing shoddy about these shoes.

Each man is, of course, his own laundry. There are different methods.



FROM FIELD KITCHEN TO A CRACK AT THE JERRIES. AN ALARM SENDS THE NOW-FAMOUS "BUSH ARTILLERY" OF AMATEUR GUNNERS SPEEDING TO THEIR ANCIENT GUN.

and crannies of the rocky wadis. Passing down these dim rifts at night you see men emerge from the rockface, disappear into it, silent, like phantoms.

THE "WELL-WISHERS"

Between working and fighting, the Garrison must provide its own entertainments. And the spirit of Tobruk that has astounded the world is shown also in this—in the gallant fight waged against "Tobruk blues."

Besides the "official" daily news sheet, "Tobruk Truth," or "Dinkum Oil"—produced through thick and thin in a bomb-shattered office by a sergeant and a volunteer assistant—many Australian units bring out their own paper. One of these, "Mud and Blood," prints the news on one side and humorous items on the other. It is even illustrated. A competition was recent-

run for the best poem on beer. The winner of the prize—beer—addressed his subject in terms as ardent as any lover ever used to his mistress. Beer is not often seen in Tobruk.

One famous artillery unit from the Midlands that has now been fighting for fourteen months in one part of the desert or another is fortunate enough to possess a band of nine instruments—there used to be ten, but the enemy scored a direct bomb hit on the big drum. There are two violins, two cornets, a tenor horn, trombone and euphonium, a saxophone and a ukulele. Also a composer—he has written a "Tobruk March"—and a librettist. This band calls itself "The Well-wishers Concert Party" and has given sixteen concerts in Tobruk, visiting many units and holding the shows in gunpits, caves, an M.D.S. operating theatre "on the deck" (near the perimeter).

It has been telephone broadcast and has given a command performance to General Morshead. "Contracts" are arranged through the padre.

A Signals man has devised a cunning system of lighting effects for the cave concert hall modifying them to correspond with the music. Excellent effects are also obtained from outside. In a sketch representing cross-talk between an Australian and German sentry, shells bursting half-a-mile away added greatly to the realism.

The band also replaces an organ in the weekly church services held underground in the rambling cavern. It plays psalm and hymn music and blares defiance to the enemy bombs that often drop close overhead. The padre's voice is never for an instant interrupted by anything Jerry can do to interfere with his ministrations. The men sing lustily, a dusty, weatherbeaten group in front of the improvised altar.

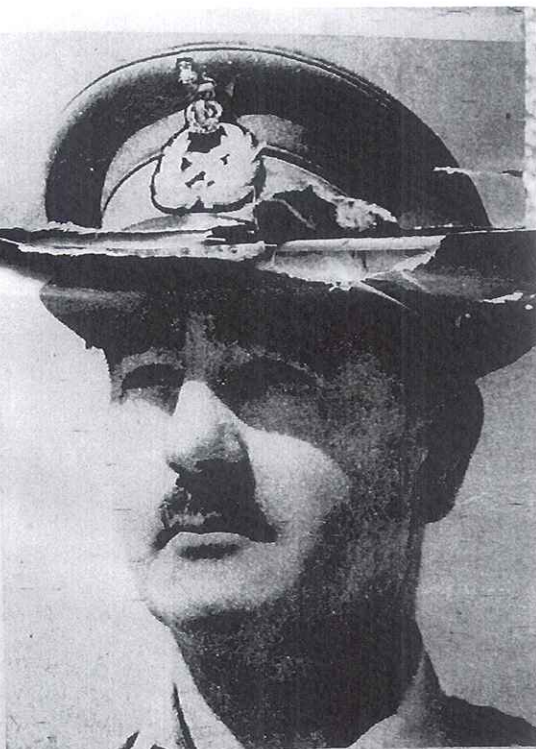
The same unit has a debating society, which meets each week, generally with the C.O. in the chair, to discuss such matters as: "Does mass attendance at cinemas have an adverse effect on the character and individuality of the citizen of today?" (lost); "That the good old days really were good old days" (lost); "That in view of the number of wars caused by Germany during the past eighty years, after the present one, she should be split up again into principalities" (lost).

A "TEST MATCH"

There has been a "spelling bee," and a mock trial is pending in which a prisoner will stand in the dock accused of the murder of his wife. The men are preparing costumes. Wigs will be made out of bandages and cotton wool.

Another enterprise was the formation of a cricket team—one of the officers is a well-known county wicket-keeper. A match was played on matting against an Australian side in conditions which

(Continued overleaf)



GENERAL MORSHEAD, C.M.G., C.B.E.
D.S.O., V.D., G.O.C. TOBRUK FORTRESS

AUSSIES ANSWER "SURRENDER" PAMPHLET

Australian Diggers' answer to pamphlet pictured on top of page 5 was to hoist a white flag from one of the highest buildings in the town. "Come and get it!" read the biggest inscription on the flag. Appropriate Australian descriptions of the Germans also figured prominently on the flag. An Australian Tobruk unit paper gives a full account of this unfortunate German experiment. The Diggers, it stated, chased the pamphlets right out to the barbed wire for souvenirs. The paper advised the enemy to word their pamphlets differently if they wished them to be effective: "This is what we suggest: 'Aussies—we have been trying to get you out of your rat holes for the past three months and are getting fed up.

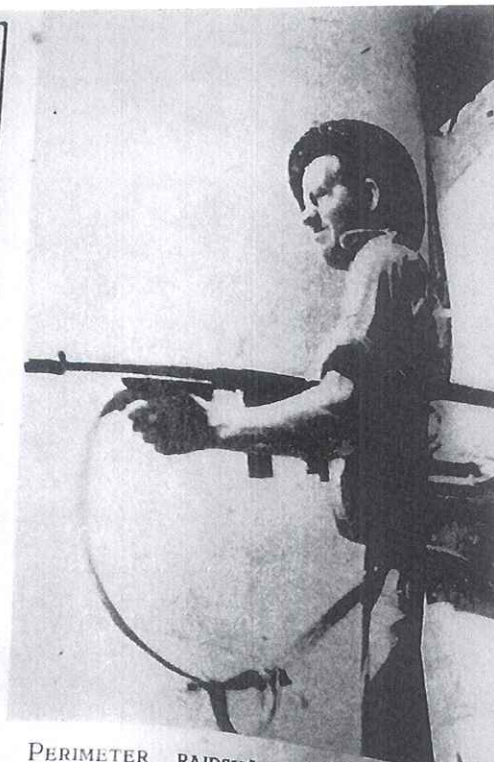
"Every one of you we get costs us ten, and it's getting a bit thick.

"Come and give yourselves up. The German beer is the best in the world, and we have millions of gallons here.

"Our prison camp is the most luxurious in the world with two-up schools every night, coursing every Wednesday, trots on Monday afternoons, and gee-gees every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It's all yours if you please, please let us take Tobruk!"

were thought rather to favour the "Aussies." Play was occasionally held up by sandstorms. Umpires, in white coats, loaded rifle and fixed bayonet, could be changed at the wish of the players if not satisfactory, according to the not too serious match-card, and grenades could be taken onto the field of play.

An amenity of the match was ironically stated to be beer during and rum before and after play. Neither Italians nor Germans were sufficiently interested to come over to this match.



PERIMETER RAIDSMAN TYPIFIES GARRISON
TOUGHNESS. ITALIANS AND GERMANS KNOW

ORACLE OF TUMBLER

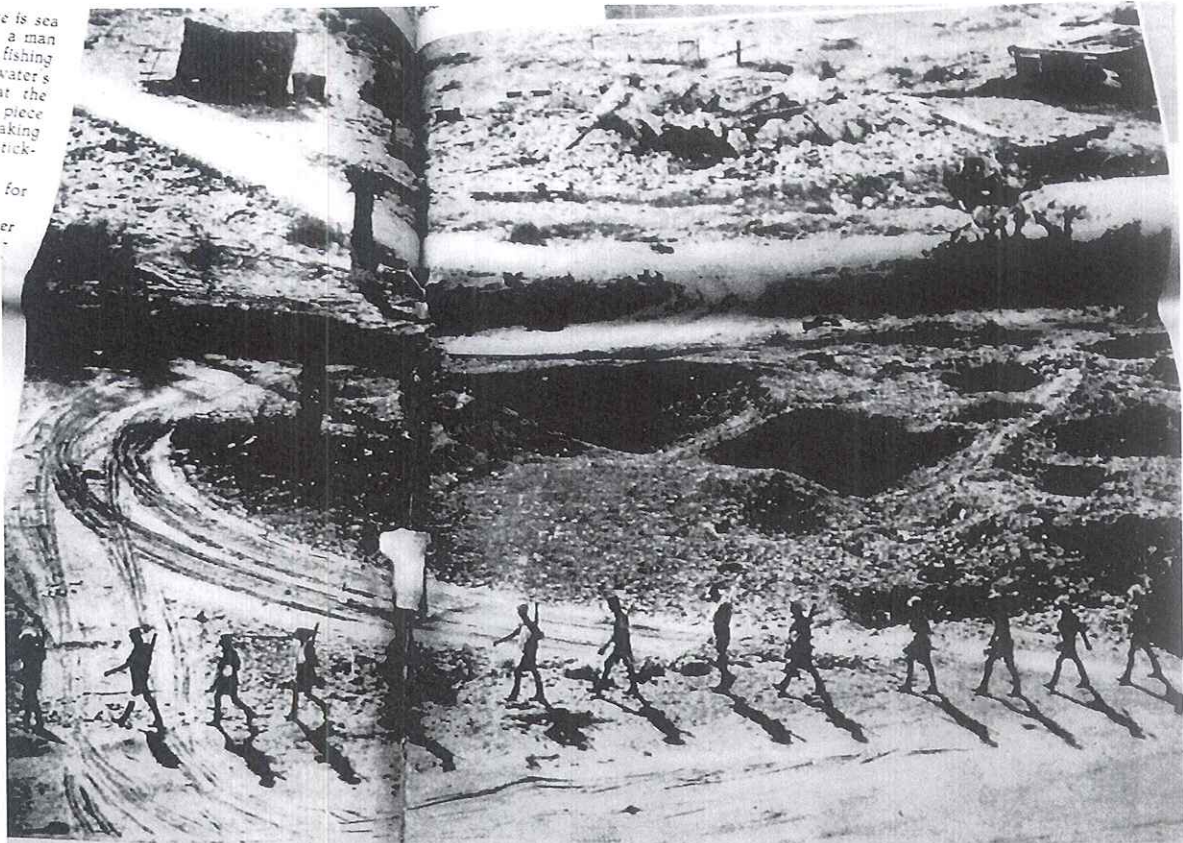
"Spiritualist meetings" have taken place round the windscreen of a car on which a tumbler is balanced. The oracle alphabetically taps out answers to questions—it may be guessed what the trend of these is. But the answers are ambiguous, dark and sometimes contradictory. It did, however, volunteer the information that at some time in the not too distant future the unit would find itself fighting in Germany.

In these and similar ways the troops in Tobruk, amid conditions that are difficult for anyone who has not been there to understand, continue to fight the "blues" in intervals of fighting the enemy. In its own way this effort is as remarkable as the Garrison's five months' resistance against all the enemy can do to it. These men can take it with a smile.

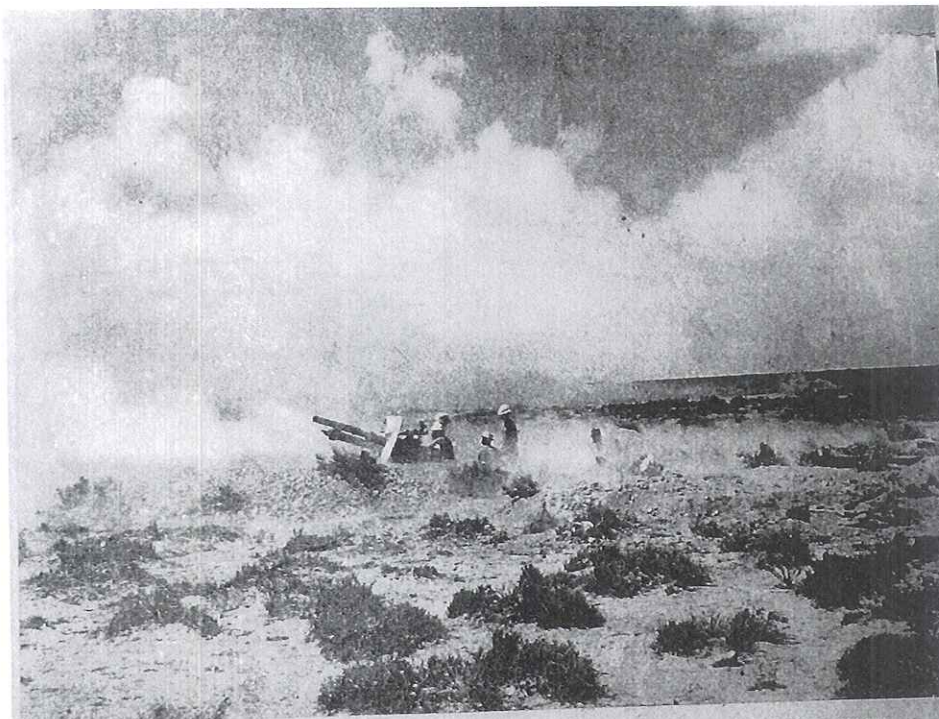
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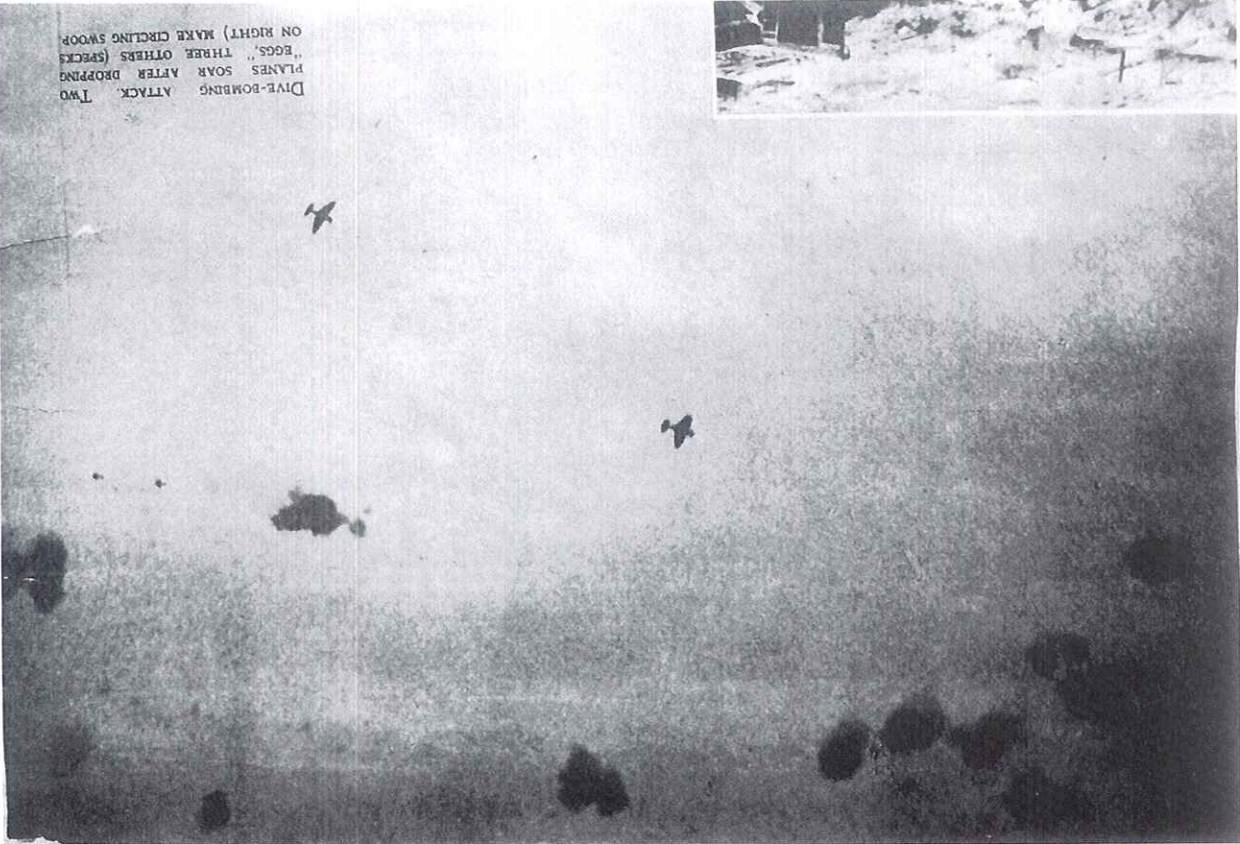


TYPICAL SANDSCAPE INSIDE WAR-SCARRED PERIMETER EXPERT, FORMIDABLE ACK-ACK FIRE OFTEN CAUSES ENEMY TO JETTISON BOMBS, SEA-MINES, ANYWHERE, AND WHOLE AREA IS PITTED WITH BOMB CRATERS, AND THE SHELL SCARS FROM "BARDIA BILL," "SALIENT SUSIE"



GUNS THAT GUARD TOBRUK IN ACTION. CREWS WORK IN SHIFTS AT TWENTY-FOUR-HOURS-A-DAY JOB. MEN TAKE TURNS FOR THREE DAY "LEAVE" BY SEA.

DIVE-BOMBING ATTACK. TWO PLANES SOAR AFTER DROPPING "EGGS," THREE OTHERS (SPRINKLES ON RIGHT) MAKE CIRCLING SWOOP



"CAVEMEN" OF TORBUK MAKE NET CAMOUFLAGE, ONE OF THE "QUEER TRADES" THAT HAVE SPRUNG UP IN THE FORTRESS. CAVES SERVE AS CONCERT HALLS, TOO.

