

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_218045

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No.

Accession No.

Author

Title

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

Infantry Brigadier

Infantry Brigadier

MAJOR-GENERAL
Sir HOWARD KIPPENBERGER

K.B.E., G.B., D.S.O. AND BAR, E.D.

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

Oxford University Press, 'Amen House, London E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS CAPETOWN

Geoffrey Cumberlege, Publisher to the University

FIRST PUBLISHED 1949

SECOND IMPRESSION 1949

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

To my wife

Contents

I. INFANCY OF A BATTALION	I
2. YOUTH OF A BATTALION	8
3. GREECE: THE FIRST ACTION	16
4. GREECE: THE WITHDRAWAL	26
5. GREECE: LAST DAYS	36
6. CRETE .	46
7. LIBYA 1941OPENING MOVES	79
8. LIBYA 1941: BELHAMED	93
9. 5 BRIGADE: WESTERN DESERT AND SYRIA	112
10. RETURN TO BATTLE: MINQAR QAIM	123
II. THE STAND AT ALAMEIN	138
12. RUWEISAT	156
13. EL MREIR	178
14. THE HARD SUMMER	191
15. MUNASSIB	205
16. ALAMEIN	221
17. PURSUIT	238

18. AGIJEILA LINE AND NOFILIA	246
19. TRIPOLI	260
20. MEDENINE	270
21. LEFT HOOK AT MARETH	276
22. INTO TUNISIA .	294
23. THE END IN AFRICA	302
24. ITALY: THE SANGRO	322
25. THE ORSOGNA BATTLES .	328
26. GASSINO	348
INDEX .	361

Illustrations

'OUR SPIRITED INFANTRY*

C. Coy., 20 Battalion, November 1941

Frontispiece

1. THE PRISON VALLEY BEFORE THE INVASION .	<i>facing</i> / . 64
2. 'WORD CAME THROUGH OF UPHAM'S V.C.'	65
3. 20 BATTALION R.A.P. AT BIR GHLETA	80
The officer is the M.O. Gilmour	81
4. SIDI REZEGH, 25 NOVEMBER 1941	
5. 'THE STIPULATION AS TO WALKING EXCLUDED	112
FOUNTAIN, HEENAN, AND HARPER ⁹	113
6. MOVING INTO POSITION AT MINQAR QAIM (N.Z.official)	128
7. THE FIRST SHELLS AT MINQAR QAIM (N.Z. official) .	129
8. 'JIM BROUGHT SOME TINNED BEER AS A PEACE	192
OFFERING.' BURROWS, GIBBS, THE AUTHOR	193
9. THE AUTHOR AND INGLIS AFTER EL MREIR .	
10. MONTY AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS AT MUNASSIB	208
11. THE AUTHOR SPEAKING TO SURVIVORS OF THE RIFLE	209
COMPANIES OF 21 BATTALION AFTER ALAMEIN (ROSS	
AT BACK OF CAR) (Dr. G. H. Levien)	256
12. THE BREAK-THROUGH AT ALAMEIN .	
13. *THE BOTTOM FELL OUT OF THE DESERT'	257
14. DIVISIONAL CONFERENCE BEFORE ADVANCE TO TRIPOLI	

(NZ official)

ILLUSTRATIONS

15. NEW ZEALAND TROOPS MARCHING PAST GENERAL
MONTGOMERY AT TRIPOLI (N.Z. *official*) . 27a
16. THE CHURCHILL PARADE AT TRIPOLI. MR. CHURCHILL,
GENERALS LEESE, ALEXANDER, FREYBERG, BROOKE,
AND MONTGOMERY (N.Z. *official*) . 272
17. VIEW FROM TAKROUNA AFTER CAPTURE SHOWING OLIVE
GROVES THROUGH WHICH 5 BRIGADE ATTACKED
(NZ *official*). 273

List of Maps

1. 4 N.Z. INF. BDE. IN GREECE	19
2. ENGAGEMENT AT SERVIA	
3. 10 N.Z. INF. BDE. AT GALATOS, 20 MAY 1941	53
4. 10 N.Z. INF. BDE. AT GALATOS, 24-5 MAY 1941	62
5. COUNTER-ATTACK AT GALATOS, 25 MAY 1941	68
6. EASTERN LIBYA (SOLLUM-TOBRUK) .	86
7. MINQAR QAIM, 27 JUNE 1942	130
8. RUWEISAT RIDGE, 14-15 JULY 1942	162
9. MUNASSIB, 5-6 SEPTEMBER 1942	208
10. ALAMEIN, 24 OCTOBER 1942	232
11. NOFILIA, 17-18 DECEMBER 1942	255
12. MARETH LINE, 11-30 MARCH 1943 .	278
13. ORSOGNA, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1943	330
14. CASSINO, FEBRUARY-MARCH 1944	354

I. Infancy of a Battalion

M R. CHAMBERLAIN'S voice stopped. I looked at Jimmie and at my wife, whose face had gone white. 'That's the end of the old pleasant days,' I said. Next morning we fully expected mobilization, but for three weeks nothing happened and I worked very hard at my practice as a solicitor. Then it was announced that New Zealand was raising a 'Special Force' for service at home or abroad and I promptly enlisted, passed the medical examination with satisfactory ease, and prayed hard for a command. My tour in command of a Territorial battalion, the First Canterbury, was nearly ended and at forty-two I might have been thought too old.

It was announced that there would be three rifle battalions, the third to be raised in the South Island, and it was that on which I had my eye. After a few days' suspense I called on Keith Stewart, then G. i¹ Southern Command. 'Am I getting the Southern battalion?' 'Not if I can help it,' he replied, 'I want it myself.' I assured him that he had no hope. He must be G. i of the Division which we felt sure would be formed and of which the Special Force was the first echelon. Keith regretfully admitted the possibility and we got the O.C. District to ring Army Headquarters for me. In a few moments my anxieties were ended and I went out with the joyful news to my wife, who showed some lack of enthusiasm.

On 26 September the selected officers and N.C.O.s were called into camp. The South Islanders went into Burnham, which for some years had been the principal military depot and ordnance store for the South Island. It was situated in the midst of the Canterbury plains, in big stony fields, and surrounded by belts of blue-gums, a most unattractive spot. Hundreds of workmen were building hutments, cook-houses,

¹ G. 1: the senior Staff Officer for operations or training in a division or equivalent formation or command.

latrines, and showers, excavating drains, laying cable, levelling and tarring roads, and there was dust and dirt everywhere.

In my inexperience I had not insisted on having a say in the selection of officers; probably it would have made little difference, as only Territorial officers who had volunteered were available, and there was little choice. I had a look at mine the first evening, found that I knew only a few, and started to learn their names. They looked a useful lot and indeed so proved, with only a few exceptions. The New Zealand Army List contained the names of about eighty regular staff officers and some 600 Territorial officers, and with these, and a smaller number on the Reserve, a division had to be raised and trained and a great expansion carried out. Thousands of new officers were trained, all coming through the ranks, but throughout the war the best of the pre-war Regulars and Territorials kept their lead. There were few battalion or regimental commanders who were not one or the other.

Dornwell, who had been my second-in-command in 1 Canterbury, came in with the same appointment, Frank Davis, a regular, as Adjutant, and Bert Steele, another regular, as R.S.M. Between them they supplied most of the knowledge of routine and the drill-book with which we staggered along in those distant days, all of us keeping just one jump ahead of our subordinates. The rifle company commanders, also selected for me, were Archie MacDuff and Jim Burrows, whom I knew, Ralph Paterson and Mathewson whom I met for the first time. Bob Orr, also a new acquaintance, was Quartermaster, and a curious little man whom I could never discover and who eventually disappeared without anyone mentioning the matter to me, was R.Q.M.S. Peter Speirs, who was regarded with awe, having a Military Cross from the old war, commanded Headquarters Company. Ray Kirk, just getting on his feet as a consulting physician, closed his door and came in as R.M.O. I decided to letter and not number the companies and the company commanders drew lots for their letters. MacDuff, with the Canterbury Company, drew A.; Burrows B. for his Southlanders;

Mathewson C. for Nelson, Marlborough, and the West Coast; and Paterson D. for Otago. We all thought this was a very fateful lottery.

Next morning officers and N.C.O.s started to drill, the first thing obviously being to get saluting right, with and without a cane. I doubted whether I would be any good with the cane and thought it wiser to stand by and observe, and continue with the learning of names. There was no doubt that our saluting was a horrible sight until we had all been induced to conform to the book.

The N.C.O.s were a very mixed lot and only a few subsequently retained their ranks.

We had a week before the men came in. The huts were barely finished, showers and ablution stands not completed; but the carpenters took their kits with them one evening and the drafts to form the Third Rifle Battalion, the Machine-gun Battalion, a Field Ambulance, and an A.S.C. Company came in by special trains. Most were ending a long journey. All were in old civilian clothes and many were far from sober. As I watched some of my men trudge in I remarked to Gordon Washbourn: 'This is going to be the best infantry in the world.'

On the first night we did nothing more than give them their army numbers, feed them, and get them to bed, in beds, for the one and only time in their service, made up by the officers and N.C.O.s; all slept very well. Next day, with the aid of a big chart showing the establishment of a rifle battalion, we organized and allotted jobs.

The rifle companies were made up by their Provinces, but Headquarters Company was not so easy. Officers kept rushing into the Orderly Room, consulting the chart, and dashing out to collect another driver or signaller or watercart man or range-finder or some such, those already acquired being left seated in puzzled groups under the strictest injunctions not to stray. Gradually the parade ground emptied as the completed platoons were moved away, some already being asked to do so in step; and about midday there were only a few stragglers left who collected and sat themselves down together. Frank Davis and I checked our chart and

discovered that we had omitted to provide for the anti-aircraft platoon, which had no officer. There should have been fourteen in that platoon. I went out and counted the survivors. There were fourteen, so establishment was completed, though as a matter of fact this was the only platoon up to strength. Several days later I found three innocents sunning themselves behind one of the huts and found that somehow they had been missed altogether and were apparently quite happy about it. They promptly became riflemen.

Three months later we embarked at Lyttleton in the first transport to leave New Zealand for the war. In the meantime, the mob which had tramped in that afternoon had become a battalion, very young, very partially trained, but already possessing its own memories and beginning to be proud.

We worked from week to week on a progressive syllabus. Once the initial recruit training was over, my guiding intention was to foster the independence and initiative of the companies and then to weld them into a team.

There were pleasant experiences that we shared—a delightful week camped in green fields beside a sparkling stream at Cave where we joyfully heard we were going overseas—a week of exercises at Tai Tapu when, in turns, the companies held the township and sustained attacks by other companies, while Battalion Headquarters sensibly and cosily umpired the operation from the hotel parlour—days and nights in the open, in lovely weather—the years that have passed leave a nostalgic glamour in memory. None from that time will forget the campfire concert when first we heard 'Now is the hour when we must say good-bye', feeling for a moment the cold hand of fate and the shadow of the long years ahead.

There were jokes that we shared. Having taken over from the Adjutant on battalion parade, I said 'Hats off' and turned to face the padre and found no padre, whereupon the battalion, which had been waiting hopefully, chuckled with me.

There were things of which we were proud. We felt certain that our leave parties were better turned out and more soldierly than those of our neighbours, the Machine-gunners.

As infantry, we were amused at the efforts of the Field Ambulance and A.S.C. to drill, and at their outlandish formations. At Granmer Square, when we were to be addressed by the Mayor of Christchurch on our farewell parade before a large concourse of citizens, His Worship said that the men might sit down. Other units did so, but not we. We stood fast until I had ordered 'Ground Arms. Sit Down/ That pleased us all very much.

Also, there was one incident that gave us a common indignation. The O.C, District rang me up and curtly directed me to have officers and N.C.O.s paraded, he would be out in half an hour. He arrived, did not return my salute, and spoke to the parade. We were about to go on final leave and it appeared that a number of men had sent a joint telegram to the Minister of Defence protesting against their rail warrants being made only to the place of enlistment. He had thought that we were going to be a good unit, but was evidently wrong, we were unsoldierly, undisciplined, there was no goodness in us, and he had come out to let us know. He stopped speaking and glared. I said 'Thank you, Sir' and saluted. He did not return the salute and departed. I dismissed the parade and, after a little reflection, went round the mess-rooms and told everyone how naughty they had been. All were very contrite, the action had been natural enough for the New Zealander, accustomed to approaching his Minister or Member whenever he felt aggrieved. Perhaps they didn't quite take the point, for that evening each company sent a telegram direct to the Minister protesting its regret and more or less indicating that it was quite willing to walk home if necessary.

We had now become the Twentieth Battalion, just after furnishing ourselves with paper headed '3rd Rifle Battalion'. Seventeen New Zealand battalions took part in the First World War and with a commendable sense of the continuity of history our numbering was started from there. The Auckland Battalion became the Eighteenth, that raised in Wellington the Nineteenth, and we the Twentieth. After the Libyan campaign of 1940 I saw captured papers which showed that Italian intelligence officers, having identified

the Nineteenth and Twentieth Battalions at Bagush, were deducing that as there were nine battalions in a Division a third New Zealand Division must have arrived.

General Freyberg called on his tour of inspection, gave us a speech in which he told us what a fine army the French had, and interviewed all the commanding officers, including those nominated for units not yet formed. His talk with me was short.

'Do your men drink beer?' 'Yes, Sir.' 'What sort, do they mind?' They say they prefer Speights, Sir, but I don't think they really mind.' 'H'm. . . . Well I suppose we'll see a lot more of one another.'

The officer commanding the Machine-gunners had a long interview and had come out downcast so that I was satisfied with mine.

A few days later Lindsay Inglis, who had undergone a grave operation to get himself fit for active service, took command of the Machine-gun Battalion. He had commanded a machine-gun company with distinction in France and was a thorough soldier. He had for years been my CO. or Brigadier in the Territorials, and I had learned more of soldiering from him than from anyone else with whom I had served.

After being embodied for three weeks we had to send candidates to the first O.C.T.U. One or two nominated themselves and were duly turned down, and I had to select twenty from some fifty nominated by my company commanders and the Field Ambulance, whose CO. preferred not to make any selection. I told each candidate that infantry platoon commanders at the beginning of a war had poor prospects; if they seemed to mind, the inquiry went no farther.

This worked very well and we sent away a very fine draft, about a third of whom died in due course and nearly all the others did good service. Several ended the war as battalion commanders. On my last parade with the Division, five and a half years later, Alan McPhail was an Acting-Brigadier. Charlie Upham asked to be left out as he was afraid he would not get away soon enough. I left him out

and sent him off at very short notice with the advance party. Archie MacDuff thought his company was ruined, more than half the candidates came from it, but every second New Zealander will make at least an N.C.O. and he and A. Company soon recovered.

Only one officer had to be dispensed with, a melancholy individual who never spoke. I tired of trying to cheer him up.

Final leave passed like a dream and at last came the day when I told the men that the battalion was now their home and we started our wanderings. My wife waved from the roadside till out of sight and then drove home, running through her tears into a mob of sheep on the way.

On 5 January 1940, with Fourth Field Ambulance and Divisional Signals, we embarked on the *Dunera*, the first transport to leave New Zealand; Inglis with the Machine-gunners and A.S.C. went with us on the *Sobieski*. I went back down the gangway to say good-bye to the O.C. District, who was speechless, a band played 'Auld Lang Syne', and with the whistles of all the ships in port blowing, we pulled out into the stream. The last I saw of my own kin was my small son dancing up and down on the bridge of a tug.

Next morning, in Cook Strait, we joined the other transports coming out from Wellington and the first New Zealand convoy set out for the wars.

2. Youth of a Battalion

THE *Dunera* was a regular troopship of some 11,000 tons. In the old style, the officers had ample accommodation (mine was luxurious) and more than enough deck space, while the men were crowded in the holds. The other ships were passenger liners not yet converted for trooping and later the Twentieth read with disgust of its luxury voyage to Egypt. For we had guessed right: it was to Egypt we were going; as in the previous war we would doubtless train there, even do some fighting in the vicinity, and then go on to France for the great battles. So it had been and so it would be—more prophetically than I knew—I warned my officers that we would share in a disaster. We shared in four before the tide turned.

Except that it was the first, there was nothing remarkable about our voyage. Remembering that in 1914 one of the troopships of our Main Body, as our first echelon of that war was called, had made an impression by dressing ship when entering Albany, I did the same when entering Fremantle. I doubt if it was noticed though we thought it looked well and were pleased to hear that some wharf labourers approved. The Eighteenth marched from Fremantle to Perth, twelve miles on a hot day, and had many sore feet and stragglers, and we felt superior and wiser in being satisfied with the trains.

There was a gay night in Perth, the first of very many with which it welcomed passing soldiery. A stuffed kangaroo arrived on board somehow and there were no men missing when we sailed; in fact a few extra—Australians.

At Colombo, one private got more drunk than most and tried to kick Ken Manchester, for which he was lucky only to get my first sentence of twenty-eight days' detention. Privates Fowler and Jack were the only absentees when

leave expired and Frank Davis thought I was too soft-hearted in sending a picket specially for them and then accepting a rather flimsy excuse. Probably I was and have done the same sort of thing only too often.

We crossed the Equator without celebration, had a few parties in the saloon, played an over-ambitious but amusing war game, drilled and had church parades and lectures and boxing contests, sweltered in the black-out, constantly practised boat stations, played deck tennis and quoits (officers only), admired the sunsets, stared endlessly at the convoy, blushed for our poor *Dunera*, the slowest ship and always being spoken to by the Commodore; there is little to distinguish one such voyage from another. In the Red Sea the rest of the convoy went ahead and on 12 February, five weeks from New Zealand, we anchored in Suez Roads.

There were fewer troops in Egypt than was generally realized, and we were welcome. General Wavell, Sir Miles Lampson, Mr. Eden, and our own General came aboard to greet us and, I hope, felt reassured. On 14 February we entrained, passed through Tel-el-Kebir—so that I completed the circuit begun when I left that dismal spot in 1916—were much interested in the sights later to become so commonplace, and detrained at Maadi, then new to us and little more than desert. The band of the Highland Light Infantry met us and played us into camp: as the step was ninety to the minute we marched very badly and must have upset General Freyberg watching. On a gusty, sandy evening, we settled down in our new home.

Messrs. Fowler and Jack were presumably still in Suez where they had gone ashore without leave.

In those days there were no roads or buildings, store-houses, orderly rooms, messes, canteens, shower-houses, barrack huts, Y.M.C.A., or any other amenities in Maadi. All were building or projected. We settled in quite happily in wretched little ridge tents, and, to our astonishment, suffered from the cold!

The very next day we began with a battalion parade aided by our band with all its eight instruments. At that time it could only play 'Sussex by the Sea*' and 'Roll out the Barrel',

but they were good marching tunes, the companies marched on and off parade better each morning, and battalion parade was an occasion that had its importance and value. The Eighteenth and Nineteenth had no band and no regular battalion parades and seemed to us slower to find themselves in consequence, though I will admit the possibility of prejudice. There was then nothing like the camaraderie between units that in later years became invariable. We got on well with the Nineteenth and the machine-gunners, regarded and were regarded by the Eighteenth with some doubt, thought little of the A.S.C., and were barely aware of Ike Parkinson and the Fourth Field Regiment. The officers of the Nineteenth joined Gezira Club as a mess and spent much of their leisure there; Eighteenth and Twentieth went to the Maadi Club, but for months their officers seldom mixed. Fourth Brigade Headquarters was established on the Hill, soon to be derisively and unfairly known as 'Bludgers' Hill'. Time rubbed off the corners but it seems to me now that none of the original C.O.s did as much towards building up a divisional spirit as we might have done. Events and the personality of the General did that in due course, and we were perhaps busy enough making our own units.

One of my first problems was to deal with Fowler and Jack, who soon arrived from Suez under escort. Twenty-eight days' detention was indicated. I went up to the Citadel and carried out a personal inspection of the detention centre there. I did not like the Commandant, or the look of the staff, or the food, or the sight of soldiers frantically scrubbing latrine buckets and being stood facing the wall to answer questions, and decided to maintain discipline with as few detention sentences as possible. This may not have been right, and later I became less squeamish, but it worked well enough with the original Twentieth, my first experiment being with friends Fowler and Jack. To the unconcealed concern of Frank Davis, I merely asked whether they proposed to be soldiers and follow the rules, or not. They said they did so intend, and I dismissed the charges. Each kept his word. Jack was killed at Bagush by a dug-out caving in—our first death. Fowler was killed on the last

day in Greece. A few days later Privates McLean and Landoas presumed on this leniency, duly got twenty-eight days, and came out so unrecognizably smart that I was tempted to send the whole battalion in by instalments; but very few so benefited.

We had very little equipment and months passed before we heard of a G. 1098¹ and started to get a trickle of its components. Ammunition for musketry practices was simply not to be had; in fact Ordnance got indignant when we asked for it. There was plenty of training to be done and ample space, and except that we had to prepare a syllabus for Brigade each week we were not much troubled by our superiors. The General came round but outwardly concerned himself only with our cook-houses and guards. Brigadier Puttick rarely intervened and then on the same lines, and at that stage no more was necessary. We worked hard and made progress. Also we became more comfortable. N.A.A.F.I.s, messes, store-rooms, cook-houses, and shower-rooms were soon erected, though in 1940 we never had better than the original little tents, very crowded and insufferably hot as summer came on.

In March we did our first brigade exercise, some twenty miles away at El Saff. The march out, along the river road past Helwan, with all the flamboyants in blossom, tried us very hard and all three battalions had many stragglers. We thought we had fewest, but too many. The general opinion was that it was a lot farther on foot than by the Brigadier's car, which I have often since noticed to be the case. We had four days out, stormed the battlemented sides of Husain Migalli in a night attack from a taped start-line—a procedure only too familiar later—sweltered in the midday heat, learned quite a lot about handling ourselves in the desert, and went thankfully back in transport. John Gray, always independent, marched back with the Eighteenth, contrary to orders. Then, of course, we had a conference to consider the lessons.

We had parades for General Wavell and for Sir Miles

¹ G. 1098: the synopsis of the complete equipment of a unit, itemized and enumerated.

Lampson, doing a little less badly each time. General Wavell came round the units, tactfully confining his inspections to asking a few questions and looking at our guard. There were a few changes in personnel, far more disturbing then than it is easy to imagine now, with units long accustomed to innumerable such changes.

In April we had the first divisional exercise, according to the 'General Idea', a phase of the war between Puttagonia (commanded by Brigadier Puttick) and Milesia (whose leader was Brigadier Miles, the C.R.A.¹). It was waged in the El Saff area and doubtless many lessons were learned, and again we all learned more about handling ourselves in the desert. I was in command of the advanced guard as we emerged from the river road on to the desert, and was accused of being sticky. This was probably true enough as the imaginary tanks of the Divisional Cavalry were on the enemy side and I did not even have imaginary anti-tank guns. John Gray showed his independence again. The Brigadier called a conference at Pt. 104. Teddy Dawson, my Intelligence officer, could not identify Pt. 104 among the numerous hillocks about, neither could I. Fortunately we saw the Brigadier's car and thankfully followed him, as did Blackburn commanding the Nineteenth, to the point the Brigadier had decided was Point 104. A mile to the south we could see a staff car on another hillock. Harry Beale was sent off to collect John but came back to report that Colonel Gray was quite sure he was at the right point and the Brigadier must go there. As it was nearly dark and there was no time for that move, the Brigadier had to get on with his orders for a dawn attack without the Eighteenth. It was a fiasco and we were all properly hauled over the coals for it by the General. The proceedings ended with an Anzac Day morning service where the General prayed for an early chance to go for the Hun and clearly pointed out to the Almighty that we had been waiting for a long time. The Germans invaded Norway during this week.

In June, to our delight, Italy came into the war. We were

¹ C.R.A.: Commander, Royal Artillery. The officer commanding the artillery of a division.

doing a night exercise when the singular code message for that event 'Prepare for burial* was brought in, and we went very happily back to camp. This was a stage nearer the real thing that we were becoming unreasonably impatient for. Each morning now we 'stood to* an hour before dawn, waiting hopefully for Italian parachutists. When the companies had reported that they were ready, the company commanders sat with me in the mess ante-room listening chillily to the downfall of France and hearing Haw-Haw's gloating predictions of the impending fate of the British plutocracy. It was at this time that he was alleged to have said of us that we were country lads doomed to leave our bones in the Libyan Desert. At that hour of the day it was natural to agree.

Companies in turn went into Cairo on anti-parachute duties, pleasantly carried out at Gezira race-course. Then the whole battalion went in to share Kasr-El-Nil Barracks with the Scots Guards. This was not an enjoyable stay. The men didn't mix, the Guards Officers were shy and stand-offish, and the Barracks were bug-ridden. A barrel of beer disappeared from the canteen. I detailed an officer to search for it in my lines but without any more result than I expected, though I have since learned that a glance into C. Company's buckets might have shown something. The N.A.A.F.I. sent us in a bill which I repudiated unless the Scots Guards were charged with half. The management was scandalized at this reflection on a regular battalion, and dropped the matter.

We did our first tour of duty in the desert and dug a useless anti-tank ditch in the Naghamish Wadi: hard work, in great heat and under a plague of flies. Feeling very bold I made a trip to Solium where Rifle Brigade posts were in occasional contact with the Italians. An enemy plane came over and I felt very timid as I took shelter in the shade of a rock. Matruh was haphazardly bombed in our sight, we heard of a man in the A.S.C. being wounded, and we felt that the war was getting closer. So we were disappointed to go back to Maadi again.

It was only for a few weeks. We got more equipment,

enough Bren guns to go round, real mortars, signalling gear, and transport, and in August we returned to the desert for a spell of coast-watching near Amiriya. After a hot, uneventful month, useful to us only in learning further to endure monotony and discomfort, we went westwards again to dig and train in the Bagush Box. Here we trained and exercised with zest, and dug laboriously. Graziani crossed the frontier and halted at Sidi Barrani. We were getting very much like a trained battalion now. I made all officers and N.C.O.s change appointments for a most useful fortnight, and when we settled down again I looked on my handiwork and thought it was good.

Then, in December, the blow fell. With mortification, almost as deep as despair, we heard that Fourth Indian and Seventh Armoured Divisions had attacked at Sidi Barrani, were sweeping forward from success to success, and we were not with them. It was incredible. We were really upset about this. Inglis said that the next fortnight was the most unhappy of his service and Wavell later thought it necessary to send a special message of explanation.

We went up in parties to look at the battlefields and collect souvenirs. Some of us got under fire at the siege of Bardia, we supplied guards for the hordes of prisoners, lent our transport to the Australians, and told ourselves bitter stories such as the one of Australians mistaking our fern-leaf emblem for an olive branch, and got thoroughly downcast over the whole matter. General Freyberg returned from England and added to our depression by tales of the second echelon's¹ doings there, its high efficiency, and notable counter-attack role for the impending invasion. He also assured us that our concern was needless; we would get more than enough fighting.

By Christmas-time we had somewhat recovered, or at least had become bitterly resigned to being treated as Lines of Communication troops, and we had a very good day and terrific parties at night. The mess was now a very happy one, we had been more than a year together with few changes and

¹ Second echelon consisted of 5 N.Z. Brigade and attached troops diverted to England, while en route to Egypt, in the summer of 1940.

fewer disputes, the companies had all become tight little entities, and the platoons groups of firm friends. Jim Burrows had become second-in-command, Cameron Adjutant, and over many senior N.C.O.s I promoted Hugh Wilson to be R.S.M. It was in fact a perfect appointment, which he held for four long years, refusing every offer of a commission, and giving his soul to the battalion. Two years later, Jim Burrows, then commanding, sent me a copy of a charge sheet. In it the R.S.M. charged XY, a sentry, with 'conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline' in that he had, 'being a sentry, behaved in a manner not befitting a sentry of the 20th Battalion'.

We saw the New Year in at Bagush and then moved out of the Western Desert to Helwan and strenuously practised river crossings, street fighting, and attacking under a barrage. We felt that 1941 would be a fateful year and that we were fit for it and very happy. I attended the first combined training course at Kabrit, where my unorthodox opinion that landings were better done in daylight had the support only of three young Scots Guardsmen, all under the erroneous impression that I had been at Gallipoli.

I returned from this course to find the battalion at Helwan again and rumours busy that we were going—no one said where; but we were all certain it was to Greece. I was desperately anxious lest a bad tinea contracted at Kabrit should keep me back, but it improved just in time. Our first reinforcements arrived and were absorbed. I reviewed appointments and decided who was to stay in Egypt, and made an honest effort to leave a good team, sorely though they might protest. There came a final mess night, an uproarious, delightful night, with the men's lines all alight and songful also, while the victims of my injustice condoled wretchedly with one another in a corner.

Early one March morning we packed our trucks and entrained for Alexandria. I wrote to a friend in New Zealand: 'We have not wasted our time. We are ready. My men will do their whole duty.'

3* Greece:

The First Action

THE Twentieth embarked for Operation Lustre at Alexandria in the special landing ship *Breconshire*, later famous in the Malta convoys. A very heavy storm made the voyage secure against air or submarine attacks and also induced Jim and me to study the Book of Acts and read the Apostle Paul's account of a stormy voyage in the same waters. On the second day I was allowed to open some sealed papers and to tell the men, assembled in the hold, that we were going to Greece.

We landed at the Piraeus and for a few days camped in the pines on Mt. Hymettos, on the outskirts of Athens. Our camp was inspected by some smart-looking EvzQnes, the German Consul, and a number of half-starved citizens. 18 Battalion, the first to land, had already gone forward. It was impossible to do any serious training and we waited impatiently. At last orders arrived for us to entrain and also for me to leave six out of my forty officers and forty-six of my 813 other ranks. This meant more painful selections and I had to withstand some most urgent protests. But I was determined to have good people in the reinforcements and made no concessions, promising them all plenty of fighting in the good time to come. After a church parade I told the battalion what I could remember about Greece and what it stood for, and we marched through Athens past the crowded balcony of the German Embassy and entrained for the front, now being built up north of Mt. Olympus. It may be of interest, as an example of the fortunes that awaited soldiers of that time, to give here a list of the officers who went forward with the battalion

and those who stayed in Athens, with a note of their subsequent fates.

2 i/c	Burrows	Brigadier, 5 Bde., 1944.
Adj.	Cameron	Wounded twice, N.Z. 1942.
Intelligence Officer	Dawson	KILLED in Greece.
Padre	Spence	Senior Chaplain, 1944-5.
Medical Officer	Gilmour	KILLED, Libya, 1941.
H.Q., Company O.C.	Orr	P.W. Libya, 1941.
Transport Officer	Garriock	Wounded in Crete, N.Z. 1941.
Quartermaster	Jefcoate	Wounded in Crete, N.Z. 1941.
Mortars	Rhodes	Wounded in Libya, N.Z. 1942.
Carriers	Green	KILLED in Crete.
Signallers	Murray	2 i/c 26 Bn. 1945.
Anti-Aircraft	Bain	Wounded and P.W. Crete.
Pioneers	Powrie	Wounded in Crete, N.Z. 1941.
A. Company O.C.	Washbourn	P.W. Egypt, 1942.
	Wood	Wounded in Crete, N.Z. 1941.
	Markham	N.Z. 1941.
	Rolleston	N.Z. 1944.
	Scoltock	KILLED in Crete.
B. Company O.C.	Rice	KILLED in Crete.
	Ayto	KILLED in Greece.
	McLaren	KILLED in Greece.
	McPhail	P.W. Libya, 1941.
	Poole	Wounded in Greece, N.Z. 1944.
C. Company O.C.	Wilson	KILLED in Crete.
	Fountaine	Colonel, 1945.
		C O. 26 Bn. 1942-4.
	Brown	Wounded and P.W. Crete.
	Aitken	KILLED in Tunisia, 1943.
	Upham	P.W., July 1942. V.C. and Bar,
D. Company O.C.	Paterson	N.Z. 1942.
	O'Callaghan	KILLED in Crete.
	Maxwell	P.W., July 1942.
	Gutzewitz	N.Z. 1944.
	Neilson	Wounded in Crete, N.Z. 1941.

Reinforcements.

MacDuff	P.W. Greece.
Yates	P.W. Greece.
Curtis	P.W. Greece.
Rhind	P.W. Greece.
O'Rorke	KILLED in Greece.
Heasley	N.Z. 1941 sick.

The rail journey was acutely uncomfortable but after some twenty-four hours we stiffly detrained at Katerini and marched to very dirty and crowded billets. I reported to the General and got a very warm welcome, for the Germans were in Bulgaria and invasion of Greece was plainly imminent. My battalion exactly doubled the force at the moment available to meet it. I was ordered to take over and prepare a front of some 6,000 yards about Ryakia, on the left of the Aliakmon line.

Next morning I went ahead with the company commanders to reconnoitre the ground and during the day Jim Burrows brought the battalion up. The position we had to occupy was very extensive, blinded by woods of stunted oak, and could be turned by the empty high ground on our left. It was vulnerable to infiltration tactics and I was very thankful that we never had to fight on it.

During the next few days the Division assembled for the first time. 4 and 6 Brigades were forward on the Aliakmon line, 5 Brigade prepared a reserve position in the Olympus pass. 4 Brigade had Eighteenth and Twentieth forward and Nineteenth in reserve, with 6 Field Regiment under command. We dug very hard, everyone taking things seriously but enjoying the work, the clean spring air, the sight of snow-capped Olympus, the budding trees, and the zest of anticipation. We dug hard, and, we thought, cunningly, practised patrolling into the woods ahead of us that soon would shelter an enemy, and rehearsed counter-attacks. I tried, secretly, to discover a way of retirement over the trackless foothills behind if the next battalion gave way and we had to go; but Jim could find no way of getting our transport out. Still, it would not be necessary: Yugoslavia had decided to fight, and we would doubtless soon be moving into Macedonia.

Germany declared war on Greece and to our surprise we still made no move forward. Across the bay one evening we heard the faint rolling thunder of distant bombing and saw the dull glow of fires in Salonika. It could not be long now.

Next day there was rain. About four in the afternoon I was ordered to report to Brigade Headquarters. On the

way down I saw 6 Field Regiment hauling and winding and manhandling its guns out of their muddy pits on to the equally muddy road. Obviously we were going forward. The Brigadier, to my extreme surprise, said that we were giving up the Aliakmon position, 6 Brigade going back behind 5 Brigade somewhere, 4 Brigade to move through the Olympus pass and up to Servia to cover the left of the Army. There had been disaster in Yugoslavia and the position might become serious. 20 Battalion would march out during the night and get on to troop-carrying transport near Katerini at daybreak.

This was quite a difficult operation. It was dark and cold when I got back to my headquarters, having given by phone an order very cautiously worded, for our lines were being constantly cut or tapped and there were many fifth columnists about. The orders group¹ was assembled, however, and the men were busy packing or having a hot meal. We had over ten miles to march, over rough tracks and with heavy gear, the companies moving in the dark from widely separated areas. First-line transport² was to move over newly constructed roads to a rendezvous only indicated on a bad map, and there we were all to meet in the morning and meet our troop-carriers. It was quite dark when the company commanders left, and as there was nothing more I could do I settled down for a good meal and slept soundly till midnight.

I reached the rendezvous at daylight just as companies, transport, and troop-carriers were arriving together at the same spot, complete except for two brothers who had gone to sleep during one of the halts and were next heard of in Germany. There was time for breakfast and a wash or bathe in a pleasant little brook. Jim went ahead with an advance party. We embussed, joined the long column in our correct place near Katerini, and very slowly and with many halts

¹ Orders group: those officers of a formation or unit who must be given the Commander's orders before any operation or move. In a battalion the company commanders, signals officer, M.O., and adjutant, and the commanders of any attached sub-units.

² First-line transport: the vehicles carrying the fighting equipment, ammunition, and signals gear.

moved up and over the Olympus pass and out on to the Thessaly plain.

The journey up the Sarantoporon pass was slow and unpleasant, in heavy rain at first and later snow, on winding, slippery roads. At one point an Australian truck had gone over the bank and half a dozen bodies were lying beside it. About midnight on Easter Eve the battalion debussed near the village of Lava in the midst of a traffic jam and dispersed to sleep in the mud. The more lucky ones found some nice shingle heaps to rest on. Gilmour, our young Medical Officer, said later that he was quite cheered by my remark that it was like old times.

18 Battalion and 19 Battalion had gone forward to position on the high ground south of Servia town, 20 Battalion was in reserve astride the road. In the morning we took up our positions and started to dig. Paterson with G. Company occupied the squalid little Lava village on high ground right of the road; Rice with B. Company, a bold spur on the left. Wilson and Washbourn and Battalion Headquarters were in the flattish ground in the centre. In front, the ground sloped away for two miles, fantastically broken by ravines as far as the black, sombre-looking hills held by the other battalions. There were two gaps in these hills: one where the main road came through, held by Bedding's company of the Nineteenth; another where a track from Servia wound through a steep pass guarded by an ancient fort and held by Lynch's company of the Eighteenth. The Eighteenth was in extremely difficult country and could only be approached and supplied through its own F.D.L.S.¹ The whole position appeared very strong and had good observation, but it was over-extended and artillery support must have been very difficult. Steve Weir got the Sixth Field Regiment into position behind the Twentieth, but except through the Castle gap he could not have dropped shells anywhere near our forward positions.

The weather cleared during the day, 10 April, and we

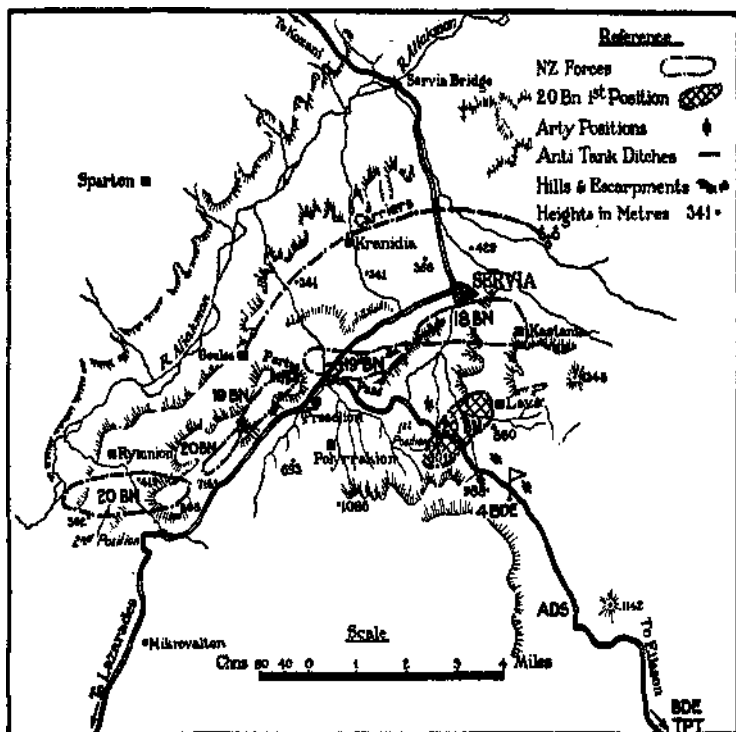
¹ F.D.L.s: Forward Defended Localities—the line of the posts held by the forward infantry.

made good progress with our digging. There were rumours of disasters in Yugoslavia but we did not worry unduly. Refugees started to come through, however, and Upham's platoon went down to a cross-roads behind the Nineteenth, as a check post.

Next day, 11 April, the war at last reached us and we had our first casualties. Through the Castle gap we saw German planes bombing and machine-gunning transport in Kozani, some miles to the north. Then the stream of refugees thickened and began to include Greek and Yugoslav soldiers, including a dignified General and a beautifully equipped Yugoslav heavy anti-aircraft battery, which settled in unpleasantly close to my headquarters. German planes came over us, bombed Serbia, and some tackled Upham's platoon and wounded two men. A nice little red-headed boy named Kelly was killed by a bomb—our first killed in action. A New Zealand machine-gunner arrived at Upham's platoon. He said he was the sole survivor of the Machine-gun Company which we had forward with the British light armour. I assured Upham that he was a runaway, and sure enough the machine-gunners came back later, in good order and with some astonishing stories of the Adolf Hitler storm-troops that they had slain. At that time it was not always realized that troops who disappear when fired at have not necessarily been hit. In the late afternoon we could see, also through the gap, German transport in the far distance and a burning village.

Two days later I was ordered to leave one company in position and to extend 19 Battalion's position westwards. I left Cliff Wilson with C. Company and we carried out a difficult move smoothly, climbed some very steep hills, and started digging again. Unexpectedly the next day passed quietly; at least we were not attacked. Our position was on the top of a very steep ridge, overlooking a wide plain to the north. The Aliakmon river curled round the foot of the ridge and across it an Australian brigade and 26 New Zealand Battalion were in uncertain touch with us. The 2nd/3rd Australian Field Regiment found gun positions in our area and on the second day was accurately shelled, the first

sign that the enemy had closed up on our front. About twenty planes attacked my headquarters, coming in low machine-gunning, and having a grand time for ten minutes. We fired back with Brens and rifles and even an anti-tank rifle, and were depressed that we brought nothing down,



MAP 2. 4 N.Z. INF. BDE. ENGAGEMENT AT SERVA,
14-18 APRIL 1941

but there were no casualties. A few hours later there was another heavier attack. I was away, watched from a distance, and hurried back expecting to find a shambles. At first no one appeared to have been hit, but we discovered two men dead in a slit trench on the very outskirts of the area. Soon afterwards we saw some planes wheeling and turning like hawks over the pass from Servia town and diving in succession to fire. In the evening Brigade told us that after this Bedding's

company had been attacked by two companies of infantry and had beaten off the attack easily, also that Lynch's company had beaten off an attack on the Castle gap. Things were warming up but nothing happened on our front. We mortared what we thought were troops crossing the river 800 feet below but they proved to be refugees.

During the morning of 16 April I was disturbed that my patrols found no one on the left. Far below we could see parties of infantry crossing the river, apparently in retreat. Brigade knew nothing about it. Jim Burrows went out to find what he could, and, miles away, met an officer who had returned to look for some missing men. The Australians and the Twenty-sixth were retiring and had failed to let us know. I altered positions, refusing the left flank, and waited on. The Brigade Major arrived and told us that Bedding's company had beaten off another attack, taking over a hundred prisoners. He got me to take him round my front because he needed exercise, which I did not, and warned me to be ready for a move back to my original position that night. We had come forward by a narrow and dangerous road and I sent Teddy Dawson off to reconnoitre a cross-country route for the rifle companies.

At nightfall the orders arrived, and at eight we set off on a very difficult move. The transport moved by the narrow winding road cut out of the side of a steep cliff with corners cambered the wrong way. The night was nearly pitch-dark, we used no lights, and it was a nightmarish trip. A man had to walk by the running-board of each vehicle where the driver could just see him. A three-tonner, a Bren carrier, a watercart, and a motor-cycle went over the bank and had to be abandoned, as also had an Australian twenty-five pounder which was blocking the corner at Prosyllion and which Jim Burrows ordered to be thrown over. It was nearly dawn when we passed Pleasants' corner, where there was already a smell of death, and passed the marching companies. The short cut had given them a terrible tramp, they were plastered from head to foot with mud, and were grey with fatigue, but they reported no stragglers. By mid-day we were back in our old positions except that my area

had been so shelled and bombed that I decided to move into Lava.

I waited to see the companies in, then struggled through foot-deep mud to Lava. Everyone had gone to sleep and the sentries had no idea where Headquarters was established. By the time I found it I was in a vile temper, and Adjutant, I.O., and batman, all got a savage tongue-lashing. They listened with respect, for such outbreaks were uncommon—until poor Neville, my batman, mollified me with some tea and stew.

We then settled down to rest, when suddenly there was an unmistakable shell-burst close outside. I went to the door as the smoke and dust were clearing, and through the Castle gap saw, far out on the plain, four quickly flickering flashes. I started to count the seconds, but before the sound of the guns had arrived there were four sharp explosions, neatly spaced among the buildings. The corner of one house collapsed and the guns flashed again. I returned inside and remarked that we were perfectly safe as two shells never landed in the same spot, whereupon with a howl one entered the room above my head, passed through the next wall, and burst feebly, slightly wounding a pig. This confirmed my opinion that we were perfectly safe as certainly no three shells were likely to land in the same place, so we sat through the twenty-minutes bombardment in moderate tranquillity.

The idea of a sleep had to be abandoned, however, when a message arrived for me to report at Brigade. Cameron and Gilmour came with me, and we laboriously slogged our way through the mud out on to the road. The German gunners opened again and seemed to follow us. I had another chance to develop my theories as to the incidence of shell-bursts. There were two huge rocks behind which I averred it would be perfectly safe to shelter. We did so for a while, and left a moment before a shell burst exactly where we had been. After this I advanced no more theories and we very slowly made our way out on to the road and down to Brigade. While we did so, four Blenheims in close formation passed northwards, and thirty German bombers passed them in the opposite direction, neither group taking any notice of the other.

4. Greece:

The Withdrawal

BRIGADIER PUTTICK was in good form but he had no bright news: the whole Army was going back to the Thermopylae position; 4 Brigade Group would pull out that night; the Twentieth would take over rearguard; and I was to control demolitions that the Sappers were preparing on the road, and should be out of the pass by 3 a.m. I got the brigade plan, saw Kelsall, the sapper doing the demolitions, and trudged back to Lava, where Jim had the orders group waiting. Many times in Greece I was thankful for our careful training in the procedure of issuing orders and our innumerable exercises and discussions on it.

This was quite a neat little problem in rearguard tactics. In fact, the whole operation in Greece had rather the nature of an exercise. I remembered sitting for a tactical fitness examination before the war. Keith Stewart had coached me, setting and marking and commenting on exercises in attack, defence, and outposts, and then, being the examiner, setting the paper on the rearguard. It was a consolation that I had passed that examination, anyway. The Twentieth was to remain in position until the Eighteenth and Nineteenth had passed through, then to follow and embus some ten miles down the pass, the demolitions to be blown when everyone had gone. There was not likely to be much difficulty with the Nineteenth, but John Gray and the Eighteenth would have a ticklish job in disengaging. They could either move forward to their F.D.L.s and then through the Castle gap to Lava or back along the hill-sides east of the road (if they could find a track), passing some hundreds of feet above Lava. Communications were bad; I could not find out what

John meant to do, and there was no time for the five-hour journey to see him. I discovered that his second-in-command had orders to bring his transport to Lava, which in fact was impossible, and had to plan on the assumption that the Eighteenth would come out that way.

That accepted, the planning was simple enough. Paterson and Rice would stay in position until the Eighteenth and Nineteenth were through their respective positions, then they would come back through Washbourn. Wilson's company had gone off to picket points on the road that were worrying the Brigadier. Washbourn would then come in, and I would take over with a rearguard of Bren carriers on the road, and in succession blow the demolitions. It all sounded reasonably simple and I had a meal and my first hour's rest for thirty-six hours. Jim Burrows came up and wanted to take over the rear-party job but had to go back to the transport, which was to pick up the troops as they came out of the pass. He said good-bye rather seriously, and about nine o'clock I took post with Kelsall and the rear-party at the first demolition point.

It was a weary, trying night. There was no trouble with the Nineteenth, which came up in good order and was all out before midnight. By then only a few parties of the Eighteenth had appeared. Rice's company came through. More Eighteenth arrived and said they thought the battalion was returning by the hill route. That meant that Paterson would be in a dilemma unless he got the same information, which there was no means of passing on to him. The Germans opened harassing fire on the road behind us, and the shells screamed overhead and burst with terrific noise in the narrow, steep valley. They also mortared the track leading to Lava, and shelled the village. A platoon of Paterson's company came through, in such excellent order that I congratulated its commander. I did not know until years later that he had lost his nerve and pulled out without orders. A complete company of the Eighteenth turned up, then the rest of Paterson's company, splashing along the river-bed below the road. John Gray himself appeared about 2.30 a.m., very exhausted. He said that two of his companies were still on

the hill route and he thought they would have to be abandoned. I gave him some rum and he went on, but Lyons, a Member of Parliament, then second-in-command of an Eighteenth company, promised to get hold of some transport and bring it back to where we were waiting. It seemed no use leaving Washbourn any longer, and he came in and passed nonchalantly on in good order.

The German shelling and mortaring continued steadily. Ross, my faithful driver, continued as steadily to make cups of tea. The Brigadier had warned me to be out of the Pass by three, but two companies were worth waiting for. It was nearly four when another company of the Eighteenth came down the river-bed, climbed up the bank and into the trucks, and not long afterwards the other company appeared. This was better. When there was no response to our calls I ordered Kelsall to blow. This he did with a magnificent crash, but when the echoes had died away we heard a chorus of cries, very far away up the black hill-side, clear and faint, 'New Zealand here, wait for us.' I went to the edge of the bank and called out that I would wait, but to hurry. Kelsall very properly reminded me that I was endangering his sixty men, waiting all the wet night at their posts down the Pass, but I replied that I was resolved to wait. I thinned out the rear-party and sent Teddy Dawson off in his carrier with instructions to go as far as Larissa and tell everyone he saw preparing demolitions that I was going to be late and not to blow till I arrived. We moved 500 yards to the next demolition point, the party which had called out arrived, exhausted and grateful, were packed on to one of Lyons's trucks and went away.

We waited a little longer. The shelling continued with some shells pitching very close, while far away we could hear the Germans heavily mortaring our empty positions. Then we blew again, and, maddeningly, there were more cries. I waited stubbornly and four stragglers arrived. At 5.30 a.m., just before ordering another blow, I called to the hill-side once more. Very faint and far off came one single voice, 'New Zealand here, wait for me.' Kelsall looked doubtfully at me but I was unable to leave. We shouted to hurry,

but it was another half-hour before our man slithered down the opposite bank into the stream. He was quite unable to climb the near bank and Sergeant Lawrence went down and dragged him up, a fully equipped, greatcoated private soldier, still carrying his Bren gun and nearly dead on his feet. We put him on a truck, and blew again. It was past 6 a.m. and there were signs of dawn.

We went down the Pass at top speed, stopping at each demolition point, where there was a pair of patient sappers waiting. Kelsall would light the fuse—the rest of us waiting around the next corner—then he and I would run back, see the result, in each case satisfactory, and on to the next. No time was wasted, but it was nearly eight when my little column—some sixty sappers, my three Bren carriers, and my car—emerged from the Pass on to the plain. All the transport had gone, but to my surprise the Brigadier was there. He had listened with satisfaction to the explosions, congratulated us on getting everyone out, made sure that I was personally the last out of the Pass, and sped off.

I formed up my column with my own car at the tail and gave orders to move at ten vehicles to the mile with no halting if attacked by planes. Then I shared a little brandy with Stan Green, the carrier officer, and settled down in the car, saying to Ross: 'TU have a sleep now.'

We moved without interruption for a mile or more, and then the morning reconnaissance plane appeared. It was not satisfied with merely discovering us, but dived and machine-gunned. No one was hurt, but the leading trucks stopped and the men scattered, halting the column. The plane went farther down the road and we got moving again, but in a very few minutes it returned and the same thing happened. No one was hurt, but we were dangerously delayed; it was now after eight and full daylight. The column got moving again, not without some angry shouting and gesticulating from me. Again the plane swooped and roared along the road, and again the trucks ahead stopped and the men tumbled out and ran for cover. The plane swung away and in a minute we were moving again.

I decided to go forward through the column and rub it in

to every driver that he must keep going. Not far ahead were the Eleftherokhorion cross-roads, where the road from Mt. Olympus joined that from Servia. It was just possible that the enemy might anticipate me there. It hardly seemed likely; there were surely plenty of demolitions in the Olympus pass, and I knew of no other way. Still it would be as well to be past those cross-roads very soon. I stopped to tell the carrier officer following me to keep his place while I went ahead. Walking back to my car I saw that everyone had stopped again, and saw a truck, half a mile ahead, burst into flames. Another truck blazed up an instant later. The men were scrambling up the low bank right of the road or diving into the shallow ditch beside it. I waddled off the road to the left to get a better view, and looked through my glasses. Half a mile ahead, fairly across the road, were two German tanks, firing fast down the road towards me.

As I watched, with bitter disappointment, one swung its turret round and started firing in the opposite direction. I saw tracer from there lashing all round the tanks. Later I learned this was from our armoured car rearguard. It seemed just possible that we might clear the way by attacking with our three Bren carriers and their anti-tank rifles. A two-pounder on portee, presumably cut off from our rearguard, was out on the left firing furiously. A carrier from somewhere ahead in the column swung out from behind a truck and raced straight at the tanks. As I watched it suddenly slewed into the ditch and capsized. There were now three tanks, a hail of tracer round them and bouncing off. I beckoned to the carriers to hurry, and the leading one was moving off the road beside me and had opened fire, when I saw coming across the fields directly towards us truck after truck of lorried infantry, all sitting upright like tin soldiers. I counted seven, more in the distance, and rightly or wrongly decided that the odds were too heavy and we must run. I shouted and pointed to the carriers, the air began to crackle with bullets, Ross jumped out of the car, and we ran together across a ploughed field, up a steep bank, and into cover behind it.

I stopped at the top and looked back. The carriers had

stuck in the plough and the crews were running for the bank. On the road every truck was stopped and several were blazing. There was no sign of any sappers except dead and wounded near some of the trucks. The two-pounder was silent and there were two bodies on the platform. Some of the troop-carriers were quite close to the road and German infantry were debussing. I dropped down behind the bank, hurried down a narrow watercourse until out of sight from the top, and paused to view the situation.

Six men, Green, Ross, two infantrymen, a stray sapper, and an equally stray cavalryman, collected round me; others could be seen already farther away. There was no time to waste and we moved off in single file. There was still firing from the direction of the crossroads and we turned parallel with the road, hoping to join our rearguard. Very soon the firing slackened, until there was only one Bren gun firing lonely-sounding bursts, then it stopped. I realized that our rearguard had gone and slackened our breathless pace. We crossed a tiny stream, knee-deep, came into a lovely little glade, ideal for a picnic, and I decided to stop, rest, count our resources, and consider a plan.

There was no sign of any pursuit and so, as a first step, I made everyone strip and bathe. Much refreshed, we shared our food, enough for a tiny breakfast. Then we counted arms, and as I decided we must travel fast and light, dumped them all in the stream except one pistol, which I kept. I had a compass and binoculars but no map. There was no more food and not a greatcoat between us. We had a discussion on prospects and it was made clear that I was commander of the unit.

My idea was the obvious one: to travel south during the day, cross the road down which the German army would be pouring, by night, and then head east for the coast. First we must get some food and perhaps help from the villagers, and so two of the party set off for a village near by. We were out of sight of the road and all the country-side was bright and silent. Before they had gone out of earshot we heard, startlingly, the thudding of guns far to the south. I jumped up. 'That's our rearguard at Elassona; they are certain to

have orders to stay till night,' I said. And at once we all started southwards as fast as we could walk.

For an hour we plodded on. Small groups of peasants were tramping towards high hills to the west and we passed a few shepherds with little flocks. We said 'Elassona?' to one, and he pointed the way we were going. The thudding and rumble of guns continued, almost seemed a little nearer, and we began to have hope. I called a halt and said that we would observe the regulation ten minutes' halt before every clock hour, and otherwise would walk on all day; that we had a chance, just a chance. We were very weary and hungry, the ground was rough and tumbled; but we trudged on hour after hour, crossing little streams, scrambling through scrub, literally over hill and dale. Soon after midday we came in sight of the road again, packed solid with German transport, head to tail, tanks and guns, lorry-loads of infantry, all halted, with the men strolling about. We turned out of sight, crossed a difficult ravine very slowly, and started to climb up a steep valley leading to the crest of a distinct line of low hills. The guns were undoubtedly nearer, though muffled by the hills, and I thought I could distinguish the nearer crumps of the shell-bursts. The valley was steep and we were desperately tired, but we were hopeful now and somehow kept going.

At last we reached its head and the party rested while I climbed the last few feet to look. A mile to the left the road was still packed with halted German transport. A group of German officers in long greatcoats was standing beside a house, looking at maps and southwards through their glasses. Ellassona itself was hidden by higher ground along the ridge which we had climbed. In front the ridge fell away sharply to a fair-sized, sluggish-looking river; then there were three miles of undulating plain and another ridge. It seemed likely that our rearguard would be holding the ridge. I watched a German plane fly along it and draw a furious crackle of small-arms fire. Our object, therefore, must be to cross this No Man's Land before the enemy could mount an attack and before the rearguard retired.

The party came up and we moved down the forward slope

at our best speed. Suddenly four shells burst neatly round us, simultaneously, and beautifully spaced. Then another four, also exactly right for range and direction, and then four more. We hastily got under cover and considered the situation. Some very smart O.P. officer evidently took us for enemy infantry and it would not do to upset him any more. After a short discussion we emerged from shelter again, in a solid clump to look as little like troops as possible, and all waving our jackets furiously. It worked and we were not fired on as we walked on down to the river. Here we were lucky; it was shallow enough and we walked across waist-deep and continued in the same formation. After going a few hundred yards we could see Germans over our left shoulders, shells bursting steadily among the houses, and some ugly slugs, German tanks, on a steep bank above the houses. They saw us and opened fire, and again we scurried for a hollow.

From there on we alternated formations, moving as a clump when the ground concealed us from the Germans and we could be seen by our own gunners, extending to forty paces when the Germans could see us, and moving in bounds from one piece of cover to the next. It was a slow business; we were all tired out and starving, the day was hot, and at each halt half the party would fall asleep and have to be kicked awake for the next bound. The ground was covered with spring flowers and the birds were singing. Evidently we puzzled the gunners of both sides, for sometimes we would make our move in peace, the next time be fired on, and once both parties joined in to fire on us. We reached a wretched little hamlet, empty of inhabitants, and spent some time looking in vain for water.

At last, after hours, I decided that it would be safer to adopt formation A. We were quite close to where our infantry were likely to be, and we emerged more or less boldly on to the road and shuffled along it, feeling very anxious indeed and waving briskly. The artillery duel was going on over our heads and any moment we expected some over-zealous Bren gunner to mow us down. Suddenly we were halted by a sharp challenge. The party stood frozen while

I obeyed a very keen-looking New Zealand infantryman standing in a slit trench and pointing a sub-machine-gun at us. He told us to stand fast with hands up, and one to advance. I did so, with hands well up, and he kept us all very efficiently covered while I tried to account for myself. He took some convincing, but suddenly decided in our favour. He gave us two tins of fruit, said that 25 Battalion was doing the rearguard and would have a hell of a fight later, and we went gratefully the last few chains over the ridge and into safety behind.

The crew of an anti-tank gun was sitting under a culvert eating tinned peaches taken from an overturned canteen truck. They welcomed us in and for half an hour we sat and ate about three tins each. We were a little offended that they were only mildly interested in our experiences, being much more concerned with the tough fight they themselves expected shortly. We, for our part, were now safely within our own lines and not to be worried about anything. The artillery affair went on very rowdily but we felt it was no concern of ours and set off light-heartedly down the road. We were considering taking over an abandoned traction-engine for transport when an anti-tank portee came along. We clambered aboard and were taken to where 26 Battalion was embussing, some miles farther to the south.

Here I joined Rusty Page and took a seat in his car, the others travelling in one of the trucks. We passed through burning Larissa in the early evening and halted in the station yard. There my party reassembled and happily drank beer from a dump about to be abandoned, while the Twenty-sixth entrained, providing its own engine-drivers and firemen. There were lots of difficulties. The town was bombed, there was a scare of German tanks having got in—as they had—but nothing disturbed our perfect equanimity. I said it was nonsense about the tanks, and indeed they had gone out again. So after dark we went most contentedly off in 26 Battalion's transport, Rusty Page again taking me as passenger. His rifle companies had gone in the train and he was travelling with his transport—and was not to have an easy moment till he saw the companies again.

The night's journey across the Thessaly plain was an experience. The Luftwaffe had had a good day with the transport of the retreating Army, and I saw no such picture of disaster till the pursuit after Alamein eighteen months later. However, I was quite happy; I seemed to be completely dehydrated, and bottle after bottle of beer had no influence. I had heard that the Twentieth had passed Larissa and would now be far to the south. It was good not to be a prisoner and I felt sure the Brigadier and the Twentieth would be glad to see me. So I remained cheerful all night, though it seemed some years since I had slept, and though checks were innumerable. At one village we stopped so long that Rusty and I got out and walked forward. We found that the column had halted because one driver had stopped for some uncertainty and had gone to sleep, everyone else doing the same or simply waiting. At daylight we found ourselves in a complete traffic jam where the road wound out of the plain at Domokos. The reconnaissance plane came over and found us, as expected; then came some forty Stukas and bombed and strafed, also as expected. It was unpleasant, but only a few trucks were hit and not many men, and we were all greatly cheered by three Hurricanes which suddenly appeared and downed three Stukas like pigeons. At last the block cleared, we wound slowly over the hills, stopped and bathed at beautiful Lamia, and then to our joy found ourselves amid New Zealand infantry.

Rusty took me to 4 Brigade Headquarters and went on to find his own battalion. The Brigadier greeted me like a prodigal son, Jim came up and handed over the Twentieth with all the pleasure in the world, and I went happily back to it.

I found that Kelsall had somehow got out from the trouble at Eleftherokhorion, that Teddy Dawson was missing, and that the battalion had lost about thirty men—from air attacks—on the way down. I had a shave with borrowed gear while Jim and I talked, then went to sleep for twelve hours.

5. Greece: Last Days

I **GAME** back to life, thoroughly refreshed, during the next day. The Division, with 6 Australian Division on the left, was standing at bay on the Thermopylae line. 5 and 6 Brigades were forward, and 4 Brigade in reserve. 20 Battalion's first task was to be prepared to deal with any landing behind the right flank. The companies moved into position, we worked out plans for all the eventualities we could think of, and for a few hours thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The spring in Greece was very lovely, the ground carpeted with flowers, the air balmy, and the sky a dazzling blue. Also we were very optimistic. No doubt there would be a battle, but we wanted nothing more, and the credulous were cheered by rumours that the Canadians had landed at Salonika and that there were 500 Spitfires at Athens. Meantime the Luftwaffe was always overhead, reconnoitring, machine-gunning on the roads, bombing or about to bomb. But under our olive-trees we were unmolested and not in any way concerned.

Bad news arrived of Teddy Dawson. He had been in a truck which was machine-gunned near Larissa, had stood to his Bren gun, shooting in the teeth of the plane until he had died of his wounds. Teddy was snowy-haired, very small, and beloved by all. He had one disability as intelligence officer, being unable to spell. I long treasured one of his reports in which he had struck out several attempts at Vessel¹ and substituted 'ship\

All the night German transport, with lights full on, poured in an unending column down the Lamia pass. Obviously there would be a battle very soon.

Next day Brigade told us to alter our dispositions. It looked easy on the map. I climbed a very steep hill and was never so puzzled as to how to place troops. Finally I made

a shot at it, a good deal encouraged by Jim's frank admiration of my solution, went down the hill, and then went up again with Gordon Washbourn's company. Gordon was rather startled to see the ground he was to occupy, and not much consoled when I pointed out the glorious view. It was certainly a glorious view, but the climb was unquestionably stiff and it was very hard work dragging up weapons and ammunition, water, and rations. At any moment I expected nymphs or the great god Pan to appear in these flowered glades, but they made no sign and I went down. Half-way I met a runner, a climber rather. He had a message from Dave Cameron that the battalion was to move after nightfall, whither he did not know. The runner went on to A. Company. At the foot of the hill I found Divisional Headquarters moving in. I saw Keith Stewart and without preamble he said: 'We're hooking it. The Greeks have packed up and we're off.'

Guy Sanders, the Brigade Major, was waiting at my headquarters with orders for the move. It was startling to hear that the field regiments were to destroy their guns before moving. There had been an attack during the day, mainly on 25 Battalion, quite easily held, and there was a pleasing story of tanks knocked out by our twenty-five-pounders. We were to move to the Thebes area and go into a rearguard position there.

As usual Jim went ahead with guides and a reconnaissance party. It was not easy getting up our transport against the stream of traffic moving south, and collecting the companies, packing, and getting off in the dark, but we were away in due time. Driver Hamilton pluckily volunteered to wait with a truck and pick up Deans and Sullivan, whom I had sent on a long tramp to find an alternative route out for Washbourn's company. Private Findlay, forgotten in his sentry post, remained faithfully alone until dawn, and then thought it well to come out with 5 Brigade rearguard, who returned him to us in Crete with no deficiencies of kit.

We travelled with lights full on and before daylight settled down in some olive-groves near Thebes. During the day we went into position on the west of the road climbing the

Kriekoukis pass, with 18 Battalion on our right and 19 Battalion in reserve. Most of the Division had passed through us in the night and we heard that they were heading for embarkation ports. We were told we would have to remain until after nightfall on the next day, Anzac Day. We had seventeen Australian field guns and seven Australian two-pounders in support. We had perfect observation and the enemy practically none, and it seemed to me that the Brigadier's orders, emphasizing concealment and depth, exactly met the situation. His instructions were as follows:

- (a) Most careful concealment to avoid enemy discovering presence of a large force in the area. No AA fire of any kind except in case of serious air attack. Wireless silence.
- (b) Long-range artillery and MG fire from forward guns on observed and suitable targets. No registration.
- (c) Forward defended localities on high ground (six hundred feet above plain) with good proportion in reserve.
- (d) By day majority of troops to be in rear of forward slopes. False flanks of detached posts and snipers wide on high ground on flanks.
- (e) Carriers of 20 Battalion wide on left flank.

During the day broken Greek troops and refugees streamed through the position. Several large formations of enemy aircraft passed overhead proceeding to and from the direction of the Corinth Canal behind us, and there were fighter and bomber attacks on the road traffic almost incessantly. We sat still and watched with interest. On my trip to Brigade Headquarters for orders I was twice chased into a ditch by low-flying fighters. At the conference, held under a culvert over a side road, the Brigadier noticed that my boots were worn out and gave me a pair he had taken from an Australian soldier who had several pairs hanging round his neck. He also gave Jim Burrows and me a bottle of whisky each. Jim went off with his to where he had our transport parked in olive-groves six miles back. I returned to the battalion and when forced on the way to get into a ditch very hastily, took both boots and whisky with me. Nothing else of importance occurred during the 24th, and that night the Sixth New Zealand and the Nineteenth Australian Brigades passed

through us, moving to the Peloponnesus, and we became the rearguard.

Next day enemy aircraft became more active still, and movement on the road was highly dangerous. We lay very quiet, and though reconnaissance planes flew low and persistently, looking for us, they apparently failed to see us. In the afternoon we got the unwelcome order to stay another twenty-four hours. The men afterwards always called that position 'Twenty-four hours hill'. I tramped all round my position and examined a track leading from the left of my position back to Vyllia, four miles to the south, and thence to the main road, and decided to retire this way when the time came.

The day was hot and I had trudged and climbed some fifteen miles when I got back to my headquarters in a wretched little shepherd's hut. Dave Cameron and I sat down on the straw and we both thought of the whisky concealed under it. Just as we were about to act Gilmour came in. He stood talking, and I considered whether to give him some. I had just decided that my need was greater than his when he sat down—and got up hastily from the broken bottle. Dave and I were both speechless. Gilly said nothing and in a moment went out, all three of us feeling guilty and stricken. After a few minutes we recovered a little and I wrote out a message to Jim. 'Send det. carriers one mile W. of Vyllia to watch track from N.W. Stop. Our bottle whisky broken.'⁵ This message of disaster was dispatched and three hours later Jim's bottle arrived, carried by motor-cyclist on the dangerous road. We called Gilly in and one of the crises of the war was past.

Early on the 26th the enemy arrived at last. An immense column of solidly packed transport appeared on the road miles north of Thebes and slowly crawled towards us. It was an alarming sight, a Juggernaut of mechanized might. The head disappeared into Thebes and for some time nothing happened. About 11 a.m. a light tank and some motor-cyclists emerged, followed by about a hundred closely spaced trucks, and moved briskly towards Kriekoukis, the village in front of and below our position. This exactly suited me; a

nice little ambush was ready for any such advanced guard. My idea was that it should be allowed to come up the road right into our position, when we would fall on it with two-pounders, mortars, anti-tank rifles, machine-guns, Bren guns, and rifles, while a party hidden in the village attacked the rear vehicles and put mines on the road. The column would have been very uncomfortable under the circumstances on the winding climb, and I fully expected a satisfactory butchery, but the plan got no trial. The gunners had been warned, but I had had no chance to see the Brigadier and get his approval. So the gunners opened fire under their instructions before the enemy column reached Kriekoukis. It was a pleasing but disappointing sight. The guns had not registered and their shells pitched everywhere but on the road. The Germans in the trucks scattered and there were some signs of panic; but very soon they pulled themselves together, embussed, turned their trucks and scuttled back into Thebes and out of range. At the end the guns got several hits and eight vehicles were left abandoned.

The main column made no effort to come forward. A dozen guns settled down in the open off the road and started to shell us, the twinkling flashes a pretty sight. Our guns replied briskly at anything that looked in the least like a target. Then the column itself turned and moved endlessly into the hills in the east, where our maps showed a bad road leading past our right. The party in Thebes kept quiet and the afternoon passed slowly. C. Company got most of the shelling but had no casualties. At nightfall the long thick snake of transport was still filing into the hills and the guns stopped.

We heard in the afternoon that there had been a parachute landing near Corinth and that our retreat was barred.

As the Brigadier said, this raised a very awkward problem. I went back to see him and found that pending further information he was preparing a very stout-hearted plan for seizing two hills east of Corinth and close to embarkation beaches. We were fully armed and equipped; in fact we had all the British guns in Greece, seventeen of them, and had several days' supplies. We would destroy the parachutists,

embark if possible later, and in any case have a very good fight. At the worst we could pass the Canal on foot, presumably by swimming it, and march south. Putt, didn't have his red hair for nothing.

This seemed a very good plan in the circumstances, and orders were being prepared for carrying it out when at 6.30 p.m. an officer arrived with a message that gave rather more hope. He came from Brigadier Charrington, commanding the British Armoured Brigade somewhere on our right. Charrington's signals had picked up a message from New Zealand Divisional Headquarters that 4 Brigade Group was to withdraw to beaches to the east of Athens, and probably embark that night, the 26/27 April. Half an hour later a second officer arrived from Charrington with a duplicate of this message and one from Brigadier Miles, the New Zealand C.R.A., with another copy.

The Brigadier wasted no time. A detachment of carriers under an English officer, Lt.-Col. Marnham, was sent along the Corinth road towards Megara to get information. The reserve company of the Nineteenth went back to Eleusis where the Thebes road joined the Corinth-Athens road. An advance party was sent to D. beach at Porto Rafti and a detachment to picket the road through Athens. I was given the rearguard and with a company of Australian sappers was to blow the demolitions from our forward positions back to Eleusis, some twenty miles.

Everything went smoothly although there had been very little time to get out orders. The withdrawal started at 9 p.m. and was unmolested. Transport arrangements were good. The column travelled with lights full on and at high speed. By 4 o'clock next morning, 27 April, it was tucking itself under the olive-groves on the approaches to Porto Rafti.

I had no difficulty with the demolitions. The four Australian sapper subalterns, whose names all began with E, worked things very well, the battalions left no stragglers, and we blew demolition after demolition without any hitch. At the last we had two and a half tons of ammonal left so we added it to the last charge and made a very fine finish. At Eleusis I found a few machine-gunners who had missed **the**

order to retire and brought them on with me. We sped through the empty streets of Athens just as dawn was breaking. Ten miles on we were stopped by a Twentieth picket, heard that the battalion was in, and lay down to sleep.

Perhaps half an hour later I was wakened, and found myself surrounded by some very serious-looking officers, Strutt, commanding the Australian Field Regiment, his battery commanders, and an Australian machine-gunner. Strutt said with some gravity: There has been a mistake, we should have embarked last night. The Brigadier has gone. Your battalion and my guns are the last British troops in Greece. I have come to put myself under your command.⁵ This neat little speech woke me up effectively. We counted up our army, one battalion, seventeen guns, one machine-gun company, seven anti-tank guns, and some sappers. I pointed out that the force was inadequate to retake Athens and said that we would fall back to the high ground about the beach, lie low or fight as the case required, and hope to embark during the night.

There is nothing like having a plan, even if a poor one, and everyone cheered up. Jim Burrows and my company commanders turned up and I assured them that we would at last have a good fight and it was a pity we would have no spectators.

I left Strutt and Jim to get the troops on the move and went off to the beach, twelve miles away, intending to find out what I could, select a defensive position, and put the troops on it as they arrived. The beach was empty, a single caique riding in the little bay and no sign of any embarkation parties, and I came away feeling rather doleful. On the way back we saw some abandoned trucks hidden under the olive-trees and as we had no rations Ross and I stopped to examine them. One was an Australian canteen truck, loaded with tinned plums and raspberries. While we were busy transferring this find I saw khaki figures through the trees and came on Brigade Headquarters and the Brigadier shaving. It was a distinct relief. He was very indignant that I had imagined him gone. No one had gone. The whole Brigade was present, evidently well hidden, and we would all embark that night.

Much more cheerfully I went with him on a short reconnaissance, handicapped by the fact that the only map was a i: 200,000 motor-map of Attica. No time was wasted about orders: 18 Battalion and 20 Battalion were to be forward on a line just east of Markopoulon, 19 Battalion in reserve, and 2nd/3rd Australian Field Regiment in support.

I then returned to the battalion and as usual found that Jim had everything ready and the orders group waiting. About 10 o'clock we were able to get on the road in our turn, moved to just short of Markopoulon, and pulled into the olive-groves again. I had been ahead with the company commanders, had given them their orders, and when I got back the men had debussed and were starting with some zest to destroy the vehicles. This is not easy to do when fire cannot be used, and heavy desert tyres are extremely difficult to injure. Oil was drained and the engines run till they seized. There was still no sign of the enemy and I told the companies to move independently to their positions and settled down to breakfast and shave.

Reprehensibly, though perhaps it should not have been necessary, I gave no special warning about precautions against air attack. The road was still crowded with transport and as the men moved off by sections, they became part of a very good target. I nearly intervened to order them off the roads; but they were hot and heavy laden and very tired, so I weakly let them go. Retribution came very quickly. I had not finished shaving when a score of German fighters appeared and dived savagely. For ten minutes there was a roar of cannon and machine-gun fire, punctuated by sharp explosions, and then they flew away. Half a dozen black columns of smoke curled up near the village, and an ammunition lorry started a fireworks display. I went along very anxiously and found that B. Company had lost two officers killed, McLaren and Ayto, and thirty men. The Brigadier said it was the only foolish thing the Twentieth did in the campaign; and it had been sharply punished.

The next few hours were rather anxious: A., B., and C. Companies got into position and reported so in good time; **but** D. Company was astray for some hours and Headquarters

Company retreated nearly to the beach, I was standing in the little square in Markopoulon when one of the companies marched through, sections in single file and intervals of a hundred yards between sections. The square was crowded with Greeks, men, women, and children. They knew we were leaving them to darkness and oppression but there were no reproaches. Instead they gave the men oranges and water, showered flowers on them, and some cried: 'Come back again, New Zealand!'⁵ I saw one sweating infantryman turn and shout: 'We'll bloody well come back again!'

For some worried hours Cameron and I were alone on the clump of rocks that we had selected for a headquarters, without information or means of getting any, and with nearly half the battalion astray. It was nearly four in the afternoon before, by one means and another, we had found and brought back the two missing companies and got our headquarters and signals established.

This was such a relief that a message from Rolleston, one of the forward platoon commanders, that eighty A.F.V.s had moved into Markopoulon was hardly alarming at all. Still it did not sound well. My mortars shelled the village and we reported to Brigade. I rather discounted the message but the gunners had reported to the same effect and got busy shelling enemy transport which we could all now see coming down the Athens road. It looked very like a fight before nightfall and a very difficult embarkation. The Brigadier sent out a message that there was every prospect of an A.F.V. attack being beaten off by gunfire and that if the front was irretrievably broken the troops would fall back to the steep, hills near the beach and hold them as infantry positions until embarkation became possible. As he explained to me that night, if there was any difficulty about water or rations we could always descend into the plain and 'savage' the Boche for what we wanted.

I thought poorly of the prospect and, against his vigorous protests, sent Jim to report to Brigade where he would be available for the embarkation, which looked like being sticky. About an hour later he returned, looking much more cheerful, accompanied by driver and batman. They did not have

knives in their mouths but otherwise appeared fully armed. He stated that Brigade did not want him, that he would take no more such bloody orders from me, and he sat down defiantly*

We were all rather fed up with the long withdrawal and would have liked to have seen some German infantry, though we were not particularly keen on the A.F.V.s. Nothing happened, however, though the enemy continued to stack up on our front. After dark we moved smoothly back through the Nineteenth and on to the beach, where we sat for some hours. All guns, heavy weapons, and equipment were destroyed by order and we were told to discard our packs. After a very trying trip on a tank lighter, which for an hour or so stuck on a sandbank, we scrambled aboard the cruiser *Ajax* and ended our share in the Greek campaign.

We had had eighty-five casualties, including three officers killed. Among the missing was Corporal Denvir of A. Company, who three and a half years later was to reappear as a Yugoslav partisan battalion commander. B. Company had suffered the worst, losing forty-four, of whom sixteen were dead. Most unfortunately, we also lost the first reinforcement of six officers and forty-six other ranks whom we had left in Athens. They were caught in the unfortunate affair at Kalamata—where Sergeant Hinton of C. Company won a Victoria Cross—and were mostly taken prisoner.

6. Crete

Ay AX made very quick time to Suda Bay and we were disembarking in great haste, bombers being expected, by ten next morning, 28 April. We had come aboard with only what we could carry, less packs. At first I could get no orders and we streamed in a long straggling crowd to Canea—a dusty road and a hot morning. Some miles along the road we found that someone had organized food and drink, and we sat down very happily under the olive-trees. We had no idea that it was only a matter of from frying-pan to fire. After a while we were directed to a transit camp and meandered along during the afternoon. Everyone had a holiday feeling, there were several attractive wine cafes, and it was evening before the move was completed and the companies reorganized. Not a good show. There were no blankets and the night was rather chill.

The companies had next morning for 'interior economy' and a thorough straightening up. In the afternoon I inspected them very carefully. Personal equipment and arms were very nearly complete except for one man who possessed nothing beyond a single hand-grenade. Both our mortars had arrived, complete with base plates, but of course without ammunition. There was scarcely any signalling gear and it was disappointing to find only thirty-seven Bren guns instead of fifty. Apparently on landing someone had told the men to dump heavy gear on the wharf and a number had been simple enough to do so.

The inspection, strictly carried out and undoubtedly helpful for morale, was only just finished when an order came for me to hand over the command to Burrows and to assume command of 4 Brigade. General Freyberg had accepted the difficult command of all the forces in Crete, Brigadier Puttick, in consequence, taking command of the New Zealand

Division. I left that evening. Some troops had gone direct from Greece to Egypt but 4 and 5 New Zealand Brigades were present together with a considerable number of gunners without guns, drivers without trucks, some sappers, and an army troops company. All for whom no rifles could be found were shipped off to Egypt and the remainder were told they were infantry.

The weather was perfect, the surroundings beautiful, and we had no doubt whatever that we would easily destroy the parachute landing of which there was some talk. The troops marched and drilled and dug and quickly got over their weariness and slackness. We had wonderful bathing in the sea or in the sparkling mountain streams, oranges by the armful, brilliant sunshine, and windless, balmy nights. For most it was a halcyon period.

For the commanders and those who knew what was impending it was very different. Intelligence reports soon made it certain that a very strong attack by air-transported troops would shortly be made; and we were in poor condition to meet it.

Hargest, with the four battalions of 5 Brigade, was holding the Maleme area, where was the only airfield, a minute one, in the western end of Crete. One of his battalions, the Twenty-first, was very weak, having been isolated and cut up near Mt. Olympus. At first it was only 190 strong but it grew to 350 as odd parties, including its CO., Macky, arrived by caiques. In 4 Brigade the Eighteenth had lost 85 and the Nineteenth 156, and all three battalions were like the Twentieth in the amount of their equipment. The various miscellaneous units were at first organized into what was known as Oakes's Force.

On 30 April 4 Brigade moved into position, its task being to cover Canea against attack from the west and to destroy any hostile troops who landed in the Prison valley. We were separated by some five miles and high ground from 5 Brigade at Maleme. I went into Canea in the afternoon and after much searching got nails for my boots; while next day I got a truck, the only one, for the Brigade. Both acquisitions proved most valuable. We set to work to dig in, handicapped

by the shortage of digging tools, of which we never got more than six per company. It was slow, hard work with these, with bayonets, and what clumsy farm and gardening implements we could find, to dig trenches in the stiff clay.

The first hint of the storm came on 2 May when there was a sharp Stuka raid on Suda Bay. We could not see what damage had been done but there were fires. General Freyberg came round and spoke to all officers and N.C.O.s and warned them that the attack was coming and that it would be tough going. He asked me if I thought the men would fight. I was very confident that they would. Perhaps I had eaten too many oranges, for on this day I had an attack of diarrhoea which stayed with me and kept me very weak until the fighting started, when it stopped as if by magic.

On the 4th and 5th there were more raids on Suda Bay. It was a delight to see several Stukas brought down, but there was a pall of smoke over the harbour and the working parties we had sent to unload stores came back to say their ship had been sunk. I had been unreasonably sceptical of any serious attempt at an air landing, but on this day Keith Stewart assured me that there would be one and that it would be a nasty affair.

On the 6th I went with Gentry, John Gray, Blackburn, now commanding the Nineteenth, and Guy Sanders, to Kosimo Kastelli, the little port near the western end of Crete. Here Bedding of the Nineteenth, two other New Zealand officers, and a dozen N.C.O.s were trying to get some order into 800 little Greeks, none more than fifteen days a soldier. They made enough progress to put up an astonishingly good resistance when the attack came, and actually to destroy the whole of the first attacking party. On the way home we had tea with Hargest, who was welcoming Major Trousdale and fifty-one men of the Twenty-first just back from a fortnight's wandering in the Aegean.

The next few days passed quietly. The General gave a very good cocktail party in Canea, the account for which was duly paid in 1945—4 Brigade band arrived, and we visited one another and enjoyed life. On the 14th the air

attacks started again, both on Suda Bay and on Maleme, and on a heavier scale. It began to look like business.

Inglis arrived from Egypt and took over 4 Brigade, and I went to command the extemporized 10 Brigade. Dispositions were altered and 10 Brigade took over the Galatos position, 4 Brigade going into reserve nearer to Canea. This formidable 10 Brigade was composed as follows:

First Composite Bn.	Strength 750.	Formerly Oakes's Force, now under Lewis; gunners and A.S.C. acting as infantry.
N.Z. Divisional Cavalry.	Strength 190.	Commanded by John Russell. Armed with rifles and Brens.
Sixth Greek Bn.	Strength 1,400.	Col. Gregorio.
Eighth Greek Bn.	Strength 900.	Greek C.O. quite useless and Cliff Wilson actual commander.
Twentieth N.Z. Bn.	Strength 650.	Not to be employed without the approval of N.Z. Division.
1 \ Platoons N.Z. Machine-guns.		
1 Battery 5 Field Regiment, armed with 3 Italian 75's, without sights and with little ammunition.		

My Brigade Major was Brian Bassett of the Twenty-third; the staff-captain was Geoff Fussell of the Eighteenth. Brigade Headquarters consisted of a dozen signallers with just enough telephones and wire to reach all battalions, but no replacements whatever, and of course no wireless.

The Composite Battalion was composed of good material but both officers and men were wholly untrained in infantry work. Though reliable at first in defence, they were wholly incapable of manoeuvre or attack and gradually lost confidence in themselves. The Greeks were malaria-ridden little chaps from Macedonia with four weeks' service. The Eighth Greeks had fired ten rounds each from their ancient Steyers, Sixth Greeks none, and neither battalion could be said to have any military value. The Divisional Cavalry was untrained in infantry work but was a well-disciplined confident unit, and easily adapted itself. Four of the six Vickers guns had tripods. There were two trucks for all purposes—supply, evacuation of wounded, and inter-communication. The Greeks had six heavy St. Etienne machine-guns, old

type, and very worn, and no trained gunners. There was a dire shortage of digging tools, not more than six of all sorts for each company.

I established my headquarters in the biggest house in Galatos and selected a battle headquarters in what proved to be a very bad position. I spent 15th and 16th May going round my units and particularly in trying to get the Greeks into reasonable positions. They had a strong tendency to dig in on the tops of hills; while the gunners of the Composite Battalion were usually satisfied with a ten yards⁵ field of fire.

Heavy raids continued on Suda Bay, several ships were sunk, and there was a monstrous pall of smoke over the bay, thickening and extending daily. On the 17th I walked out through the Prison valley, south-west of Galatos, and an ideal and expected place for a parachute landing, and visited John Russell and Cliff Wilson. Their units, the Divisional Cavalry and 8 Greek Battalion, were in positions nominally commanding the western end of the valley; but they had neither weapons nor troops adequate for the task. I warned them of the imminence of an attack and authorized John Russell to fall back via the high ground into my main position if he found he was doing no good. Cliff thought his Greek officers useless and he felt very lonely. He would be cut off by any landing and I could only try to encourage him, and tell him in the worst case to fall back into the hills and try to work round to rejoin us via Suda Bay. I did not tell him that I had argued elsewhere that 8 Greek Battalion was only a circle on the map—(BG)—and that it was murder to leave such troops in such a position, and had been told that, in war murder sometimes has to be done. We had lunch together in a spotlessly clean little parlour and then said good-bye for the last time.

The whole of the Prison valley was dominated by the Prison itself, a solid rectangle of buildings, impervious to our little guns. Its Governor was suspected of being pro-German, and so he proved. I have no recollection that we ever considered garrisoning it. Perhaps we were too tender of the civil authorities, or we may have thought it too easy a

bombing target. It was very useful to the Germans who used it as a headquarters and a field ambulance.

That day and the next there were more heavy raids on Suda Bay and Maleme and reconnaissance aircraft were continuously overhead. On the 19th the tempo increased, Suda Bay was full of sunken ships, and transport on the road was machine-gunned. We went to bed convinced that the day was near. Inglis and I had a talk and satisfied each other that the attack would be disastrously repulsed.

An order had arrived during the day for twenty-four N.C.O.s to be sent to assist in training the Greek recruits who were guarding Italian prisoners miles away at Alikianou. I decided not to obey it meanwhile.

The right of 10 Brigade line rested on a bold bluff overlooking the sea, 1,800 yards north of Galatos. Thence it ran southerly through vineyards along a ridge for 2,000 yards to Wheat Hill, a bold feature which dominated the whole line 1,000 yards west of the village. Then the line turned eastwards across the Prison road 2,200 yards to Cemetery hill, a bare prominent knoll 800 yards south-east of Galatos and surmounted by a walled cemetery with cypress trees after the Eastern style. From this point the line ran southwards again for 2,000 yards across the Canea road to the Turkish fort, an ancient structure on a terraced foothill of the main range. The right sector, as far as the Prison road inclusive, some 3,200 yards, was held by the Composite Battalion with the Divisional Petrol Company in the most dangerous portion astride the Prison road. The Sixth Greeks held the remaining 3,000 yards of the brigade position. The Composite Battalion sector was dominated by Signal Hill, two miles westward, with numerous ravines and broken country between. The Prison valley, olive-trees and open pasture, lay opposite the rest of the position. Nearly two miles beyond it and quite isolated, the Divisional Cavalry and the Eighth Greeks held positions respectively north and south of the Agia Reservoir and power station. I had the only map in the Brigade.

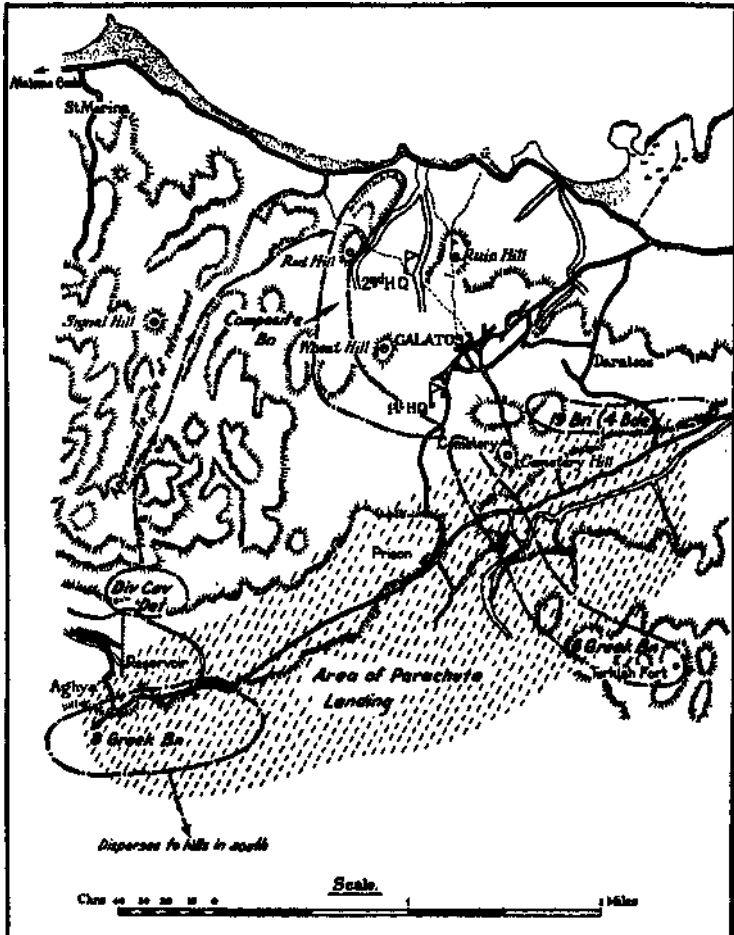
Twentieth Battalion nominally belonged to 10 Brigade but could not be employed without Division's approval. It

was in the hospital area west of Ganea and Brigade Headquarters had no communication with it. Our nearest support was likely to come from the Nineteenth, in strong reserve positions east of Galatos.

The brigade front was covered by single or double apron wire, weapon pits were quite well constructed, and except for one circumstance there was no reason that it should not have been held against any attack likely in the first instance, despite the bad communications. This circumstance was that the Sixth Greeks had only three rounds per man. Our one truck had delivered five truckloads of ammunition during 19 May, but for some reason it had not been distributed, by whose fault we never discovered. If our troops had been well trained and armed a parachute landing in the Prison valley would have been easily dealt with. As it was, the two outlying units were in hopeless positions and there was little solid about the rest of the line. It was a pity that the Twentieth had been replaced by the Greeks and withdrawn into reserve where they did nothing all the vital first day.

The morning of 20 May was calm and cloudless, as was every day during the battle. Before the sunlight had reached the valleys the German reconnaissance plane appeared. Shortly afterwards a fighter arrived and started to roar up and down the main street of Galatos firing bursts at anything it could see. This struck me as a bit unusual so I hurriedly finished shaving and looked with some caution out of my first-floor window. Other fighters were swooping over the Ganea road and there was a great deal of noise from aeroplane engines. Nothing appeared imminent, however, so I finished dressing and went down for breakfast under the trees outside. The plane was still tearing up and down the street and maybe the cooks were bustled, for the porridge was mere oatmeal and water. I was grumbling about this when someone gave an exclamation that might have been an oath or a prayer or both. Almost over our heads were four gliders, the first we had ever seen, in their silence inexpressibly menacing and frightening. Northwards was a growing thunder. I shouted: 'Stand to your arms!'⁵, and ran upstairs for my rifle and binoculars. I noticed my

diary lying open on the table. Four years later it was returned to me, having meanwhile been concealed by some Cretan girl.



MAP 3. IO N.Z. INF. BDE. AT GALATOS, 20 MAY 1941

When I reached the courtyard again the thunder had become deafening, the troop-carriers were passing low overhead in every direction one looked, not more than 400 feet up, in scores. As I ran down the Prison road to my battle

headquarters the parachutists were dropping out over the valley, hundreds of them, and floating quietly down. Some were spilling out over our positions and there was a growing crackle of rifle-fire. I pelted down the road, outpacing the two signallers who had started with me, and scrambled up the steep track to the battle post, a pink house on a little knoll east of the road. As I panted through the gap in the cactus hedge there was a startling burst of fire fairly in my face, cutting the cactus on either side of me. I jumped sideways, twisted my ankle, and rolled down the bank. After whimpering a little, I crawled up the track and into the house, and saw my man through the window. Then I hopped out again, hopped around the back and, in what seemed to me a nice bit of minor tactics, stalked him round the side of the house and shot him cleanly through the head at ten yards. The silly fellow was still watching the gap in the hedge and evidently had not noticed me crawl into the house.

The signallers and Brian Bassett arrived and Brian and I surveyed the situation while the signallers tested the lines. The whole valley was covered with discarded parachutes, like huge mushrooms, mostly white, with different colours for those which had been dropped with supplies. Men were running about among them but though there was fire none appeared to be falling. With a shock we saw that a good many had dropped behind the Greek position and that the Greeks were running all ways.

Our own front line, where the Divisional Petrol Company lay astride the road, was only a few hundred yards ahead, and we quickly found that we were in far too exposed a position. Bullets ripped through the cactus and soon it was obvious that we would not be able to stay with any comfort. It was necessary to be near one of our few telephones, so we decided to move to Composite Battalion Headquarters, a few hundred yards to the north. I took the tommy-gun and a pistol from the dead German; Brian and the signallers went back up the road to warn the rest of Headquarters of the change and I went direct through the trees. On the way I came on a dead parachutist hanging in his harness on an olive-tree.

We settled down at Composite Battalion Headquarters, which consisted of a few holes in a hollow, but at least had a telephone. Everything was quiet south of Galatos. A few stray parachutists had landed in the battalion area and had been shot, others were being rounded up, and eventually there was a tally of fifty-five. Two parties of gunners and drivers each about thirty strong under young officers named McLean and Carson—the latter had represented New Zealand at cricket—did most of this rounding up. When they had finished it I kept them in hand as a reserve and we gave them some training as infantry. About 400 of the Greeks were rallied by Michael Forrester, an officer in the Queen's Regiment who was attached to the Greek Mission. He had arrived in Galatos on a visit that morning and decided to stay for the party. He somehow got the Greeks forward and established them on a rough line south of the village connecting the Petrol Company with the Nineteenth.

About 10 o'clock a tremendous racket started on the Galatos-Prison road. The Germans had organized themselves and put in a fierce thrust through the trees on both sides of the road. The Petrol Company was forced back several hundred yards to behind our original headquarters and had thirty-five casualties. McDonagh, its commander, was killed, and Fussell, my staff-captain, was mortally wounded. Harold Rowe, my supply officer, took command of the situation, the men fought stubbornly, and after a while the fighting died down.

There was then time to take stock of the position. Small-arms fire could still be heard from the Reservoir area but we could not see what was happening. 19 Battalion told us that they had killed 155 parachutists and, rather apologetically, that they had taken nine prisoners. They also apologized for having shot my Greek colonel, who was creating a nuisance by throwing grenades at them. Two or three snipers were hiding in Galatos, taking pot shots at intervals, and Carson went off after them. Otherwise the brigade area was clear. Our losses were not heavy, except for the near elimination of both the Greek Battalions. Numerous enemy fighters were about but were uncertain as to who was who

and were doing little damage. Belated troop-carriers continued to arrive and drop their loads in the valley.

At midday there was a short flare-up when patrols approached Cemetery hill. The nearest Greeks set up a terrific yelling and about fifty of them charged. The patrols ran away smartly and all became quiet. Signals had by then got a line through to Division and I spoke cheerfully to General Puttick, who seemed decidedly pleased to hear me. I gathered from him that the position generally was thought to be in hand, there had been a big landing at Maleme and fighting was still going on. There were no troops to spare for a counter-attack so we turned our attention to lunch.

Brian and I were very annoyed that Composite Battalion Headquarters had done nothing whatever in this direction. We made the necessary arrangements and from then on I assumed direct command of the battalion as well as of the Brigade.

By captured orders we later learned that three battalions of the Third Parachute Regiment had landed in our area. They were very elaborate orders but had so far not been carried out. A German officer, Captain Neuhoff, of this regiment, who was interrogated after the war, said that very heavy casualties were suffered from the moment the men left the planes. From his aircraft only three men reached the ground unhurt, and those who jumped first, nearer to Galatos, were nearly all killed either in the air or soon after landing. This was our observation also. In his battalion approximately 350 men survived the initial landing and organizing period.

The afternoon started quietly. I was anxious about John Russell's Divisional Cavalry detachment and about the portion of the line held by the Greeks. They had very little ammunition left and though they did not seem to mind charging were obviously incapable of holding ground. McLean and Carson were sent up to stiffen them but about 4 o'clock both anxieties were ended when John brought his people in and took over the sector. Without long-range weapons he had been unable to interfere with the landing and so exercised the discretion I had given him and came in over Signal Hill. John had

run a stick of bamboo into his leg and like me was very lame, but he had had no casualties. He reported that Cliff Wilson's Greeks appeared to be hopelessly dispersed and disorganized. For the next few days we frequently saw mortar bursts round the Reservoir and occasionally could hear distant rifle fire. No news ever came back from Cliff and long afterwards we learned that he had been killed. He is still remembered with warm affection and in him the Division lost an officer of great promise.

There was another half-hearted attack up the Prison road about this time but the Petrol Company beat it off emphatically and, according to Neuhoff, inflicted really heavy loss. Most of the Germans were armed with sub-machine-guns, not nearly as effective a weapon as the rifle at over 200 yards. I pressed again for infantry with which to counter-attack and was told that something would be done.

Late in the evening two companies of the Nineteenth, under Pleasants and McLaughlan, came over and moved to a start-line behind the Petrol Company. Three light tanks of the Third Hussars came into the village. These people said they were going to attack at 8.30 p.m. but were not at all clear what their objective was. The more common opinion was that they were to reach the edge of the olive-trees north of the prison and remain there to deal with any other landing in the morning. Exactly at zero hour I was informed that the Nineteenth was under my command. We tried to get in touch with the two companies but they had gone forward and it was already dark. We heard very little firing but my patrols, who could not have been very venturesome, failed to find them during the night. Before dawn McLean and his stalwarts went forward with orders from me to withdraw the infantry, Division having recognized that whatever opportunity there was had now gone. McLean found that they had only got about 200 yards past our original wire and were just about to resume their advance with little prospect of success. They came in, except for one platoon that went right across the valley and re-crossed, ten strong, three days later. Pleasants had inflicted about twenty casualties, McLaughlan claimed nothing. The tanks on the previous

evening had gone to the edge of the olive-grove and returned after shooting a few Germans.

We were kept busy all this day, 21 May, though we reported the morning quiet except for persistent ground strafing, another small parachute landing, and a brisk attack up the Prison road. During the night the enemy had got on to Cemetery hill, enfilading part of our position and depriving us of our best observation post. 19 Battalion was still under command, so in the afternoon I attacked the hill with a squadron of the Cavalry and a company of the Nineteenth. This attack was difficult to organize and support but it was quite successful, several machine-guns and mortars being captured, and forty or fifty Germans killed or wounded. There were no tools to dig in with, however, and very little cover on the hill, so after a while the troops, who had been sharply mortared, came back and said the hill was untenable. The Germans appeared to agree and thenceforth both sides left it alone. John Russell and I, having got rather forward and climbed a tree to watch, were seen and had some frights before we got down amid a shower of twigs. We had thirty casualties in this affair.

During the afternoon we had heard that the Twentieth was to go up to Maleme to make a counter-attack with the Maoris. I was able to ring Jim Burrows and wish him luck.

Two days had now elapsed since the landing and it had not yet occurred to us that we were going to be beaten. Instead the impression prevailed that the enemy was evacuating and during the night I was directed to be as aggressive as possible the next day, 22 May. Quite early in the morning we heard that matters had not gone over well at Maleme and that the Twentieth had been badly cut up. It was clear by now, too, that there was no question of the enemy evacuating but that the troop-carriers which we could see flying towards Maleme in an unending procession were bringing reinforcements. Nevertheless, it was decided to go ahead with my plans.

19 Battalion attacked with two companies on a front of 800 yards, with the object of regaining most of the ground from which the Greeks had been driven. Meagre support

was given by our three Italian 75's and a couple of mortars. There was considerable opposition, enemy aircraft intervened with some effect and, after three hours of rather desultory scrapping in very broken ground, both companies withdrew with a dozen casualties, having captured a mortar and three heavy machine-guns.

The day closed with a heavy enemy attack in the evening on the old line up the Prison road. This was fiercely pressed on a front of some 700 yards, and after losing about fifty men the rather weary Petrol Company fell back, though still fighting. The enemy followed, raising strange yelping cries and firing continuously. I sent McLean to reinforce the Petrol Company and moved with Carson to Wheat hill with the idea of counter-attacking from that flank. The line had gone back some 500 yards, fighting from tree to tree, when we got there. The Germans, whose left was quite close, were abreast of the hill and between us and Galatos. They had also started a direct attack on the western side of Wheat hill. There was a beautiful opening for Carson, and I was waiting for him to line his men up before giving him the order to charge, when a most infernal uproar broke out across the valley. Over an open space in the trees near Galatos came running, bounding, and yelling like Red Indians, about a hundred Greeks and villagers including women and children, led by Michael Forrester twenty yards ahead. It was too much for the Germans. They turned and ran without hesitation, and we went back to our original positions.

I reinforced the Petrol Company with twenty gunners, borrowed a platoon from the Nineteenth, and gave John Russell command of the Petrol Company as well as his own people. The Greeks were collected and reassembled under Forrester behind the village—and a very busy day ended.

Five patrols of about thirty men each went out from the Composite Battalion position. Three moved west along the coast road and then turned southwards to clear the valleys as far west as Agia Marina. About forty Germans were found in the little village of Agio Goannino and nearly all disposed of by Veitch's party. A 12-year-old Cretan boy gave invaluable help here. The other two patrols moved south

of the high ground, and one, under the indefatigable Carson, got as far as Lake Agia and caused some disturbance.

During the day we were rather frequently attacked by fighters, though without great effect, and the enemy mortar fire became much heavier. We copied some of the German ground-to-air signals, without knowing what they meant, and got an interesting assortment of supplies, including a nice new mortar but no ammunition.

My sprained ankle was becoming a nuisance as it prevented me from getting about as much as I should have and also kept me awake when the odd chances of sleeping came. Brian Bassett, my Brigade Major, was a great help. He managed to visit every unit and sub-unit at least once daily, was always cheerful and optimistic, and keenly observant. It was such a pleasure working with him that the battle was almost enjoyable. It was also a delight to have John Russell with me, cheerful and determined and uncomplaining. His batman could always produce a cup of tea, a very important point. Some other officers, especially those who had not had much to do, were beginning to show signs of strain. The Composite Battalion's casualties were now 190, those of the Divisional Cavalry 60, and Lomas, the Battalion's medical officer, warned me that morale was going down. During the day we had an increasing number of cases of slightly wounded men being brought in by three or four friends in no hurry to go back.

23 May was a quiet day for 10 Brigade, but we heard the bad news that 5 Brigade was leaving the Maleme area and moving into reserve behind us. With the help of a company of the Eighteenth we put parties south of the coastal road to cover the retirement. These came in late at night, having had several small brushes and having effectively covered their part of the retirement. Enemy patrols from the Prison area were active and Russell's group was constantly engaged. There was the usual mortaring and ground strafing, with a further ominous increase in the former. I managed to get round most of the Composite Battalion and was forced to the reluctant conclusion that it was in no condition to meet the heavy attacks that must come soon. All day we could see

enemy troops moving into position on the lower features of Signal hill. We had nothing to reach them with and they troubled very little about concealment.

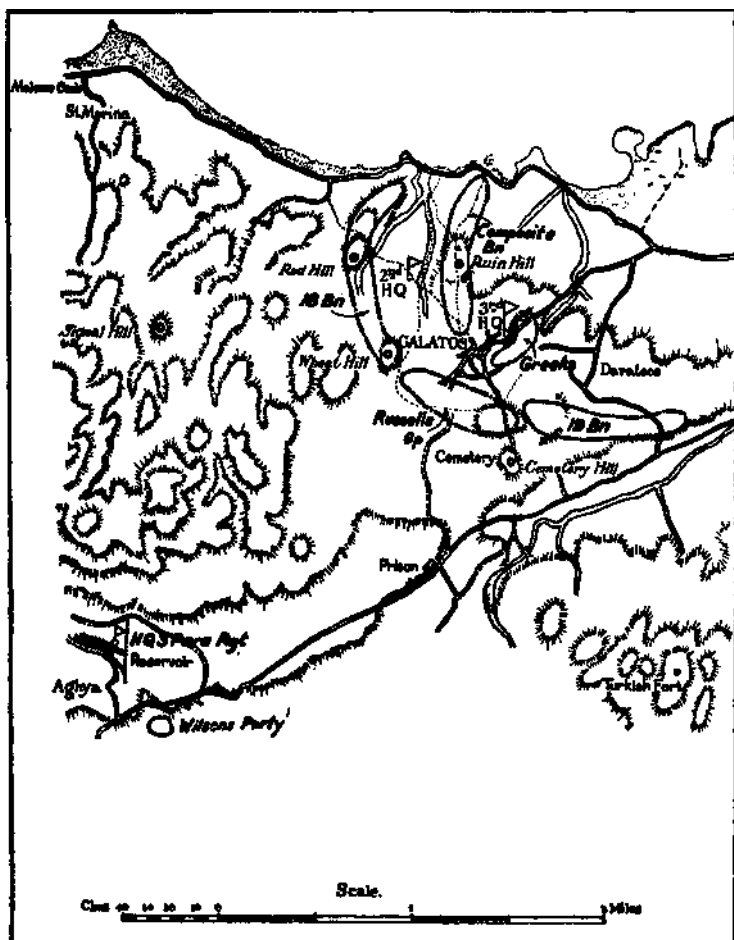
At midday I went down to Division by truck and reported the state of affairs to General Puttick. He at once decided that the Eighteenth should relieve the Composite Battalion in the evening. Apart from the General and Gentry, who gave no sign of perturbation, the atmosphere at Division was not cheerful. I saw some of the Twentieth platoons moving back, looking dazed and weary to exhaustion, and for the first time felt the coming of defeat. During this visit there was a very heavy bombing of the area, so heavy and prolonged that we thought it preceded another parachute landing. I had stupidly come out weaponless and was very relieved when nothing happened.

Inglis came up soon after my return and we arranged the details. 10 Brigade came under the command of 4 Brigade. Russell's Group, who had had the bulk of the fighting but were in the best condition, stayed in position. 18 Battalion took over the line from the sea to Wheat hill inclusive, unfortunately not taking over the feature we called Ruin hill. Composite Battalion, less the sturdy Petrol Company, moved a few hundred yards back to a ridge running north from Galatos. My headquarters moved to a half-completed building at the eastern exits of the village and Michael Forrester managed to move his mob of Greeks to the same area. Fifty of them, under a very stout young Greek officer, remained in the line under Russell.

These moves were not completed until early morning. It was heartening to see the Eighteenth come in—looking very efficient and battle-worthy—in painful contrast with the columns of clumps in which my unfortunate quasi-infantry got about. One of the Composite Battalion's officers told me that the contrast completed his discouragement.

The morning of 24 May was ominously quiet. I managed to walk along the whole of the Composite Battalion's new line and get them into something like reasonable positions. I also tried to put a little heart into some of the officers, but

too many had only the idea that they had done their bit and should be relieved. It was only too clear that the unit had little fighting value left.



MAP 4. 10 N.Z. INF. BDE. AT GALATOS, 24-5 MAY 1941

The afternoon was lively enough. 18 Battalion was heavily mortared, and there was a lot of ground strafing. In the evening John Gray reported that he was being attacked and asked for help. I put 120 men from the Composite Battalion

under his orders but they were not used, and by dark all was quiet again. About this time 18 Battalion issued an unfortunate order that if companies were too hard pressed they were to retire to the next ridge. This came to Inglis's knowledge and he promptly ordered it to be countermanded, but it probably had some effect on the battalion next day. I reported to Inglis in the evening that the line did not look too stable. What remained of the Twentieth was his only reserve but he promised to do what he could.

The next day brought hard and critical fighting. All morning there were continuous air attacks and steadily increasing mortar and machine-gun fire. Numerous parties of Germans moved into cover opposite 18 Battalion's front and about midday a column about 1,500 strong moved in threes to obvious assembly positions.

B., C, and D. companies of the Twentieth, organized into two companies under Fountaine and O'Callaghan and 140 strong, were sent up by Inglis. I placed them in reserve in the olive-trees north of Galatos, intending to use them for counter-attack. Jim Burrows came with them and said it was nice to be under my command again. Early in the afternoon they were particularly heavily bombed and machine-gunned. From midday mortaring and air attacks became intense and John Russell's front was warmly engaged.

About 4 o'clock a dozen Stukas dive-bombed Galatos. We had no anti-aircraft defences and they must have enjoyed it. My headquarters had one or two very near misses. At this stage I was standing on a table looking through a window that gave a view over the line from the village to the sea, and every few minutes I had to stand aside to avoid being seen by one of the planes continuously cruising over the tree-tops shooting at everything in sight. Fountaine, O'Callaghan, and Carson were with me, waiting the order to counter-attack. Carson's batman kept us all going with cups of tea.

Immediately after the bombing the main infantry attack started against the Eighteenth, and the crackle of musketry swelled to a roar, heavily punctuated by mortar bursts. Inglis rang and asked what all the noise was about and I could only say that things were getting warm. I estimated

the mortar bursts at six a minute on one company sector alone. 'Overs' from the German machine-guns were crackling all round our building in the most alarming manner. The telephone system had been almost destroyed by the bombing; the line to Brigade now went out and, though the linesmen worked gallantly, was never restored.

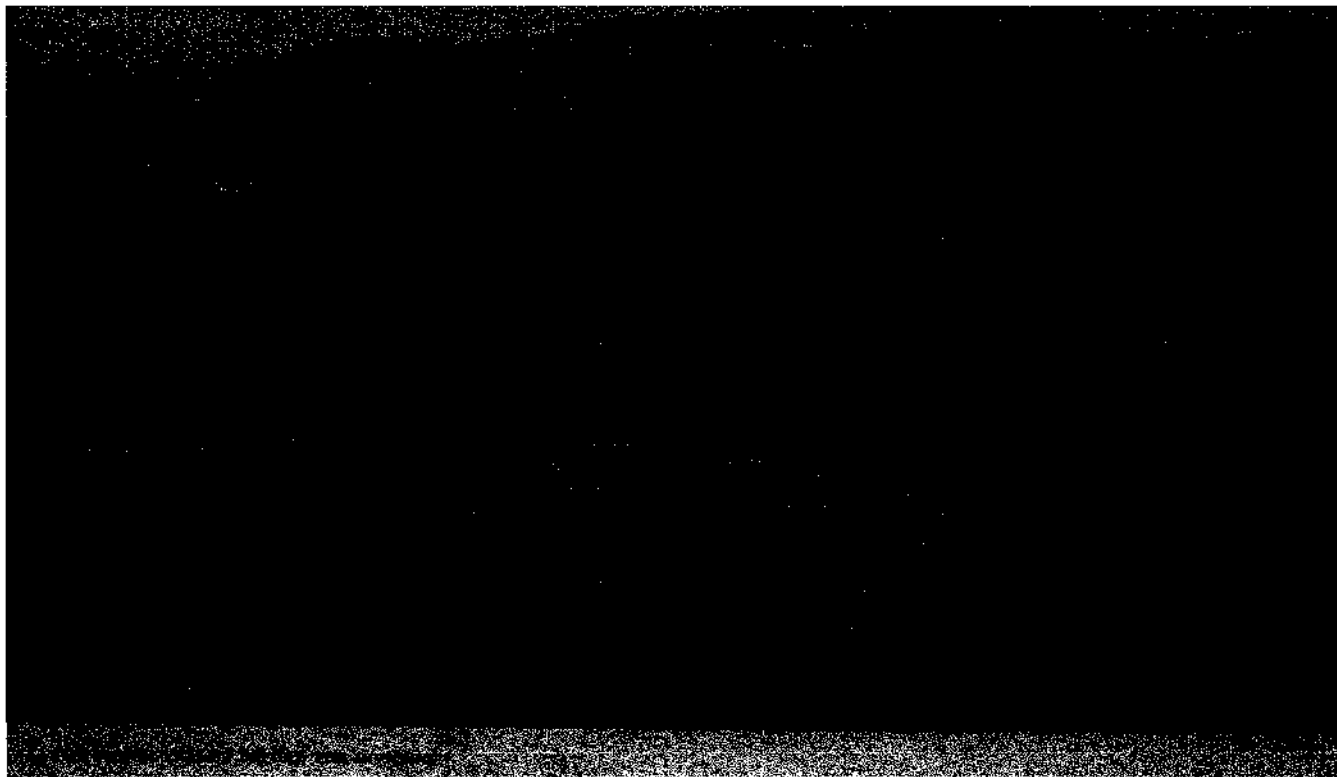
I went a few hundred yards forward to get a view of Wheat hill, and for a few minutes watched, fascinated, the rain of mortar bursts. In a hollow, nearly covered by undergrowth, I came on a party of women and children huddled together like little birds. They looked at me silently, with black, terrified eyes.

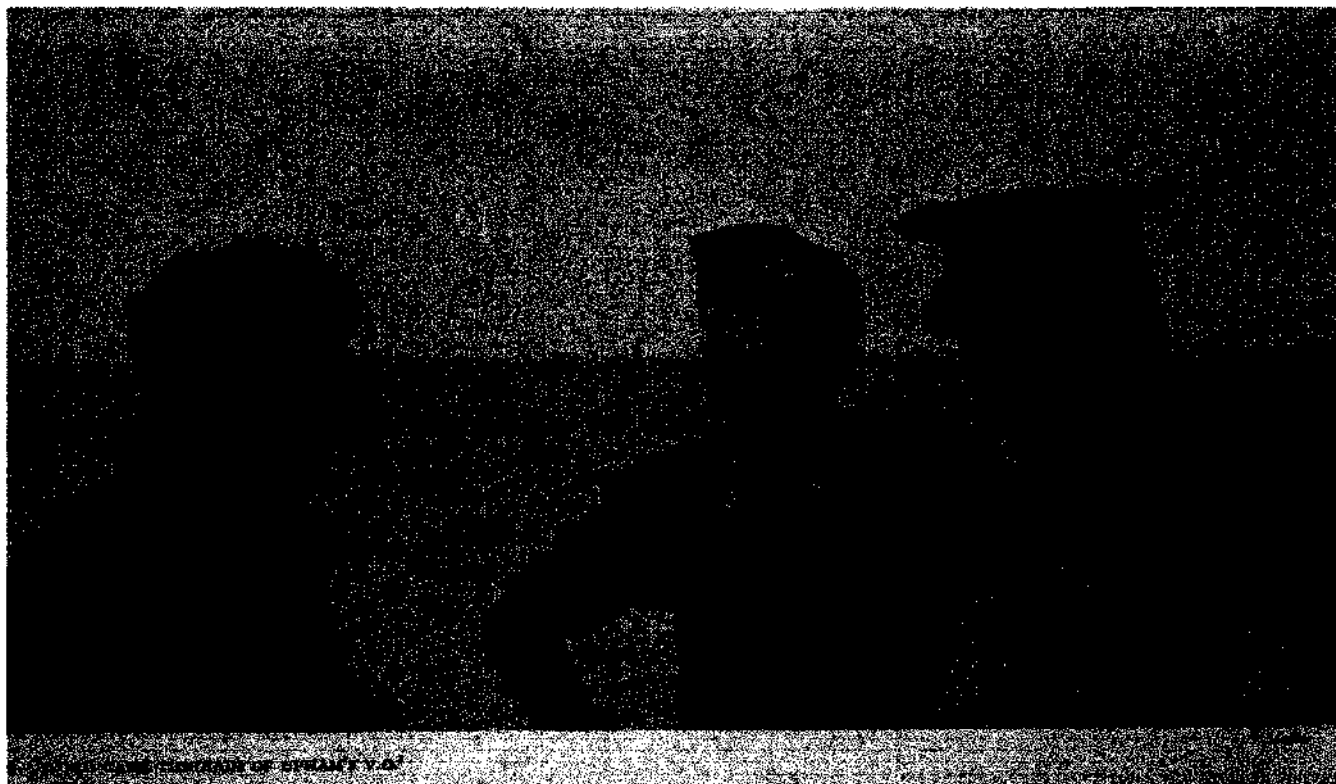
After two hours of this John Gray came back and said that his right company had been overwhelmed. I told him to counter-attack with his reserve (his Headquarters' Company and Bliss's 120 men) and restore the situation. Brian Bassett went with him and later returned to say that the counter-attack had failed, though padre, clerks, batmen, everyone who could carry a rifle, had taken part. In the meantime two runners in succession had come direct to me from the company holding Wheat hill asking permission to retire and had gone back with refusals.

I decided that the time had come to use the Twentieth and ordered it to move fast to the right of the Composite Battalion's ridge. Fountaine and O'Callaghan ran out, stooping under the stream of 'overs'. They got into position, finding the Composite Battalion nearly all gone though it had only been getting 'overs', and hung on grimly. For the rest of the evening it was a comfort to hear their fight going steadily on.

Matters were now looking grave, for John Russell reported that he was being hard pressed, and a trickle of stragglers was coming back past me. I sent Brian on foot to tell Inglis the position and say that I must have help. There were nearly 200 wounded at the Regimental Aid Post, close to headquarters. Our two trucks worked incessantly, taking them down to the Advanced Dressing Station in loads like butcher's meat.

Then the position worsened. Wheat hill was abandoned





without orders. This exposed Lynches company in the centre of the Eighteenth line and it fell back, still fighting savagely; Suddenly the trickle of stragglers turned to a stream, many of them on the verge of panic. I walked in among them shouting 'Stand for New Zealand!' and everything else I could think of. The R.S.M. of the Eighteenth, Andrewl, came up and asked how he could help. With him and Johnny Sullivan, the intelligence sergeant of the iTwentieth, we quickly got them organized under the nearest officers or N.C.O.s, in most cases the men responding with alacrity. I ordered them back across the next valley to line the ridge west of Daratsos where a white church gleamed in the evening sun. There they would cover the right of the Nineteenth and have time and space to get their second wind. Andrews came to me and said quietly that he was afraid he could not do any more. I asked why, and he pulled up his shirt and showed a neat bullet hole in his stomach. I gave him a cigarette and expected never to see him again, but did, three years later, in Italy. A completely empty stomach had saved him.

John Gray himself came back about 7.30 p.m., almost the last of his battalion, and looking twenty years older than three hours before. I told him to reorganize his battalion on the Daratsos Ridge. The Greeks had attempted a charge while the Eighteenth was rallying, but this time the men would not face the fire and they disappeared from the field. Fortunately Inglis had acted unhesitatingly and a steady stream of reinforcements was coming up the road; I set to work to build a new line.

The first to arrive was 4 Brigade band, which I put to line a stone wall a hundred yards in front of my headquarters. The Pioneer platoon of the Twentieth and the Kiwi Concert Party extended their right, and A. Company of the Twenty-third under Carl Watson carried it farther towards the sea. Runners got through to the Twentieth with orders to come back to prolong the right of this company. O'Callaghan was never seen again after he had arranged with Fountaine how to carry out this order, but somehow the withdrawal was carried out. There were swarms of Germans everywhere

among the trees but their advance seemed to have lost its impetus and darkness was near. Firing was still incessant and general, too general, for some of the Eighteenth on the ridge behind opened fire on me when I was silhouetted rather too prominently somewhere, and splintered the tree against which I was leaning.

Brian, who seemed to be everywhere at once, appeared at this stage and told me that the third company of the Twentieth, Washbourn's, was in position behind the other two, and this part of the line was secure. Also that more of the Twenty-third, from 5 Brigade, were coming up. The Composite Battalion, on the other hand, he said had cleared out. We long afterwards learnt that some gallant groups had hung on desperately to the end; but the rest of the Division knew nothing of their fate until the war was over and prisoners, who had been there, returned.

The position began to look more hopeful, when it suddenly worsened again. An officer, who had skirted Galatos, arrived with a message from John Russell that he was being heavily attacked frontally and that the enemy was in Galatos behind him. The sound of firing on the whole line increased and there was again mortar fire in it. Evidently the enemy was making his last effort before night.

Two ancient Mark VI tanks of the 3rd Hussars came up the road. Farran stopped and spoke to me and I told him to go into the village and see what was there. He clattered off and we could hear him firing briskly, when two more companies of the Twenty-third arrived, C. and D., under Harvey and Manson, each about eighty strong. They halted on the road near me. The men looked tired, but fit to fight and resolute. It was no use trying to patch the line any more; obviously we must hit or everything would crumble away. I told the two company commanders that they would have to retake Galatos with the help of the two tanks. No, there was no time for reconnaissance; they must move straight in up the road, one company either side in single file behind the tanks, and take everything with them. Stragglers and walking wounded were still streaming past. Some stopped to join in as did Carson and the last four of his party. The

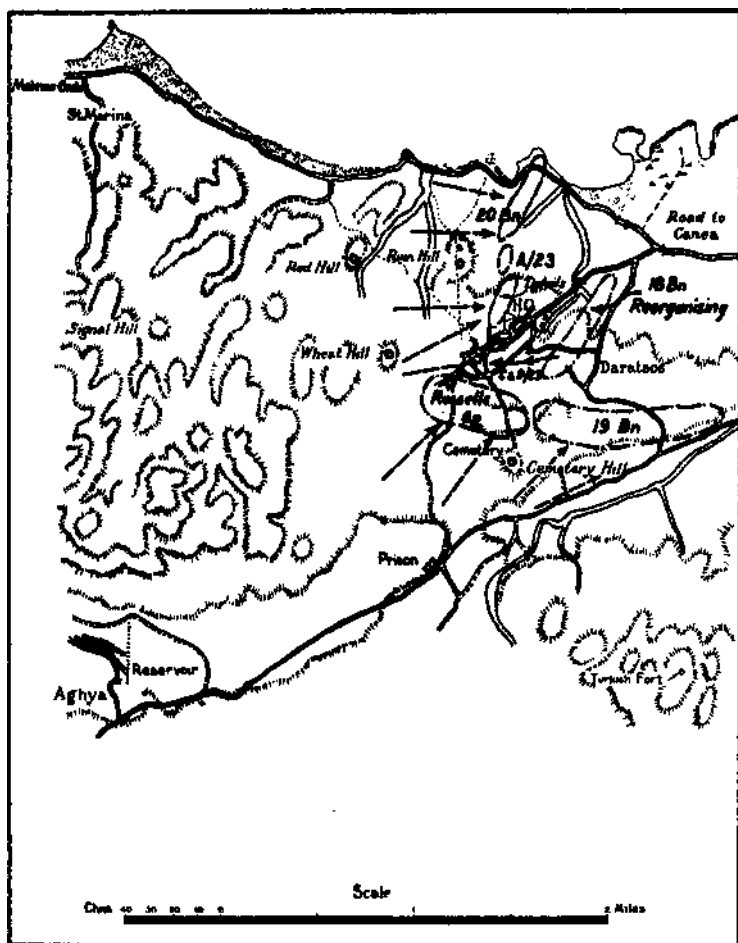
men fixed bayonets, and waited grimly* One of the platoon commanders, Connolly, came up and gave me a photograph of my wife and family which he had brought from New Zealand.

Farran came back with his two tanks and put his head out of the turret. 'The place is stiff with Jerries', he said, I told him that I had two companies of infantry; would he go in again with them? Certainly he would, but he had a driver and a gunner wounded; could they be replaced? I turned to a party of Sappers who had just arrived and asked for volunteers. Two men, one named Lewis, immediately volunteered, the wounded men were dragged out, and they clambered aboard. I told Farran to take them down the road to give them a ten minutes' course of instruction and that we would attack as soon as he came back. My batman went off to John Gray with a message that we were counter-attacking and an order to join in.

We waited another ten minutes, the air filled with noise and tracer crackling incessantly overhead—and then Farran came rattling back. He stopped and we spoke for a moment. I said the infantry would follow him, and he was not to go farther than the village square: 'Now get going.' He yelled to the second tank to follow him, pulled the turret lid down, and set off. The infantry followed at a walk, then broke into a run, started shouting—and running and shouting disappeared into the village. Instantly there was the most startling clamour, audible all over the field. Scores of automatics and rifles being fired at once, the crunch of grenades, screams and yells—the uproar swelled and sank, swelled again to a terrifying crescendo. Some women and children came scurrying down the road; one old woman frantic with fear clung desperately to me. The firing slackened, became a brisk clatter, steadily became more distant, and stopped. The counter-attack had succeeded, it was nearly dark, and the battlefield suddenly became silent.

We had lost both tanks, Farran was wounded, and in each company some thirty men were hit. Two of the subalterns who had led the charge, Sandy Thomas and Rex King, were badly wounded and were later captured in our abandoned

dressings station. John Gray had collected a few dozen men and led them in himself. A belated platoon of the Twentieth under Green, who had escaped with me in Greece,



MAP 5. COUNTER ATTACK AT GALATOS, 8.20 P.M., 25 MAY 1941

had also joined in, and Green was killed. John Russell and Harold Rowe seized the chance and extricated what were left of their men.

Before the end Thomason, commanding the Twenty-third,

had arrived with his last company. The position was now stabilized for the night and there was nothing left of 10 Brigade. I told Thomason where everyone was and, more tired than ever before in my life, or since, walked down the road with Johnny Sullivan to report to Inglis.

It was quite dark when we arrived at Brigade Headquarters and we stumbled round for some time among the trees. Inglis was in a tarpaulin-covered hole in the ground, seated at a table with a very poor light. Burrows, Blackburn, and Sanders were already there. Dittmer, the Maori Battalion commander, arrived a moment after me. Inglis was anxious to use the Maoris in a night attack and recover the ground. It was clear to all of us that if this was not feasible Crete was lost. It was a difficult operation, perhaps impossible: darkness, olive-trees, vineyards, no good start-line, only 400 men in the battalion. Dittmer said it was difficult; I said it could not be done and that it would need two fresh battalions. Inglis rightly pressed, remarking that we were done if it did not come off—'Can you do it, George?' Dittmer said, 'I'll give it a go!' We sat silently looking at the map; and then Gentry, the G.I., lowered himself into the hole. Inglis explained the position. Without hesitation Gentry said 'No'—the Maoris were our last fresh battalion and if used now we would not be able to hold a line to-morrow.

There was no further argument; it was quickly decided that Galatos must be abandoned and everyone brought back to the Daratsos line before morning. I returned to the Twentieth Headquarters with Jim Burrows and slept under a tree while he reassembled the battalion.

The Twentieth had been in reserve and in coast defence positions during the first two days. In the evening of the 21st it had been detached to counter-attack at Maleme with the Maoris and re-capture the airfield. It was known that the enemy was about to attempt a sea-transported landing and consequently the battalion was not allowed to leave its position near Canea until relieved by an Australian battalion. Then it was to move to near Platanias in trucks which had brought the Australians, put in a night attack, and be consolidated by dawn. Unluckily the Australians, bombed

en route, were late and the relief was not completed until after midnight; the attack did not get under way until 4 next morning. It was vigorously pushed, some of Upham's most notable exploits helping the advance; but daylight came before the airfield had been cleared and further progress became impossible. If the attack by these two battalions had been successful the enemy could have brought no more troop-carriers in until he had cleared new landing-strips farther west, and the whole position would have been altered, for the sea invasion was intercepted by the Navy and we might have been in a position to make a general counter-offensive. The Twentieth withdrew by stages to its original area, and from then on the 25th shared in the fighting at Galatos. It had had 292 casualties, including thirteen officers, of whom Rice, Scoltock, and Green had been killed, and was now not much more than 300 strong.

There was hard fighting about Daratsos on the 26th but 5 Brigade held firm and we rested all day. There was a project to form an improvised brigade of some British infantry, including a battalion of the Welch Regiment, which had not yet been seriously engaged. Inglis went off to take command and I took over 4 Brigade, less the Nineteenth, which came under the command of Hargest, and also less A. Company of the Twentieth, which somehow had become attached to the Twenty-first and was retained by that battalion.

It took me all day to discover the Eighteenth and the Composite Battalion—in fact, their commanders discovered me. While its commander was looking for me the Composite Battalion, for its own reasons, made another eastwards movement and we lost all touch with it thenceforward. Inglis returned in the evening, having been unable to find the units of his projected brigade, and resumed command. I returned again to the Twentieth.

There was again heavy fighting on the 27th, but 5 Brigade and Vasey's Australian Brigade held their positions and we were not called on. We spent the day straightening ourselves out and were soon in good shape. The infantry had fought so successfully that, despite nearly 50 per cent, losses, morale

was, if anything, higher than before the battle started. Nevertheless, the news from many quarters made it plain that the end was near and I was unashamedly pleased in the evening when orders came to set off on the march over the mountains to Sphakia and there embark.

We moved in the evening, joined the main column of retreating troops near Suda Bay, and after a weary night march halted in an olive-grove. Shortly after daylight a sergeant from the Welch Regiment arrived in full retreat also. He said that the rearguard had been overwhelmed and his battalion cut up. I thought him just another panic-stricken straggler but his story was true enough this time.

Another rearguard was apparently produced and during the day we saw its positions on the hill behind us being heavily mortared. We were not called on and rested all day, except for a very unpleasant and sustained attack by fighters who discovered us under our trees. Strain was telling on some people and after this attack one officer continued digging until he could not climb out of his pit. One of my officers, who had been badly shaken, appeared walking very fast with odd automaton-like steps and quivering incessantly. He made a great effort to control himself, offered cigarettes to Jim and me, and continued his move at a high velocity.

We discovered a dump of biscuits and bully and saw that every man had as much as he could carry. Everyone washed and cleaned up and made ready for the hard march ahead, some forty miles to Sphakia over a rough, steep mountain road. Pat Welch brought me a billy of tea and I promised to overlook the next few days he overstayed leave. In due course he reminded Bob Orr of the promise, but either there was some technical flaw or Bob thought I had not contemplated a three-weeks' absence.

We were ordered to move to the plain of Askipho, twenty-two miles by the map, and take up positions there to deal with any parachute landing intended to intercept the retreat. This was a desperately hard march, uphill nearly all the way, and made more difficult by the masses of masterless troops, British and Greek, who cluttered the way. Mostly non-combatants of various descriptions, their officers had

lost all grip and they were in a panic-stricken and pitiful state. We plodded on at a steady pace, kept well closed up, halted for the regulation ten minutes before every clock hour, and ruthlessly beat all stragglers out of our column.

At one point, half-way through the march, the road forked and I was uncertain which fork to follow. I spread a map on the ground and turned a torch on to it. Immediately there was a chorus of cries from the bank above: 'Put out that . . . light!' and a man rushed up and kicked the torch out of my hand. I stood up and seized him by the throat, throttled until he started to choke, and threw him down. I then stated if there was any more such talk I would open fire. Apart from a few satisfied grunts from the column behind me there was a dead silence, so I turned on the torch again and resumed study of the map. I was still puzzling when Dick Hutchens, one of the L.O.s¹ on Brigade Headquarters, came up and placed a finger unhesitatingly on the right-hand fork, and we all got up and followed his intuition, for that is all it could have been.

We trudged on, through silent villages, through one where there was a burning house, up interminable spirals. Once we all overslept for half an hour at the hourly halt and woke guiltily but refreshed. At last about 7 o'clock, after thirteen hours on the road, I halted, though we were still short of the plain, meaning to resume the move in an hour's time. The men were reeling with fatigue and with my still-swollen ankle every step was a crisis.

Within ten minutes the Brigade Major, who had travelled ahead by truck, appeared and administered a reprimand to me for stopping before we had reached our destination. He offered to lead us to the plain by a short cut, for the road wound and climbed crazily. Off we went and got at once into some country that would have been difficult for fit and fresh men. I should have turned back to the road but thought that would be the last straw for the men, and plodded on.

¹ L.O.: Liaison Officer—the practice was to attach junior officers from units to the headquarters of the formation to which the unit belonged or was attached. Their duties were adequately indicated by their description, and in addition they carried out many minor staff duties on the formation headquarters. Dick Hutchens was 19 Battalion L.O. on 4 Brigade Headquarters.

A peasant came up and offered to guide us; he said the track was 'all right for Cretan, for soldier no good'. However, we managed it somehow, climbed up a very steep pinch to the rim of the hills round the little plain, and then down an almost vertical face to the plain itself, arriving about midday. We then moved, very slowly indeed, to positions from which we could command every part of the flat, and by about 3 o'clock the men settled down and slept at once.

I went *off* to Brigade Headquarters intending to shoot the Brigade Major, but was easily mollified by a tot of whisky, a beautiful cold bath, and a cigar of the Brigadier's. In quite a good humour I returned to the battalion and there Jim Burrows and I shared a blanket and his gets-cape in an extraordinarily uncomfortable position on the hill-side. There did not seem to be a square foot of flat ground in this part of Crete.

Next day, the 29th, we spent quietly in our positions. Large numbers of troops passed through *en route* for Sphakia, the infantry in good order and still moving in sections at intervals, most of the others in no formation whatever. I saw A. Company of the Twentieth passing through. Markham told me they had had a lovely fight yesterday and both he and Washbourn were pleased about a bayonet charge they had done. Very wrongly I ordered the company to stay with me and heard afterwards that the Twenty-first had an anxious time looking for it.

Water-bottles were short and many were stolen by stragglers. The rearguard was still north of the plain and we were not molested, except occasionally by low-flying aircraft. Whenever a plane appeared, however far away, everyone on the road except the infantry would scurry for cover, and several times I had to go out and be very angry to get movement going again.

General Puttick with Divisional Headquarters was in a hamlet on the plain. Something I heard about the orders for embarkation annoyed me, and without any right to do so I went to speak about it. Frank Davis gave me a beautiful sponge, there was a lovely little spring, so I stripped, soaped, and bathed myself, addressing the General and Keith

Stewart the while. They listened tolerantly and it eased my mind. I had travelled in the one truck we had with the battalion and on the way back was nearly shot off the road by a fighter.

Then an order arrived for us to go back to the northern approaches to the plain, which was as much like the bottom of a sugar-bowl as anything else, and take up a position there until 8 p.m. This did not appeal to me, as it meant a six-mile tramp there and back and we were in good positions where we sat. So I made another trip to Inglis and persuaded him to send a company of the Eighteenth instead. I don't know whether the Division ever knew.

That evening, the night of 29 May, we set off on another long night march. It was not less difficult than the other two and there was more trouble with the stragglers. These were now being organized in groups of fifty, they were tired and quiet but they jammed the road, and we had to force our way through them. It was the policy that formed units should have priority for embarkation after providing a rearguard, and indeed very few got away from Crete who were not with their units.

About daylight we reached the end of the formed road and halted in sight of the sea in a memorably stony spot. I had a slight bickering with an officer from 5 Brigade Headquarters who thought I was in the wrong place, but we were both too tired to pursue the argument.

A few hours later we moved down an extremely steep track and halted in a ravine, known as Rhododendron valley, close to the cave which housed Force Headquarters. Inglis was there and I climbed out of the ravine to speak to him. He handed me the following warning order:

1. Force HQ directs that the following tps only embark tonight:
 - (a) HQ, 4 Inf. Bde. Strength 70.
 - (b) HQ and part 19 and 20 Bns. strength in each case 230.
 - (c) HQ, and part 28 (Maori) Bn. strength 230.
 - (d) 18 Bn. strength 234.
2. Balance of 19, 20 and 28 (Maori) Bns. will be placed under command Lt. Col. Burrows and it is expected will be embarked tomorrow night.

3. HQ of each unit must be embarked tonight.
4. Units will organize forthwith parties to embark tonight.
5. Orders for the move to the beaches will be issued tonight.

1425 hrs.

30th May.

Sgd. G. P. SANDERS,

MAJOR

B.M.

Inglis explained that the Navy could only take off 1,000 men and he sharply overruled my protest against Burrows being left.

While we were talking there was a close and violent outbreak of firing from the ravine and for a few minutes almost equally violent perturbation round Force Headquarters. It appeared that an enemy party was in the ravine within a few hundred yards. Inglis went off to organize resistance on the eastern side. I went to the edge and shouted orders to Washbourn to take his company up the bed of the ravine and to Fountaine to climb up the cliffs on the western side.

Both companies set off promptly and in a few minutes the firing died down. I went back to the valley and with a heart as cold as stone sat down to consider the position. I had 306 men, including the Kiwi Concert Party and 4 Brigade band* I decided that the Concert Party and band must stay, which left about 40 to remain from the Twentieth. These were apportioned between companies and I told them to make the selection any way they liked. I decided that Markham should be the officer to stay but, when a deputation of subalterns came to point out that he was married and to push their own claims to be left, selected Rolleston instead. I had to turn down very emphatically some urgent appeals to be left with the rear-party.

Meanwhile Upham's platoon was slowly climbing the steep 600-foot hill west of the ravine. The men were weak and very weary but they kept slowly going, and we could see that Upham was working round above the Germans still in the bottom of the ravine and pinned down by Washbourn's company and by fire from the eastern bank. Two hours after they had started the climb there was another sharp outburst of firing. It lasted about a minute, there were then some single shots, and then silence. A little later Upham's

platoon started to come back and then a message came that all twenty-two of the enemy party had been killed, completely helpless under his plunging fire.

The companies made their selections and Jim Burrows started to organize his rear-party and to take over water and food from those who were to go. Fountaine's company came back, very hot and tired. When they were collected Fountaine told them how many were to stay and asked for volunteers. There was a gasp and then Grooby, the C.S.M., stepped forward. He was followed at once by Fraser, the C.Q.M.S., and by Kirk and Vincent, the two sergeants, and then the remaining forty men. The N.C.O.s insisted on staying and after much argument lots had to be drawn for the men.

The afternoon wore miserably on, but at last there was nothing for it but to say good-bye and go. I spoke as reassuringly as I could to the rear-party, shook hands with Jim, and went off very sadly.

We had a tramp of some miles to the beach, the last part lined with men who had lost their units and were hoping for a place with us. Some begged and implored, most simply watched stonily, so that we felt bitterly ashamed. There was a cordon round the beach with orders to shoot any man who tried to break in. I had to count my men through. We were the last unit to pass, and on the principle that there is always room for one more, I bullied the cordon officer into letting me take Frank Davis, with some of Divisional Headquarters as well. I had Brian Bassett with me and just before embarking found that John Russell was in an A.D.S. on the beach and insisted on taking him also.

We embarked on the Australian destroyer *Napier* and were at once led to great piles of bread and butter, jugs of cold water, and urns of coffee. We ate and drank incredible quantities. An Australian colonel and his Adjutant got aboard, but just before sailing discovered that their battalion had not embarked and went hurriedly ashore again. We sailed after midnight and made for Alexandria at full speed. I had been given the purser's cabin and some pyjamas, and slept profoundly.

Late in the morning I was shaving when suddenly there

was a stunning concussion, everything loose in the cabin crashed all ways, and I found myself sitting on the floor in darkness. My first thought was that the cable announcing my safe arrival would not now be sent. Actually we had a near miss which reduced speed to some twenty knots. I went out and for some time sat with the others in the darkness, waiting as calmly as possible to be drowned. I was a bit disgusted with the way John Gray was rushing round until it appeared that he wanted to get out to take photographs. The ack-ack guns barked furiously, there were other concussions farther away, but we could do nothing but wait and hope for the best. It is a common enough experience to be bombed but we formed the opinion that it is nicer on land than aboard ship.

The racket died down and we went out into the brilliant sunshine. I hastily finished shaving and dressing and decided to spend the rest of the voyage on deck. There was one more scare, but it was caused only by two of our planes which were a shade late in giving the recognition signal. Once the ship stopped altogether but at last we saw the palm-trees of Amiriya and then the towers of Alexandria rising out of the sea. We had never realized that Egypt was so beautiful a country.

We came into Alexandria harbour in style, standing to attention and saluting, and the Navy blowing pipes as we passed each ship. It looked like the graveyard of the Mediterranean Fleet. Every ship showed damage and many were listing or down by the stern. We tied up and I went up to the bridge to thank the Captain. While there I was very distressed to see R.S.M. Wilson hurrying down the gangway. Then he called loudly for markers from Twentieth Battalion and I watched with pride while he collected, dressed, and placed them, all as correctly and smartly as if at Maadi. The men filed down and it was good to see that every one was armed and every one was shaved. The R.S.M. fell them in, handed over to the Adjutant with full routine, the Adjutant handed over to me—and we marched off, I stumping hatless and very proudly at the head and everyone on the wharf saluting.

We spent the next day in a transit camp at Amiriya, got clean clothes, showered, and rested. Also we drank a large amount of beer. In the evening we heard that some more ships, the last embarkation, were coming in. I went down, saw the *Orion* with grim-faced sailors unloading the bodies of the hundreds of the Black Watch killed by a single bomb—and the *Perth* with both her fore-turrets blackened wrecks—and then saw the *Phoebe* come in. Troops streamed off her and then I saw Grooby, and then Fraser, Dave Kirk, and little Vincent, and the rest of them, and then Jim, and met them openly crying.

Late the next night we arrived at Helwan and went to the lines from which we had left for Greece. Twelve of us went into the mess which forty had left, and drank and talked quietly into the small hours.

7. Libya 1941: Opening Moves

WE had a week's leave and then came back to Helwan to rebuild. The Twentieth had all told 300 out of the 851 who had gone to Greece and received 400 reinforcements in one draft. They were marched in on a ceremonial parade and we settled down for training in very hot weather.

A battle was fought near Solium, known by its code name as 'Batde-axe'. It was not a success but we took little interest. I went into hospital with a recurrence of malaria and was joined by John Gray and Jim with jaundice. I convalesced at Moascar, bathing and sailing on Lake Timsah, dining and drinking at the French Club, and being eaten alive by bed-bugs, and returned to the battalion early in August. We moved to an unpleasant camp at Kabrit on the Canal and did a combined training course. Brigadier Puttick returned to New Zealand on promotion and Inglis took over 4 Brigade, making his mark at once with a characteristically thorough inspection.

In September, after a leave in Palestine, we moved back to the Western Desert and again camped at Bagush. Tobruk was still besieged and we concluded that we were to share in its relief. Jim was promoted and went to command an infantry training depot and McKergow from the Twenty-sixth became second-in-command. There had been many changes and my rifle company commanders were now Mitchell, Agar, Fountaine, and Manchester, of whom only Fountaine had been in Greece and Crete.

One spell of training is very like another, very important, very interesting for the trainers, but there is not much to be said about it. We trained and exercised solidly, practised

night and day attacks and movement in desert formation, got to know one another, and became very fit. Word came through of Upham's V.C. and there was great rejoicing, Jim sent a nicely worded message of congratulation from his depot. A week later we heard that Sergeant Hinton, also of C. Company, had been awarded a V.C. We had left him at Athens with the reinforcements and he had been captured at Kalamata. A notice appeared in the lines: Join the 20th and get a V.C — and another message came from Jim:

Memorandum
Headquarters,
20th Battalion,
sniN.Z.E.F.

for:

Headquarters,
Southern Inf. Trg. Depot,
18th October, 1941.

HONOURS & AWARDS

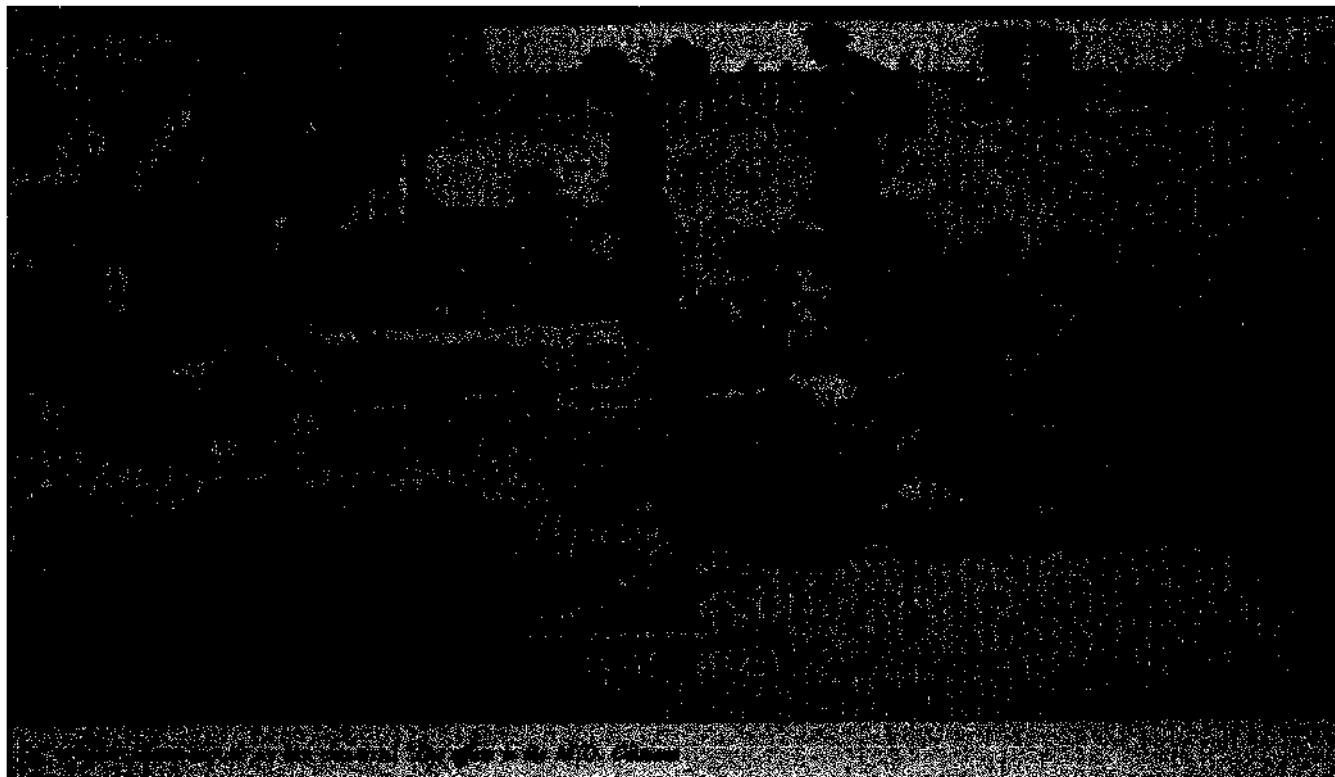
Reference our communication 11/1/4630 dated 15th October 1941, for 2nd Lieut. Upham read 2nd Lieut. Upham and Sergeant J. D. Hinton.

It would be a convenience to this Headquarters if in future, the names of members of the Twentieth Battalion who win Victoria Crosses were published in one list and not on different days as appears to be the present practice.

Sgd. J. T. BURROWS
Lieut.-Colonel.

The company areas were rather far apart but every Saturday night all officers came in to headquarters mess and we had very happy and valuable parties. There was a famous divisional Rugby match against the South Africans, inter-company and inter-battalion matches. We ran a very good inter-platoon competition in drill and tactics, easily won by Upham's platoon. It was a happy, fruitful period which might have lasted indefinitely for all we knew or cared of future plans, and then it suddenly ended.

C.O.s were told to take a few days' leave, but that they might be recalled for a divisional exercise. I went down to Maadi and had been there twenty-four hours when I was recalled as the exercise was about to begin. Grooby and





Author

Vincent, at the depot after spells in hospital, waited anxiously on me, and I took them back, Grooby to his death, Vincent to years of imprisonment.

Back up the desert road and at Battalion everything was packed and ready to move. No one doubted that the exercise would be held in Libya and that the enemy would co-operate.

The General gave the outlines of the plan to all senior officers. I paraded the battalion and with maps told everything I knew. We had a final party. Upham, McPhail, Maxwell, and the others I had decided to leave behind sat gloomily in corners. At the last moment I relented and took McPhail and Chesterman extra to establishment.

In the morning of 12 November we took our place in the column, moved through Matruh and down the Siwa road, and in the evening formed up at the head of 4 Brigade for the great approach march. Until the end of the war it was the opinion of old hands that the morale of the New Zealand Division was at its peak for this campaign. Certainly in the Twentieth it was terrific; we felt like runners, tense for the pistol.

This great approach march will always be remembered by those who took part in it though the details are vague in memory. The whole Eighth Army, Seventh Armoured Division, First South African Division, and the Second New Zealand and Fourth Indian Divisions moved westwards in an enormous column, the armour leading. The Army moved south of Sidi Barrani, past the desolate Italian camps of the previous year, along the plateau south of the great escarpment, through the frontier wire into Libya, south of the enemy garrisons in the Sidi Omars, and wheeled north. Then, just as we were rejoicing in the conception of a massive move on Tobruk, disregarding the immobile frontier garrisons and crushing everything in our path, the whole Army broke up and departed different ways. This was the era of the Brigade Group and the Jock' column. It has been said that at the Somme in 1916 British tactical doctrines reached their lowest depths, and it seemed to me that Libya '41, or the Winter Battle, or Auchinleck's Offensive, or 'Crusader*', as it was variously called, was fought with an equally total

disregard of what one had understood to be the principles of war—with two exceptions.

Surprise was achieved and thrown away, but there certainly was economy offeree, a nicely calculated or perhaps unavoidable minimum for every operation, and there was a most obstinate maintenance of the objective. The Army battled on, regardless of setbacks and losses, until it had fought the Germans to a standstill. Then it gathered the fruits of a great victory, relieved Tobruk, and mopped up the frontier garrisons. So perhaps the management was not so bad as we were inclined to think. It was a fantastic battle, fought during the short days and moonlight nights under lowering skies. There were no flanks, the enemy was as likely to appear in what one thought was the rear as in front, Headquarters were constantly on the move, usually running hard from some roving column, the whole picture changed daily in kaleidoscopic fashion. We had rather more than parity in the air but two grave weaknesses. Our armour had nothing better than a two-pounder gun against the 75 mm. of the German tanks, and our infantry with only four two-pounders per battalion were helpless in the stony desert against the German tanks.

We did a short night move, some 14 miles, and then two long day moves of 50 to 70 miles. These were easy, there was little dust and we rolled along, trucks 150 yards apart stretching far out of sight, a monotonous, never-changing procession like a convoy at sea. Then we started on the night moves. The trucks closed in until we were in 9 columns, not more than 20 yards apart and trucks almost head to tail. This was done just before last light each evening and meantime the provost sections went ahead planting posts with lanterns at $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile intervals along the intended bearing. All the brigades had different desert formations. In 4 Brigade at this time 20 Battalion led in 9 columns with companies abreast, 18 Battalion and 19 Battalion followed, each in 3 columns behind the flanks, and Brigade Headquarters and the attached troops, field, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft gunners, sappers, Field Ambulance, and supply vehicles followed the centre 3 columns. Fully closed up there was a mass of over

800 vehicles on a front of some 200 yards and a depth of 1,500 or so. When dispersed in the day-time the front was about 1 mile and the depth anything up to 10,

Brigade groups followed one another, so that when each closed up for the night move there were gaps between them of about nine miles and they had to halt with similar gaps to leave room for dispersion at daylight—always made forward and outward. We had practised movement in desert formation, by night and by day, very often. Every truck had its allotted place and everyone knew it. The Division in the desert always moved on the one axis, marked by black diamond discs or by lights. Each formation and each unit had its regular and often-rehearsed drill for passing defiles, changing direction, dispersing and closing in, deploying to attack, or taking up a defensive position. One great advantage to commanders, staff officers, and dispatch riders was that once a truck was identified it was easy to find the headquarters of the formation, unit, or sub-unit to which it belonged, as relative positions were known and familiar and unchanged.

This carefully studied and very often practised system enabled the Division to carry out many great moves, from Egypt to Tunisia, with comparative ease and speed. In time we came to think, not without reason, that we knew all that needed to be known about the movement and the manoeuvring of masses of transport in the desert.

With every care and attention to system and detail these night moves were weary and slow. In the move into Libya it was my responsibility, as the Commanding Officer of the leading battalion, to lead the Brigade on to the line of lights and hold it on the line, which sounds easy enough. The vehicles of the Brigade ahead disappeared as they moved forward to concentrate. My first task was to find the three lights marking the brigade starting-point, and these were invariably where I did not expect them. If, as happened once or twice, I failed to find them before starting-time, the only course was to lead off on the correct bearing, peering anxiously ahead into the darkness until a light was picked up. At the time the provost people had a maddening habit of

planting lights in hollows where these occurred at the correct half-mile intervals, and they would be passed altogether if there was the slightest discrepancy in course, or not seen until almost trampled under. Sometimes there were gaps in the line of lights, perhaps through one being knocked over and broken, and then we crawled on in acute anxiety until the next was picked up. In later times the provost detachments had learned more about our limitations and difficulties, planted their lights more frequently and prominently, and even let us know what spot in the desert they calculated to be the start-point. But the move into Libya remains in memory as a nightmare of anxiety.

Apart from these difficulties the night moves were not easy. We used no lights and most desert is bumpy and uneven. Leading vehicles travelled at two and a half miles in the hour but there was unavoidable concrtinaing, and the tail of a long column usually had to move in fits and starts at anything up to twenty miles an hour. Twenty miles was a long night march under normal conditions. The drivers could see nothing of the ground in front, those back in the column could only follow their leaders. One was constantly slithering down over steep banks, bumping against hummocks, falling heavily into abandoned slit trenches, or getting stuck in soft sand. But every difficulty would be surmounted, the lights were always found in the end, and a few minutes after daylight we halted and dispersed and every truck brewed up for breakfast. During the day the stragglers and cripples were brought in by the indefatigable L.A.D.,¹ and next night the performance would start again. The men could sleep during the day, but there were conferences and affairs of various kinds for commanders, and I was very short of sleep before the battle opened.

We crossed the frontier into Libya through a gap made in the wire on the night of the 18th. A few miles on I lost the line of lights and worked farther and farther off-course in looking for them. It was undesirable to stop the column to take a bearing unless unavoidable. But I got a shock

¹ L.A.D.: Light Aid Detachment, a section specially equipped for the recovery and repair of vehicles.

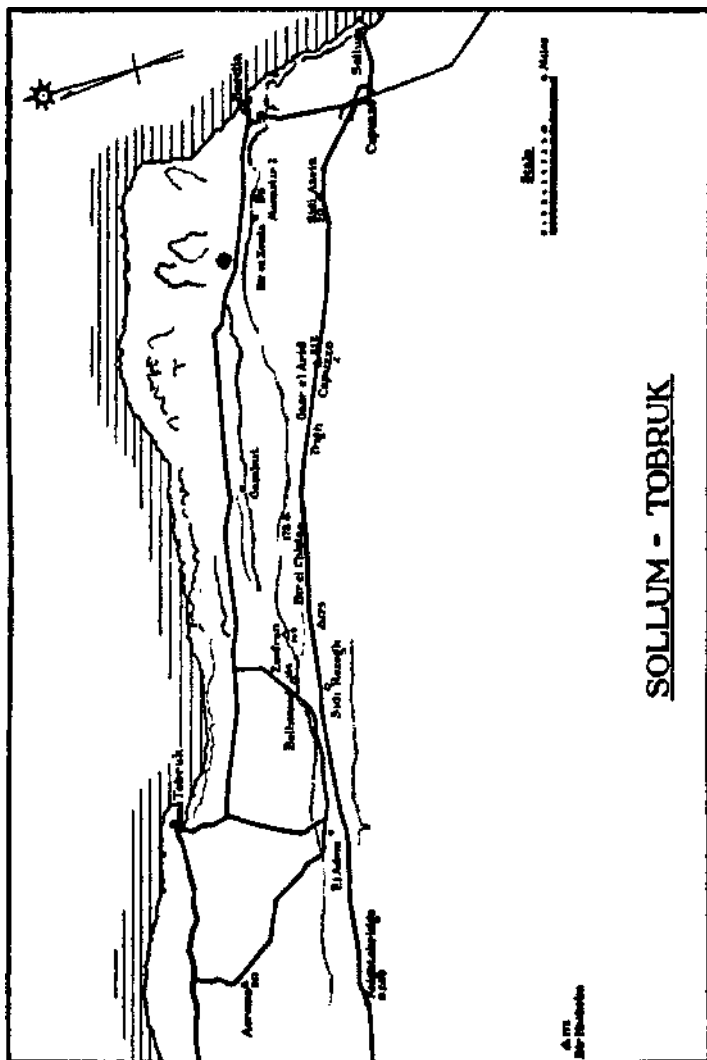
when Inglis came up from the rear, stopped me, and said, 'Kip, you're ninety degrees off your course. I denied it, but took a bearing and found he was right; in fact, we were more than ninety degrees off. I accordingly led on round to complete a circle, and my car, travelling at three miles an hour, moved across the rear of the column, bounding along at twenty, on to the right track again. Very few knew that we had carried out this odd movement.

At a conference next day we heard something more about the plan. The armour had gone ahead 'to seek out and destroy the German armour'—4 Indian Division was to capture the enemy position in the Omars, now east of us. The South African and New Zealand Divisions were to remain in laager and await events. We made a short move and halted.

On 20 November we stayed in our laager all day, listening to the rumble and thudding of tank battles far ahead over the rim of the horizon. I went for a run round and saw the start of an attack by an Indian brigade on one of the Omars. Two hundred enemy tanks were reported ten miles ahead but they came no nearer. Two German planes flew over the laager, came low to look, and went away in a great hurry with everyone firing at them.

The morning of the 21st passed quietly. At 12.30 p.m. we moved very suddenly. To my keen and doubtless ill-informed disappointment the Division split up at once. 6 Brigade went to help the support group of the Armoured Division, already hotly engaged and hard-pressed on Sidi Rczegh escarpment. 4 Brigade moved northwards to cut the Bardia-Tobruk road, 5 Brigade north-east to deal with or mask the positions about Solium.

We moved for seventeen hours continuously, in the latter stages a very hard march. Near Sidi Azciz, about midnight, we ran slap against a deep trench which had no right to be there. A crossing place was found but in the rain and darkness it was a desperate struggle to get over. Somehow it was done, and in some miraculous way the drivers sorted themselves out again into their correct positions. Boyle and Chesterman, in an eight-ewt. truck, were navigating for me. At 5 a.m., before first light, they said we were within half a mile



SOLLUM - TOBRUK

of the escarpment at the Bir Ez Zemla, a mile west of Menastir, They were right and it was a very good bit of navigation.

The Brigade halted and shook out into its day-time formation. I sent Mitchell's company forward to go down the escarpment on foot and get established across the Tobruk-Bardia road and then we rested until daylight.

Very soon after dawn I arrived on the escarpment and in the growing light saw a pleasing scene. The escarpment here was steep and about a hundred feet high, unscalable for vehicles except by one very steep track. On the road below, half a mile away, several trucks were stopped, one blazing, and grenades were bursting round another which also broke into flames. Numerous German trucks dug into pens were scattered between the road and the escarpment, and hundreds of enemy soldiers in groups were staring at the blazing trucks. Half a mile to the east, on the edge of the escarpment, was a group of tents, more transport, and men bustling round in an agitated manner. Obviously it was a complete surprise.

The companies had come up in their trucks and were waiting close behind me. I ordered Agar to debus with B. Company and attack across the flat, Manchester to take D. Company in its trucks right up to the camp and go in with the bayonet, and kept Fountaine with G. Company in its trucks in reserve. The carriers found the track down, and Guthrey went down with them to sweep between the road and the sea, three miles away.

Everything went like wedding bells. The companies moved quickly, and the enemy, with A. Company already in their midst, were too surprised to offer much resistance. In an hour's time we had 200 prisoners, armoured cars, and some thirty trucks, with only one casualty. One truck, taken by A. Company, was marked A6 and proved to be their own, lost in Greece, and with some possessions of Washbourn's still on board.

This was a good start and I looked round for something more to do. No more enemy were to be seen in the Bardia direction but there were still some about, west of Mitchell's position and fairly close. I went down and saw that he was

comfortable, went back and told Fountaine to take his company down and mop these parties up, made sure that the gunners were ready to support, and sat down for breakfast, surveying the scene with satisfaction. It suddenly changed rather alarmingly. Some German armoured cars and a couple of self-propelled guns appeared from the Tobruk direction, opened fire at long range and then closed steadily on Fountaine's company. We had no anti-tank guns down the escarpment yet and, though C. Company fired briskly with Brens and rifles, it was obviously soon going to be in trouble. Fountaine handled his company skilfully, keeping up a steady fire and stepping platoon by platoon leftwards to the shelter of the tankproof escarpment. This was the only thing to do but it exposed Mitchell, and our gunners seemed maddeningly deliberate over getting into action. The German A.F.V.s¹ continued to close—more dash and they would have punished us heavily—but just when matters were looking really serious, Carson, my old friend of Crete, got his troop into action and the Germans at once withdrew. The guns shelled them happily till the range was over 14,000 yards but did no damage.

C. Company collected on top of the escarpment. Only one man, a nice lad called Hill-Rennie, had been killed and a few wounded, but the men looked rather rattled and were worrying more than they should have. Many more Germans had appeared from holes in the ground when their A.F.V.s were about and the situation needed clearing up.

I went back to Brigade Headquarters, a mile back from the escarpment. Parties of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth were kicking footballs about, Inglis was tied to the telephone to Division. He told me to take the squadron of Valentine tanks attached to the Brigade and counter-attack as I thought fit.

We soon worked out a plan. The tanks were to move down the only track, face westwards astride the road, and advance to a depth of three miles. A company of infantry was to follow them, mopping up and dealing with any anti-tank guns. I gave this task to C. Company to stop it from brooding,

¹ A.F.V.: Armoured Fighting Vehicle. Tank or armoured car or self-propelled gun.

detailed D. to mop up the wadis along the escarpment, and took B. in its trucks along the top, meaning to come in behind the Germans at an appropriate time and place.

The plan worked very nicely. The tanks moved smoothly down, deployed, and advanced at a steady pace, Fountaine close on their heels. The enemy cars and guns moved well back; their infantry surrendered as they were overrun. The only contretemps was that when I emerged with B. Company on the escarpment a mile ahead of our tanks they opened a warm fire on us and we retired rather hastily. By dark we had another 230 prisoners in hand with three or four more casualties. I pulled tanks and C. Company back to the top of the escarpment, left A. Company in its position with some two-pounders, and felt that it was quite a good day. The night was bitterly cold, and Rhodes, my Adjutant, gave himself a great deal of work trying to get hot food and blankets for our 430 prisoners.

During the action the remainder of the Brigade had moved westwards on Gambut without waiting for the result of my attack. I was to be relieved by 22 Battalion from 5 Brigade and follow next day.

Early on the morning of the 23rd advance parties arrived from the Twenty-second. I was showing them my dispositions when the Germans attacked again from the Tobruk direction, this time with thirteen A.F.V.s of different sorts and sizes, and some scores of infantry lorries. Infantry and anti-tank guns opened briskly, but as the enemy seemed to mean business, I hurried my squadron of tanks down the escarpment again. Unluckily this move could not be concealed and the enemy scuttled off smartly.

Division called for me to move without delay to Point 212, fifteen miles westward, on the Trigh Capuzzo, the so-called road from Capuzzo to Tobruk. 22 Battalion was arriving, so without waiting for formal relief I called in A. Company and the tanks, formed up into desert formation, and set off. The Twenty-second had some very hard fighting later in the positions they took over from us.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after one detour to avoid some camels which looked suspicious, we arrived at

Point 212, where Divisional Headquarters and 21 Battalion were waiting* General Freyberg told me that 6 Brigade was heavily engaged on Sidi Rezegh, 5 Brigade was staying to watch Bardia and Solium, and Inglis with 4 Brigade, less the Twentieth, was by now at Gambut. Divisional Headquarters, with the Twentieth and Twenty-first, was to move through the night and join 4 and 6 Brigades. An enemy force with guns was in contact farther west along the Trigh and would have to be by-passed. I was to take the lead and guide the group to Bir¹ Chleta, another fifteen miles to the west, where it would be between the two Brigades.

This was a really difficult piece of navigation. We had to swing round the Germans ahead, and then back on to the Trigh before we got on top of the unclimbable Sidi Rezegh escarpment. We moved very carefully, halting every half-hour to check distances and bearings, which we plotted by torchlight in the back of my car under a blanket. Flares, only used freely by the enemy, were going up in all directions and we several times had to alter course. But it was accurately done, and at midnight I was able to tell the General that we were at Bir Chleta and that the high ground looming to the south of us was the Sidi Rezegh escarpment. The Twenty-first immediately moved off to join 6 Brigade, the rest of us got into laager and had several hours sleep. A German Staff car ran into the laager during the night and its occupants were very surprised to be taken prisoner.

Soon after daylight I was ordered to move to Point 172, a mile or so to the north, make contact with 4 Brigade, now at Gambut, and come under Inglis's command again. He was about to resume the move westwards parallel with 6 Brigade's advance on the Sidi Rezegh escarpment. The enemy group which we had by-passed had now followed us up and was shelling our laager, so I was also told to drive them away. Obviously this would have to be done before we joined 4 Brigade,

The battalion carriers moved a mile to the east to form a screen and I went out to reconnoitre. Three miles north-east

¹ Bir: a well, always marked by the heap of excavated soil and so a tactical feature in the desert

of Bir Chleta there were about a hundred vehicles, tfeognisable as German, moving about in an uncertain fashion. I still had the squadron of tanks and a platoon of machine-guns under command, so decided to make a frontal attack with tanks leading and the infantry following in their trucks, machine-guns, anti-tank guns, and carriers giving covering fire from the right flank. Orders group was waiting when I got back. We had practised this sort of attack, though never with these particular tanks, and orders were simple.

The Twentieth formed up in its trucks with its right flank on the Bir, B. and D. Companies leading on a front of 1,000 yards. C. and A. Companies lined up 600 yards behind them with Battalion Headquarters and the mortars immediately behind again. When the forming up was completed the tanks were to pass through in line abreast and advance at ten miles an hour on a bearing of forty degrees, the infantry following. If the tanks could overrun the enemy so much the better; the infantry would mop up. If the tanks were checked the infantry would debus, pass through, and assault, 4 Field Regiment would support with observed fire and I emphasized that speed and violence were the essence of the affair. No time was wasted in giving these orders but it took an hour for everyone to move into position. Meanwhile I ran in a carrier to Point 172, which was on the edge of the next escarpment above Gambut, and saw the rest of 4 Brigade already moving westwards in exactly the opposite direction to that in which we were about to attack.

I returned to find the battalion formed up and the tanks passing through. They did not check, charged on at about fifteen miles an hour on a bearing more like seventy degrees than the prescribed forty, spotted our carriers moving out of the way to the right flank, opened fire and knocked out two of them, one bursting into flames, and carried madly on. Things happened very quickly. Through the control tank I yelled to the tanks to get on the right bearing but without result. The infantry trucks leapt forward, keeping stubbornly to the correct bearing and steadily increasing speed. The guns opened, unluckily on the wrong target, a newly appeared mass of transport miles farther away. The machine-gun

platoon had got well forward and came briskly into action, as did the carriers. So did the enemy, with guns, mortars, and automatics. The tanks saw the enemy and swung in to their correct course, slackened speed, and opened fire. Several were hit and blazed up, others stopped. Rhodes and I had followed up in a carrier and we stopped to speak to the control tank, sheltering in its lee from a hail of bullets. The tank commander called me and said: 'I've had seven tanks hit; I'll have to stop.*' I had just seen the leading companies debus and advance, one steadily and nicely spaced, the other in rushes and evidently under fire. I replied: 'The infantry are attacking; go on or I'll court-martial you/ This was unfair to a very gallant officer, killed a few days later, but it was no time for politeness. The tanks went on slowly, firing fast, but the infantry passed through them and closed swiftly and savagely. I passed through the empty trucks coming back to get out of range and found that the fight was over. Most of the enemy transport had got away but about a dozen trucks were abandoned and we had captured three 88's with their crews all dead, except one slightly wounded man whom we picked up. I ordered the companies to move back at once and embus. A detail was left to cover the tanks, whose recovery vehicles quickly came up, and to mop up. They collected 260 prisoners of 361 German Infantry Regiment. Our loss was twenty-one and seven tanks, of which several were soon runners again.

Our transport had gone rather too far and I overtook the infantry trudging back. They were very cheerful and pleased with themselves. I was still rather excited when I met Gentry, the G. 1, and told him: 'Tell the General my infantry arc beautiful.' We reached the trucks, got into desert formation with the carriers as a screen ahead, and moved west. At 4.30 p.m. we drew level with 4 Brigade, to which I sent a message that we had had a nice fight, and until dark we moved steadily on, going seven miles without opposition. At dark we halted for the night, expecting a good deal to do in the morning. There was an orders conference at Brigade at ten but I had the first real sleep since the campaign had opened.

8. Libya 1941: Belhamed

AT first light on 25 November we resumed the advance in our trucks, all three battalions of 4 Brigade moving abreast. 6 Brigade, which we heard had experienced very heavy fighting, was on top of the Sidi Rezegh escarpment on our left, and the immediate intention was simply to move up level with it.

We travelled along cheerfully for four miles until nearly level with the famous Blockhouse, a prominent square white building near the edge of the escarpment. I was up with the carrier screen a mile ahead of the trucks when we suddenly came under close-range fire from an anti-tank gun which must have been extremely well concealed. One carrier was hit and we had some trouble getting the badly wounded driver out of the flames. The gun was knocked out and I went back, a little shaken from the effect of several near misses from high-velocity shells, and stopped the trucks. We were on a dead flat plain, overlooked by the escarpment, and orders were not to press on against opposition. We accordingly halted and started to dig in, while Paddy Boyle went up the escarpment to discover the position on our left. Johnny Quilter, our L.O. with Brigade, came over and said that the Eighteenth on our right had taken a hundred prisoners and was half a mile ahead. We accordingly stopped digging and advanced in extended order until level with it, and settled down to dig in again immediately below the Blockhouse. Paddy Boyle came back with the disturbing news that the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth, on our left, had been amalgamated because of losses, and he thought they looked rather worn.

We spent the day in this position without any particular incident. Enemy transport was visible miles ahead. We were spasmodically shelled, and around the Blockhouse and

in the wadis to the west there was activity which we could not quite interpret. There were constant reports of enemy forming up for a counter-attack. In my experience this usually means that the forward platoons have seen someone moving far ahead. Our guns found plenty of targets and fired away steadily. Padre Spence went over to 6 Brigade and came back hours later looking very sad. He had buried eighty of our dead. The General came round and told me we had some very hard fighting ahead.

In the afternoon matters were so quiet that I went three miles back to the transport, shaved and bathed, and for a while rested blissfully in the sun. A message came that A. Company below the Blockhouse was being counter-attacked, and I hurried back. All was quiet. I walked over and saw Mitchell who reported a small scrap, a few casualties, and a certain amount of discomfort from mortaring. I went round his posts, had a chat with a cousin who was a private in the company, and was discussing patrols for the night when Rhodes rang to say I was urgently wanted at Brigade and that there was a warning order for an attack.

I reached Brigade Headquarters at 6 o'clock. Inglis's orders were short and to the point. 18 and 20 Battalions were to seize and hold Belhamed, I was to be in command, make the arrangements, and continue to command on the hill after its capture. 6 Brigade was attacking along Sidi Rezegh and we were to advance simultaneously with them at 9 o'clock. There was no question of artillery support; it had to be a straightforward night attack with the bayonet. The guns would, however, fire small concentrations at intervals to help us keep direction.

Belhamed was another escarpment, very steep on the northern side and then falling away very gently for four miles to the foot of Sidi Rezegh. On our approach we would have to cross a wadi running at an angle to our line of advance and then ascend a moderate slope. I expected difficulty in keeping direction for the 6,000 yards of the advance.

Inglis gave me precise objectives and then rather soberly wished me luck. Jan Peart was commanding the Eighteenth,

and he and I discussed the plan of attack. We settled on a start-line and Paddy Boyle went off to lay it and guiding tape for the battalions to move up on, no easy task. We decided to attack with the two battalions side by side, Eighteenth on the right, each with two companies forward extended to four paces, the other companies following similarly extended 400 yards behind.

It was nearly 8 o'clock when I got back to the Twentieth. The companies had come in from their positions, had a meal, and were assembling. I gave my orders to the company commanders, A. and D. Companies to lead, Mitchell to take command if I was hit. Mitchell was the senior company commander but, as he had not been in action, I had ordered before the campaign began that Fountaine should take my place if necessary. Mitchell had done so well that I now revoked this order, to his obvious delight. When all the companies were assembled, sitting quietly together in the brilliant moonlight, I spoke to them. It was a tense moment. We all knew that desperate fighting was very close ahead. I told the men what the objective was and the plan, that our success would mean the relief of Tobruk, and that we would go through at all costs and then hold the hill against all comers. I ended by saying: 'And now I want only to wish you good luck, every man of you.' It was a very wonderful thing to hear the response: 'Good luck to you, Sir.' But it is little use wishing good luck; not one man of the 500 of the Twentieth who stormed Belhamed that night had any; more than half were killed or wounded; the others suffered years of imprisonment.

We moved off along the guiding tape, feeling somewhat serious, and each man thinking his own thoughts, and without misadventure we reached and formed up on the start-line. The Eighteenth arrived about the same time. Jan Peart and I checked up and found everything in order; we were an hour late but that did not matter.

At 10 o'clock I gave the forward companies the order to move. They stepped off with a resolute air and disappeared. Then the supporting companies came up and passed, intervals very accurate, and the men moving in a steady,

determined way that stirred my heart. My young cousin passed, we exchanged greetings, and I turned and watched him go to his death. My headquarters appeared, Rhodes, some of the Intelligence section, Roberts with some signallers, Copeland from the Brigade staff, two trucks laden with mines, the anti-aircraft platoon under Baker. Paddy had gone with one of the assaulting companies to help in keeping direction and check distances. I joined them and we followed, I munching biscuits that stood for my evening meal. I reflected that my hobby of soldiering had got me into a serious position.

We moved at a good smart pace but I was surprised that we quickly lost sight of the companies ahead. I remembered with a shock that I had omitted to say where my headquarters would be established after the attack. As I had always flattered myself that I gave orders clearly and in the correct sequence, this was mortifying and it might cause serious trouble. The company commanders should have reminded me, but, after all, their failure to ask me was also my fault, something wrong with my training. I was fretting over this and considering how to notify my whereabouts in due course when after travelling 2,000 yards we reached the wadi. It was shallow and not very wide, but the trucks had to pick their way and, without my noticing it, they and my whole party emerged on the other side some hundreds of yards north of the original course. A few flares were going up ahead but there was still no firing and we pressed on. A few hundred yards on Allison, my young Intelligence sergeant, told me that he had lost touch with the companies. He was on the correct bearing, 282 degrees. Neither of us realized what had happened at the wadi crossing and we hurried on. Soon the loom of high ground appeared to our left—how far away it was impossible to tell—and a moment later the flash and sparkle of tracer. In an instant the top of the hill was sizzling with tracer criss-crossing in all directions—and faint and clear and distant we could hear the high-pitched yell of charging infantry. Still quite unsuspecting of what we had done, I said, 'That's Sixth Brigade going in on Sidi Rezegh', and we hurried on more anxiously than ever,

momentarily expecting the roar of battle to break out ahead. The clamour to our left swelled and sank and swelled again. We heard the incessant hammering chatter of many automatics, the 'whang*' of grenades, yells and screams, but all seemed far away. We were fired on from our right but took no notice and hurried on, almost running. Then I was startled by bursts of tracer over our heads from the high ground and at the same moment found myself on a bitumen road.

I instantly realized what had happened. In crossing the wadi we had swung to the right and had thenceforward moved parallel with the assaulting battalions and outside their right flank. We had gone through a gap in the enemy line, the high ground was Belhamcd, not Sidi Rezcgh, and it was our own fight we could hear and partly see, still raging furiously on our left rear. Crouching under a greatcoat I examined the map with a pocket torch. Thinking very carefully indeed, I decided that if we went back for 1,200 yards and then climbed the escarpment we should be behind the Eighteenth.

We had just turned the trucks, all keeping very quiet as the situation seemed delicate, when there was suddenly the sound of many men running over stones down the escarpment only fifty yards away. Baker and his platoon rushed across. For a minute there was a terrific noise, everyone shouting and firing at once. I went over and savagely ordered silence. To my surprise there was. We had eighty German prisoners. They had been running from the fight and had scrambled down the hill to get on their trucks, and were very surprised by our appearance. Our situation was still insecure, however, deep in the enemy position and ahead of our own troops. Some of my men were excited and inclined to be noisy; the Germans kept silence and behaved with perfect discipline. After a few minutes I got everyone quiet and we formed up for the return march, the prisoners moving in threes between the two trucks. Belhamcd was silent and dark again.

We moved off gingerly and slowly, counting the paces. At 1,200 we stopped and Rhodes and Allison came with me

up the escarpment. Near **the** top we came on a wounded German, moaning and writhing, and then to our delight heard the clank of metal on stones—the Eighteenth digging in. The next problem was to get in without being fired at.

We walked towards the sound and then I went ahead with my hands up and called out, 'New Zealand here', thinking glumly that another omission from my orders had been a password. The picking and shovelling stopped and I was sternly ordered to advance and keep my bloody hands up. I did so and was sharply examined by a soldier, one of three who kept me closely covered. At first he refused to send for an officer; one of his mates recommended shooting the bastard. I protested and said who I was. He knew of me but did not think I looked like the chap. My knowledge of his Colonel's name only tended to confirm his suspicions. Then he said: 'Well, if you are a New Zealander, who won the Melbourne Cup?' 'Damned if I know!' I replied. This satisfied him. 'You sound like a New Zealander', he said, and called for his officer.

There was no further trouble, the platoon commander recognizing me at once. I told him to bring in the wounded German (long afterwards he told me that he had died) and Allison went back and brought the party, prisoners, and trucks up on to the hill. For the next four hours we wandered round trying to find the Twentieth. I found Peart and got directions from him, but though we quartered the hill I could not find the battalion. We came on many German dead and wounded and a few of our own, there were cries for help in all directions. I could never understand why we failed to find any of the Twentieth: for they were there and in their correct positions. Presumably we moved in circles. I sent a message to Brigade reporting success and before dawn sent off the prisoners and the trucks with escorts.

We rested for a short while, bitterly cold and worried by the wailing of the German wounded all around. At first light we set off again, Rhodes, Roberts, the signallers, and myself. Shortly afterwards we found Peart, and he had meanwhile found the flank of the Twentieth. We proceeded with him to the forward posts of one of his companies and found

two of his officers, Green and McKay. They knew where the Twentieth lay and Green pointed out the company positions. We were standing in rather a careless group in the growing light. I had just said delightedly, 'They are all just where they should be', when there was a streak of tracer coming directly for us. We all dived for the ground and as I was going down I felt two violent knocks on the left thigh.

For a moment there was a stream of bullets over us, all literally hugging the earth. When it stopped I asked Rhodes if he was hit. He said he was, badly—eye and wrist. McKay had a bullet in the head and Roberts one in the calf of the leg. Peart and Green (both to be killed in later battles) were the only ones unhurt. They crawled up cautiously and applied field dressings, and then went away, stooping and running. So did the signallers, whom I told to find Major Mitchell, now in command. After a while Roberts hobbled off.

Rhodes, McKay, and I lay still for a time. It was bitterly cold and the wind blew the sand in our faces. One of the tanks, up to support at first light as promised, came past and changed course to avoid us. Fifty yards on it was hit and burst into flames. Two of the crew scrambled out, were hit, and collapsed beside it. The blazing tank attracted the enemy mortars and they searched the area with an intense concentration. I saw a soldier's head a few yards away, was invited to share his pit with him, and laboriously dragged myself there. The others found similar cover a few yards away.

For half an hour my host and I lay squeezed together in his shallow trench under a most alarming pounding. One shell burst a yard away and covered us with sand. At last the fire ceased and I was able to sit up, light a pipe and look round, while my friend got out and, kneeling, dug himself another home. My view was limited and I could see nothing but the burning tank, so I settled down to smoke and wait for stretcher-bearers. The time passed very slowly.

After a long time a signaller with a wireless set appeared and crouched down beside me. He told me that Mitchell had taken command of the Twentieth and I spoke to the

companies in turn. A. was quite happy under heavy shell-fire, Captain Baker was now in command; B. was also cheerful, Agar said he was not far away and would send some stretcher-bearers. C. said that Captain Fountaine had gone to Battalion as Major Mitchell had been wounded, and Sergeant-Major Grooby was now commanding the company. I spoke to Grooby and this gallant soldier told me that all was well, a bit of a counter-attack had been beaten off and the boy* were quite happy. We could not raise Manchester and D., and for a while had to lie very low under another heavy mortaring. The signaller said that the whole hill was being pestered and that there were many casualties. When there was a little quiet again we called Battalion and got through. The operator could only tell us that Captain Fountaine had been wounded and that Captain Agar was coming over to take command.

The signaller went away. I saw him a few days later just before he died. The mortaring continued and for a long time I could see no movement. A medical orderly named Arnold, whom I remembered having punished severely for some offence at Athens, appeared at a particularly nasty time and put fresh dressings on us all.

About 1 o'clock four stretcher-bearers from B. Company appeared, picked me up, and set off cheerily, quite regardless of the fire. Rhodes and McKay came too, and the mortar bursts followed the procession the whole mile to 20 R.A.P. On the way I saw Ray Lynch, who was upset to see me wounded. Sergeant Smith told me that fifty-eight wounded had already been evacuated and showed me the list of names. He said that Captain Gilmour was up on the hill where there were many more wounded, but sent his compliments.

We were loaded into a truck and bumped off painfully over the hummocks. We called in at Brigade where Inglis and Bassett came over, very friendly and concerned. Inglis agreed to send Johnny Quilter up as Adjutant, which eased my mind greatly. In the early evening we arrived at the Advanced Dressing Station where I found that the two knocks had been one bullet passing in and out so that nothing much had to be done. Ross and Neville arrived, very

anxious and worried, with my bedroll—but I spent a highly uncomfortable night.

For the next week I cannot do better than quote my diary, helping it out where memory serves:

Nov. 27th. Moved to surgical tent, being treated better than was warranted by my wound. Did poorly for food but was comfortable very quickly and began to feel better. Rusty Page (C O. of the 26th) came in, hit through the back, and looking rather poorly.

Nov. 28th. General, Gentry, Maxwell, and Kenrick all looked in, very cheery and confident. Gentry says Germans have only fifty tanks left. About five German infantry came in and made us all prisoners. Alan Tennent popped his head in the door and said, 'We're in the bag!' The orderlies all went out with their hands over their heads.

Two German soldiers looked in, I remember, but said nothing, and we were left in silence. There were about twenty seriously wounded in the tent and after a while some began to call out for water. I was least badly hurt so I got up and found that I could walk after a fashion. I found a bucket half-full of water and went round giving everybody a drink from an enamel jug. All drank with restraint for they knew how badly off we were. Rusty refused anything.

The orderlies returned after an hour. 4th, 5th, and 6th Field Ambulance, and Mobile Surgical Unit, and about 1,200 wounded are prisoners and 900 German prisoners have been released.

Nov. sglh. Shifted to tent provided by Stan Wilson and joined there by Guy, Paddy, and Cyril Pepper, all in a bad way. Mills and Mitchell are in the tent I have just left, Mills very bad. Fountaine is in another tent. Heenan, Rolxrts, Harper, Abbott, and Baker are in holes near by. Spent most of day talking to wounded and hobbling round watching Germans get into position. In afternoon our people seemed to be attacking in our direction and got within two thousand yards. Considerable small arms fire. About 5.30 p.m. *damned* Italian motorized Division (Aricté) turned up. They passed with five tanks leading, twenty following, and a huge column of transport and guns, and rolled straight over our infantry on Pt. 175. About 200 of the Twenty-first came past us as prisoners. Fighting went on in the moonlight until 11 p.m.

Nov. 30th. At daylight we saw that the enemy column was still halted with its head on Pt. 175. An hour later shells started to burst among the leading vehicles and there was a great panic.

The tanks stayed, but every other vehicle bolted and many did not stop to pick up their passengers. A number passed through the camp and Paddy and I put out a coil of wire between two tents. A small staff car ran slap into this and the occupants got out and continued running. We grabbed an attache case and when they came back looking for it, were lying down in our tent looking very sick. The papers were interesting but of no great value. This was a cheering incident but otherwise it was an unhappy day.

Completely cut off and without news. Rations and water very short. Can manage a few days on one pint per man. Much firing in all directions and camp shelled by own twenty-five-pounders. Several of the wounded killed.

The signaller who was with me at Belhamed was among these. He sent me his compliments after he had received his second and mortal wound, and I was with him when he died.

[*November.*] Over a thousand wounded here, many serious, and cannot be washed or properly looked after. Heard from wounded that *B' and 'C companies of 20th made an attack on the 27th and suffered heavily, to no good.

In the evening Italian ten-ton trucks took away several hundred of the walking wounded and drivers. I was nearly included in the party, but was saved by John Twihigg giving me warning in time to keep away. He and a number of other medical officers were taken. Dittmer, C O. of the Maori Battalion, Abbott, and some others joined the Italians in one of our three-tonners and escaped from the column after dark,

Dec. 1st. Lot of traffic during night and hopes that enemy were leaving, but they were still about in the morning. On two tiny meals a day, and half a cigarette tin of water, so taking things quietly and trying to keep optimistic. Very heavy fighting visible about Belhamed, six miles away.

On the previous evening the German armour had overrun the remainder of 6 Brigade on Sidi Rezegh and during that

morning of 1 December what was left of the Twentieth was overwhelmed on Belhamed. I watched sadly and anxiously from the edge of the wadi and had an odd conversation with a German artillery officer. He came up and said: 'We have retaken Belhamed and our Eastern and Western Groups have joined hands.' I expressed regret, 'But it is no use; we have lost the battle,' he went on. 'I am glad; it has been a pleasure to meet you. You have fought well,' I said. 'That is not enough. Our losses are too heavy. We have lost the battle,' he answered and went on his way.

About 5.30 p.m. much shelling in all directions and many in the camp. Hecnan gave me some tobacco, Jackson got some heavenly extra water by straining tea leaves thrown out by the cooks. Walked a few hundred yards to see Fountaine and visited as many men as I could, which was tiring.

Dec. 2nd. A.S.C. personnel and senior medical officers taken away. In evening about two Battalions Italian Motorised Infantry with twenty guns came from west and took up positions facing north-east, less than a mile away.

I have never been able to understand the object of this Italian movement. Our guns were firing only from east and south.

Dec. 3rd. A grim sort of day. Started to plan escape but in evening, big enemy column, fifty tanks, twenty-eight armoured cars, hundreds of trucks parked south of wadi and cut off chance. Conference of conspirators, postponed attempt. Moonlight too bright, guards all round, R.A.F. dropping flares and too many troops about. Bitterly cold night.

And bitterly miserable! When the Germans came into our camp our drivers managed to remove the rotor arms from our trucks and immobilize them. On this day two drivers, one named Robinson, came to me and said that they had the rotor arm of their truck and would like me to organize an escape. We spent the day getting recruits and planning and in the evening held a conference. A surprising number of those approached were not willing to take the risk. Many, of course, were not fit and several of the doctors held that their duty lay with the remaining wounded. I agreed to take twenty altogether and stipulated that those

going should be able to walk and should each have a packet of biscuits and a bottle of water. The stipulation as to walking excluded Fountaine, Heenan, Roberts, and Harper of my own battalion, and I gave myself a dispensation as it would have puzzled me to walk half a mile. The party finally consisted of Stan Wilson, Lovell, and Jack, doctors who considered they could be spared, Rhodes, Boyle, Jackson, and Pepper, all badly hurt but able to walk, a South African, and a number of Lovell's medical orderlies. I was rather unwilling to take these latter as many of the orderlies had behaved badly when we were captured and under the shelling, but there were no other fit candidates. We held a secret meeting after dark. I hoped to make a bolt during the night but we had to abandon the idea for the reasons given in my diary. I lay awake very disappointed and despondent all night.

Dec, 4th. Tank column moved in early morning, east apparently. Decided about nine to make a break. Got truck by a miracle. Gradually loaded people aboard. One complete unloading because of prying Italians. Finally seized chance and bolted. Anxious moment climbing out of wadi but not stopped and after furious run of five miles were fired on and stopped by South African armoured cars.

I had just completed a laborious reconnaissance, discovered that the way south and west was clear, and that the Italian sentries had been reduced from two every fifty yards to one every hundred, when Lovell joined me and suggested that we should make the attempt at once in daylight. I agreed, pleased to have the encouragement, and we set about it. The people concerned had to be notified to make their final preparations and to collect unnoticed in the vicinity of the truck, which was well placed beside a marquee. This was a slow process, as it had to be done in a casual manner and there were many Italian soldiers wandering about the camp looking for what they might pilfer. As the party arrived I loaded them into the truck, seizing opportunities when no Italians were near. Once, when about half were aboard, lying on the floor, some Italians started to examine nearby trucks. I had to make everyone scramble out and

later start afresh. I found a chance to call on Rusty Page and say good-bye. His neighbour, an English tank officer, gave me the pistol which he had concealed under his pillow and I had binoculars and a compass.

After three nerve-wracking hours all were aboard and I dragged myself up beside the driver and told him to start. He pressed the starter button and the battery was flat! The switch had been left on the previous night. I ordered everyone out again. It was quite impossible to use the crank handle. The plan had collapsed.

At this precise moment, before anybody but myself had got out, a British three-tonner drove up and stopped alongside facing east. Two Germans got out, one carrying a kit of tools, and without even looking at me they went to the far end of the camp and started methodically examining trucks. They had stopped their truck in an ideal position and in five minutes I had the whole party transferred and lying on its floor. I then clambered in beside the driver, told him to rev. the engine up, to back for twenty yards, and then wheel round and climb out of the western side of the wadi, I then drew my pistol, told him to drive close to the nearest sentry so that I could have an easy shot if necessary, and said I would certainly shoot him, the driver, if he stalled on the climb. I do not think Robinson needed this encouragement. The engine started nicely. An Italian sentry fifty yards away, whom we were facing, stopped on his beat, looked at us very hard, and then unslung his rifle. I thought it was time to go and gave the word. Very coolly Robinson backed the twenty yards with the engine singing beautifully. The sentry still hesitated, we turned and bounded up the slope, passed within two yards of another sentry who luckily for himself was too slow-witted, and rattled west at full speed.

It was a delightful moment. There were cheers from the passengers and a great *sense* of relief and elation, but we were not yet quite out of the wood. My plan was to run west for a mile, then south for five, and then east for Egypt. We turned south, saw enemy tanks ahead, tried to get round them, saw more and more tanks, until we were forced to run west again and then found we were being chased by two

armoured cars. They quickly overhauled us, opened fire with machine-guns, and began to hit. Very sadly we stopped, there was a wild scramble to get out and lie on the ground, and I went clear of the truck and put my hands up. The fire stopped and the cars came in, keeping us well covered. An officer put his head out of a turret. 'What an ugly-looking bastard you are/ I thought; and then suddenly I saw the pennants and his shoulder badges. They were South Africans!

The two armoured cars escorted us to their Regimental Headquarters and thence we proceeded alone to Jock Campbell's headquarters. This consisted of a few trucks dispersed on a piece of perfectly flat desert. Four very suspicious-looking twenty-five-pounders swung their barrels on to us as we approached.

I dismounted and was met by a smart-looking military policeman who asked for my identity card. I had torn this up while a prisoner and so I replied, 'You go to hell.' 'Very good, Sir,' he said, and conducted me to Jock's car. Some food was promptly arranged for the party and I had a memorable meal of bully and Worcester sauce, sitting in the back of his car with Jock, I told him of the move of the German armour westwards along the Trigh Capuzzo that morning and he promised to stop shelling the wadi and to see what could be done about rescuing the wounded still there. We then moved on, and two days later after a painful journey arrived at Bagush. On the way we had discovered Corps Rear Headquarters and managed to interest someone in rescuing the wounded in our wadi, which was done.

New Zealand Division had returned to the same area from which it had left for the battle. Lovell and his team went on another 400 miles in the night to Helwan. The other wounded made a very slow journey by hospital train to Alexandria, where Rhodes had an eye removed and Boyle his broken jaw fixed up. I myself stopped at the 2 New Zealand General Hospital at Gerawla. Here an 18 Battalion officer told me of the annihilation of the Twentieth and took me to Brigade Headquarters.

I got out of the truck and walked towards the familiar

entrance. A staff car passed me and General Freyberg and Rudd, the Military Secretary, got out. Rudd saw me and grabbed the General's arm. The General turned, stared an instant, took three huge steps, and embraced me, saying: 'You're a Brigadier!' A minute later I met Inglis and Bassett and Beale, all beaming and smiling.

We had drinks, asked and answered questions, and then I went back to Gerawla, and to bed for the next three weeks.

A few days after our escape, when only thirty gallons of water were left, the hospital camp was recaptured and the remaining wounded and medical staff were freed. Page and Mitchell came into beds on either side of me. Mills was brought in moribund and died, as did the officer who had lent me his pistol.

The Twentieth had returned to Bagush with 120 men, all from Headquarters Company, and two officers, Agar and Padre Spence. Jim Burrows had come up with 600 reinforcements and thirty new officers to form a new battalion, greatly helped by Upham, Maxwell, and Gibb, whom I had most fortunately left behind, by Washbourn who came up from Base, and by Phillips and Chcsterman who had been wounded and evacuated early. R.S.M. Wilson and Quartermaster Bolwell were both back, and other old hands who were scattered on courses or had also been evacuated early were quickly collected, so that the links with the first Twentieth remained strong.

It was some time before we were able to get a reliable account of what had happened after I was wounded. Mitchell and Fountaine were hit in quick succession and Agar took command, with Quilter as Adjutant. On the morning of the 27th B. and D. Companies made an attack, the details of which are still obscure. Agar stated that he was given insufficient time for preparation and wholly inadequate artillery support for a daylight attack—a ten minutes' concentration by one Field Regiment which ended before his orders had reached the platoons. The attack was stopped by very heavy machine-gun fire, with more than 50 per cent, casualties.

Inglis then relieved Agar of the command and replaced

him by Orr, who was thus the fifth commander in three days. There were two quiet days with a constant trickle of casualties from shelling and mortaring. On the morning of 1 December the battalion, which then had nine officers and 286 men, with four two-pounders, was attacked by forty-eight tanks and some hundred lorried infantry and after ninety minutes resistance was completely overrun, one man escaping. The Eighteenth, less directly attacked, withdrew into Tobruk with fifty casualties. We knew that Gilmour and Grooby had been killed, but otherwise had no details until a month later, when a few men escaped from Benghazi and made statements. Two of the statements are worth quoting. Sergeant McConchie says:

At Belhamed on December 1st, my platoon occupied a forward position. Shortly after dawn word came round to stand by for an A.F.V. attack. We had had several warnings of this nature and did not really expect anything to eventuate. In about twenty minutes' time, I spotted a dozen tanks advancing up a wide wadi about eight hundred yards distant but I thought they were our own tanks as I could see the Artillery preparing breakfast in the Brigade area about five hundred yards away, and they did not appear to be disturbed at the appearance of the column. It was very hazy and dusty and we remained watching these tanks, unable to decide whether they were friendly or not.

The first indication that they were enemy was flashes from their guns, firing at the artillery. By this time, the artillery started to get moving and four quads with guns came tearing over to our left flank but only got three guns into action as one was hit on the way and remained there with the quad burning, the first column of tanks advanced on the Brigade area setting afire several trucks. Another column of fifteen tanks turned and commenced a zigzag attack on our position. The German tanks advanced in threes, each supplying protection for the other two. When about one hundred and fifty yards distant, they stopped and threw several smoke bombs which exploded round our guns and made direct shooting very difficult for them. The two-pounder in my rear opened fire but was soon put out of action by a direct hit from a 75-mm. shell.

Through the haze and smoke we could see enemy mortar teams and infantry coming up. Sergeant Lochhead ordered us to open fire on these and at once we could see that this fire was having

good effect as the enemy went to ground. My particular target was three motor-cycle combinations and I had great satisfaction at seeing two of these careering round, out of control, with the seats empty- All this time we were expecting our own tanks to put in an appearance as shortly before the attack a British tank officer informed us **that** our tanks were coming in. This English captain was making a great joke of it all. He **walked away but** had only gone a few yards when I heard a groan **and saw him** lying on the ground. I crawled over and dragged **him** into a hole close by. He had been hit in the stomach and as I couldn't do anything for him I crawled back to my own position.

Three enemy tanks directly in front started to advance **and** I had visions of being run over and squashed. However, they came to a halt sixty yards away. Lochhead ordered us to fire at **the** slits, and we opened fire. I fired half a magazine but received such a hail of fire in return that I decided it was useless firing at a tank once he had spotted you. 'Gunner' Leckie, a few yards to my right, was firing steadily with a Boys anti-tank rifle. Apparently he was annoying the tanks as twice I saw the turrets swing round and send a hail of bullets in his direction. He bobbed down each time the turrets swung round and continued firing when the tank was concentrating on other objects. He ran out of ammunition and yelled for more which we threw over to him. He continued firing and we could actually see the bullets bouncing off the tank, it was so close. Suddenly and very quickly the turret swung round and the tank opened fire with its 75 mm., Leckie receiving a direct hit at not more than fifty yards.

I glanced over to my left and saw one twenty-five-pounder still firing, the remainder were going up in smoke. After the tanks had knocked out this gun several moved round to the left flank of 'C company, completely surrounding our area. I concentrated on my front, firing at the German infantry, and when I glanced over to my left received a big surprise to see 'G' company coming out with their hands up. This was rather more than an hour from the commencement of the action. I looked over to my right and there was 'A' company coming out with their hands up. We stopped firing and lay in our holes as low as we could, thinking we might be missed. However, one of the tanks came rumbling up, a turret opened, a German appeared with a Tommy gun, pointed it at me and in a very guttural voice said 'Op, Op,' We got out.

A battery of twenty-five-pounders a fair distance away was **still**

firing and the Germans hurried us back to the Mosque very quickly. On the way we passed several German tanks and I noticed that behind each tank was a huge pile of firewood attached with a chain, apparently with the object of raising dust. The Germans in our captured ambulances (about six of them) were driving round the battlefield collecting their wounded and we could see that our fire must have had very good effect as each ambulance was crowded, with the slightly wounded standing on the running-boards.

Sergeant McConchic was awarded a D.C.M. next year for very gallant conduct at Minqar Qaim.

Sergeant McDonald, who was later killed at Alamein, gave a similar story:

The troops were all in good spirits. In conversation with men from the companies on our flanks on the previous day, they all expressed pleasure that our platoon was there with seven extra Bren guns, and I heard some say that they hoped the Germans would attack and that we would chop them in pieces.

Shortly after dawn the order was passed along * Stand by for A.F.V. attack.' Visibility was bad, a haze making it difficult to pick up objects beyond five hundred yards. About fifteen minutes after the warning order three tanks passed across my front about four hundred yards away. They had brushwood tied at the back to raise a dust. At first I was not sure whether they were enemy as our artillery did not fire at them, but when they stopped I saw their gun flashes firing towards Brigade area. Then more tanks came into view with anti-tank guns towed by motor vehicles. I immediately opened fire, range about five hundred yards. Motor-cycle combinations followed and there were a good number of infantry. They were engaged by us with good results. Two large-calibre guns mounted on four-wheeled carriages never got into action.

For the first part of the attack the nine tanks I could see did not engage us. With the arrival of their supporting weapons they turned on us, edging slowly up. We had been firing continuously for some time and I was beginning to consider the advisability of conserving ammunition. During a pause I looked to my left and was surprised to see some of our men with their hands up, three hundred yards away. I could not understand what had happened. There was still plenty of enemy movement in our front and we carried on shooting and getting heavy fire in return.

The tanks closed in to shorter range and fired heavily on us with guns and machine-guns. About fifteen minutes later Mr. Guthrey shouted to me to put my hands up and I did, not understanding the reason until I saw three tanks a short distance away to the left. Surrendering was something I had never considered possible and yet here it was.

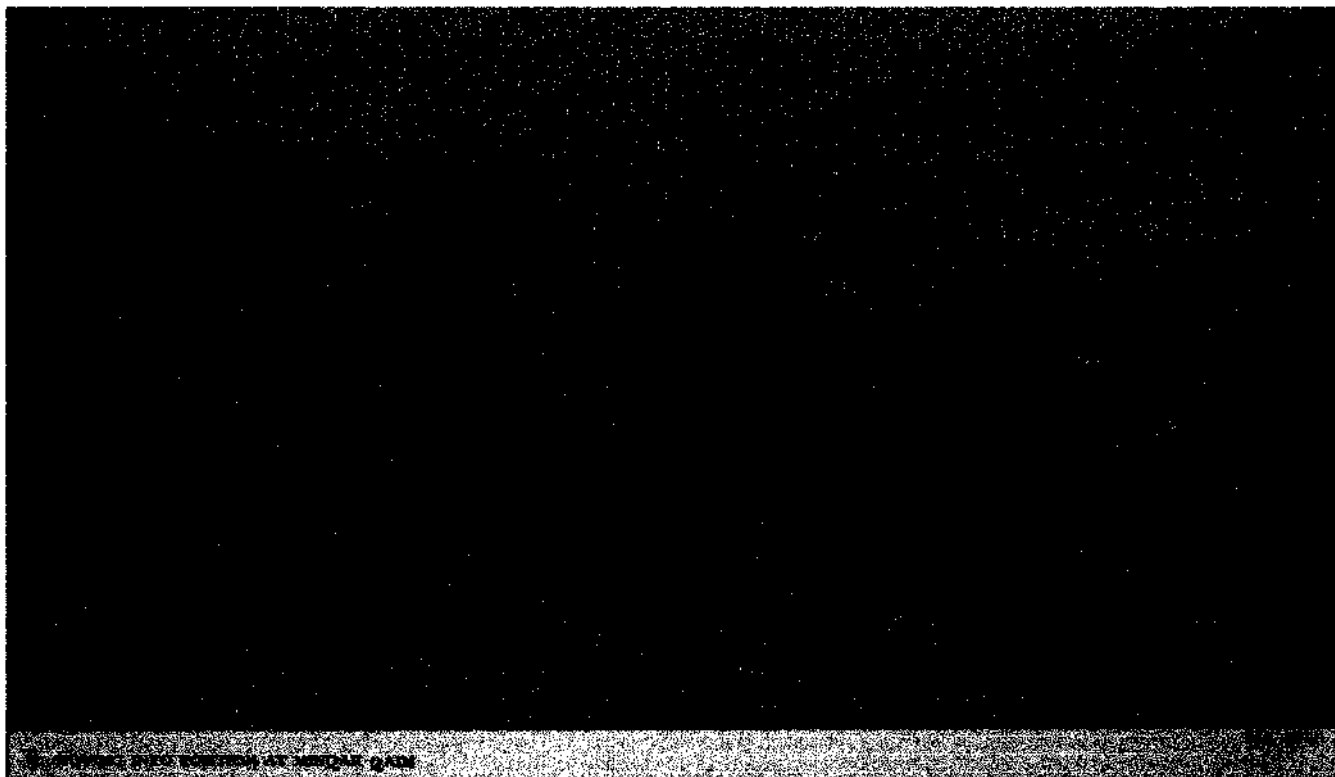
While I was in hospital at Gerawla an incident occurred that left a good deal of bitterness. Inglis attended a parade of the new battalion and, after some handsome remarks on the performance of the unit up till 1 December, said that it had surrendered too easily at Belhamed. In saying this he had the highest motives and he must have believed there was an alternative. I was never able to concede that there was; I told him that what my men had done was good enough for me, and we agreed to differ. Inquiries among prisoners after the war have only confirmed my opinion that when the surrender took place there was no possibility of continuing effective resistance or of running away. The casualties of the Twentieth in this campaign were twenty-four officers and 537 other ranks, of whom ten officers and 361 other ranks were prisoners; about a hundred of those taken prisoner were wounded.

9- 5 Brigade: Western Desert and Syria

I SPENT Christmas Day of 1941 with the Twentieth, very pleasantly, but rather sadly; there were so very few familiar faces. For New Year John Gray and I were at Alexandria and in the middle of my convalescent leave I was recalled to Cairo. There I found that a proposition was under discussion for a landing in the Gulf of Sirte, behind Rommel, by the New Zealand 5 Brigade under my command. It filled me with alarm and I was unfeignedly glad when it was shelved. For a few days I was in command at Maadi Camp but had hardly discovered where my office was when on 16 January I was appointed to command 5 Brigade. On the way to the Canal area to take over I lunched at Helmieh Hospital and, feeling very smart in my new red band and tabs, decided to call on one of the sisters. She was out, but later told me that she thought it might have been I who was asking for her as the nurse said that a military policeman with grey hair had called.

The 5 Brigade at this time consisted of the Twenty-first, Twenty-second, Twenty-third Battalions, the Twenty-eighth (Maoris) who usually served with it having just been transferred to 4 Brigade.

My Brigade Major was Bob Dawson, a regular, who had held the same appointment under Hargest. I unblushingly brought in Chesterman, McPhail, and Ensor, all old Twentieth, as Staff Captain, Intelligence, and transport officer, respectively. McPhail and Ensor had been commissioned in the Twenty-third and both were closely identified with that battalion. Lionel Dickey commanded the defence platoon; a few months afterwards he became transport



officer, and when, more than three years later, he left the Brigade he claimed to have served under ten Brigadiers*

In the first few weeks I had a careful look at the units with which I was to serve for the next two and a quarter years. 21 Battalion had an unhappy record of misfortune and at that time was regarded as the unluckiest battalion in the Division. This had its effect on both officers and men and my impression was that its morale was low and its discipline slack. Sam Allen, who had been in charge of the Divisional Signals, came in to command and I felt confident he would pull the battalion together.

22 Battalion had a good record, though it was unhappy at having lost its Maleme position in Crete—after very heavy casualties—and it had a grouch that it had not been fairly treated in decorations. Les Andrew, unfortunately, was going; but I had my choice of John Russell or another good officer to succeed him, chose John, and had no worries thenceforward.

23 Battalion was a grand solid unit, very carefully commanded by Leckie, but not then going through one of its best periods. Too many officers and N.C.O.s were holding temporary appointments, and some absurd provincial jealousies had not yet died out. The worst feature in the Brigade was that the battalions had an odd hostility towards one another which sprang from old antipathies between earlier commanders and was not eradicated for a long time to come.

Brigade Headquarters had to be built anew and there were several changes before we settled down. I believed in making war in as much comfort as possible but it took us some months to get a good mess. Ross came with mc from the Twentieth and as Neville had been captured at Belhamed I acquired a new batman, Joe Minogue, who had been strictly trained in that capacity by Hughie Mitchell.

The Sirte Gulf project was revived and we did a full-scale landing exercise in the Gulf of Suez. I liked the plan as little as before and indeed doubt whether General Freyberg would ever have allowed us to take it on. Just before going on the exercise I saw the Middle East appreciation of the courses

open to Rommel, then standing at the Agheila line. It was appreciated that he might fight there or, more sensibly, retire to Tripoli. On the last day of the exercise we heard that he had adopted a third course, not mentioned in the appreciation. He had advanced, scattered the forward British troops, and was again menacing Tobruk. Consequently the project for our employment was again dropped. The Division was by this time on the move to Syria. 5 Brigade Group was hurriedly brought up to strength in transport and ordered to move to the Western Desert with the utmost speed.

Bob Dawson and I set off on 12 February to report to Eighth Army Headquarters near Gambut, leaving the troops to follow by the longest possible stages. We made two stages to Sidi Barrani, got a hurry-up message, and arrived at Army Headquarters next afternoon. General Ritchie told me to report to General Gott, commanding 13 Corps. We found him long after dark, got orders to prepare a brigade box, an unhappy device fashionable at that time, at El Adem, and ended our 700-mile journey after midnight, sleeping under a table at Rear Corps Headquarters. We were up and away before daylight and while I reconnoitred a position Bob took action to hurry up the troops. The C.O.s arrived during the day, the troops, rather travel-weary, on the next day, and we were busy digging on the fifth morning after leaving the Canal. In the event the urgency was unnecessary. Rommel had made a gesture but he did not come on and we worked at our positions for nearly six weeks.

We dug, wired, and mined a very good box, as such things went, and tucked the whole Brigade Group inside it with a perimeter of 14,000 yards. In the May battle it was held by an Indian Brigade against several attacks, and I was gratified to be told in June by General Gott that it was the best of all the boxes in his positions. We took mines from the Tobruk defences, 19,000 of them, with full authority to do so and with a good conscience, for at an army conference I heard the decision that Tobruk was not to be held if the Army had to retire. The attitude and mentality of Eighth Army was distinctly defensive. The only army exercise we did was one envisaging retreat to the frontiers; every unit or formation

was busy shutting itself up inside a box of some sort, out of supporting distance from its neighbour; huge minefields were laid, entirely uncovered by fire, and we reconnoitred or prepared alternative positions farther to the rear. An unduly high opinion of Rommel was prevalent and I more than once checked officers sharply for speaking of him as one of the masters of war. People opposed to these masters usually get beaten and it is unwise to believe that your enemy is a god of battles.

We were all so busy digging that so far as I could learn neither we nor anyone else did any serious training. We did organize and train our private mobile column. This was composed of a regiment of tanks, a battery, a company of infantry, some carriers, and some sappers. We had a very enjoyable time playing round with this little force, which presented interesting problems for command, signals, artillery, and supply. The idea was that while we were beleaguered in our nice little box it would cavort around outside, biting at the rear of our besiegers. I thought that war should be taken more seriously.

We had one heavy rain when we were all washed out of our beds, our trucks sank to their axles, and we had two thoroughly uncomfortable days. Italian planes did a 'hit and run' raid, so much run in it that only one Bofors got into action and it missed by many miles. I visited Belhamcd on a sombre black afternoon and saw the graves of my men, also the wadi where I had been a prisoner. On another day I set off to visit General Koenig and the Free French at Bir Hachim, penetrated the perimeter unseen in a sandstorm, failed to find him, and went out again undetected. We went over the scenes of the Brigade's fighting near Gazala, had a thorough look at Tobruk, most miserable and sordid of desert places, and visited every area that seemed likely to be important in the impending battle. But time went heavily, we disliked being away from the Division, felt no great confidence in the command, and at the end of March were glad to get orders to return to Maadi and thence move to Syria.

The return journey to Maadi was notable for a very

severe *khamsin* which caught us on the escarpment above Solium. For a few hours the whole Brigade was scattered and lost, many vehicles being forced to halt until the wind died down.

The troops were glad to be back at Maadi and near to Cairo for a few days, and on the first night they blew off steam by firing fusillades from the numerous captured weapons. This was a bad thing to do, even though most of the firing was into a cliff and no one was hurt, and we deserved the sharp reprimand that came down from Camp Headquarters next morning. Being in the wrong we were all the more annoyed and resentful at such fussiness.

Ross and Joe and I left for Syria ahead of the convoy. We camped the first night in the desert near Beersheba. Next morning our petrol pump played up, some Australian officers gave us a spare and we went on with them to Tel Aviv. Next day the spare collapsed near Jaffa and was replaced by one donated by a South African officer. We carried on until in the evening it too went wrong as we were crossing the Lebanon above Beirut. This time it was a French general who came to our aid and we went on to spend the night at Divisional Headquarters at Baalbek.

After inspecting the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter and the delightful little Temple of Bacchus and visiting the Twentieth, we went on next day to Aleppo. 4 Brigade was working on its part of the divisional position being constructed in the Baalbek valley, 5 Brigade on arrival was to relieve 6 Brigade, now under George Clifton, on the Turkish frontier and at Aleppo, and 6 Brigade was then to return to the Baalbek position.

At Aleppo I found that George had his headquarters installed in a palace and was himself living in a very comfortable flat, which I took over. He had of course got to know everyone worth knowing, had acquired a very nice horse for his morning gallop, seen all the sights, run several social functions, and somehow found time to examine every road and track in the big area for which he was responsible. I was surprised that he had not been into Turkey, but the Turks were excessively neutral and apparently that was a

little too risky even for George. During the next two days he took me all round and introduced me to everyone. He also took me to the top of the tower of the Citadel, built on a huge mound and surrounded by a wide and deep dry moat. I have no very good head for heights and was terrified when at the very top he leaned casually with his back against the rickety railing.

6 Brigade held a parade to impress the inhabitants and General Freyberg came up and took a salute from the balcony of the Baron Hotel. Apparently, the troops had not been warned where the saluting base was and nearly all passed without taking the slightest notice; about half the others, startled by the band, gave an 'eyes left' to the opposite side of the street. However, the spectators probably thought that this was in order and were suitably impressed. There was a terrific row with the C.R.A., Steve Weir, who came up to discover that George had fired all the Field Regiment's carefully husbanded allotment of practice ammunition in a single concentration. This blew over, my battalions arrived, and we proceeded with the relief. I sent the Twenty-second and Twenty-third to the frontier area at Afrine and Idlib respectively, where each had about a forty-mile sector to watch. The Twenty-first, still in need of some drill and hard training, went to the German barracks at Aleppo, where also we installed 5 Field Regiment, 5 Field Ambulance, and 7 Field Company.

The weather during April and until late in May was perfect, with glorious cool sunny days and fresh nights, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. With Chesterman, Dawson, or McPhail I spent days in travelling round northern Syria. Our role was to cover the heavy-bomber airfield at Aleppo and to impose as much delay as possible on any invasion by the Germans through Turkey before retiring over the Syrian plain 180 miles to Baalbek. Possibly, if the Turks invited us, there would have been an advance into Turkey, but this would have been difficult as their roads had been deliberately allowed to fall into disrepair and they had done nothing to clear up malarial areas.

On our side of the frontier we had thousands of Kurds, the

cruellest-looking people I ever saw, working on construction and repair of roads, erection of bridges and culverts, and in fact doing everything possible to ease things for the Germans once they got into Syria. There was of course an elaborate demolition scheme but road demolitions do not usually take long to repair and the only really important one was that projected for a viaduct in 22 Battalion's area.

There was very good defensive country north-west of Aleppo but not a single possible position in a wide belt to the north. My own opinion was that if an invasion came this way, the only one likely, we would have to scamper very smartly indeed. We made ourselves thoroughly familiar with the ground and in that lovely country, in the delicious spring, it was very pleasant doing so.

I paid a formal call on the Syrian Governor and was received with all the state possible in Aleppo. A space had been roped off outside the Palace. I drove up with outriders and numerous police clearing the populace away, dismounted amid what I took to be cheers, and advanced across the square on a red carpet to the steps, where a bevy of resplendent aides was waiting. These escorted me up three flights of stairs to the Governor's room. The stairs were lined by very bad-looking but very ornate troops, and on each landing an officer wearing a helmet with feathers and a cuirass saluted with his sword, making me duck a little each time. The Governor and I drank coffee, and through an interpreter discussed the recent changes in the Cabinet at Damascus and the rising price of wheat, a delicate subject as His Excellency was known to be one of the chief monopolists.

I departed in a similar manner and later in the day the Governor returned my call. We received him with the Brigade band, which played the Syrian national anthem, which it had learned during the morning, and a very good guard of honour. We drank coffee out of a set which an L.O. procured from the Bazaar just in time, and talked the same banalities and I suppose it helped the war effort in some way.

The British Political Officer took me to dine with the candidate for some Sheikhdum. He was the candidate

acceptable to us, and the idea was that the fact that he had entertained the General from Aleppo would help his prestige. We drove out to the village and stopped at the foot of the hill on which stood the candidate's house. He had rallied a large number of his supporters who appeared to be mostly women in brightly coloured gowns. The candidate and half a dozen other chiefs advanced to meet me. As I got out of the car the elastic of my underpants snapped. I grabbed desperately but, as I was wearing shorts, not quite in time. We shook hands all round, I clutching the while in extreme anxiety, and then advanced to the house amid the plaudits of the crowd and with what I should imagine was a concerned expression. Ross took a photo from the rear showing a very intriguing two inches of white lingerie under each leg of my shorts. It was a great relief to get safely seated on a cushion in the parlour without worse disaster. We smoked cigarettes and drank sherbet for two hours, conversing only by smiles and signs, until the boiled sheep was brought in on an immense tray heaped high with rice and spices. We then hitched our cushions up and had a very good meal. The host's son looked after me, tearing off succulent pieces with his fingers. I enjoyed them and was grateful that he did not offer me the eyes, which Colonel Stirling had told me was possible. When it was finished and we were all replete we chatted awhile by the same dumb show, and I again only just safely negotiated the trip down the hill to the car. On my return to Aleppo Joe and I had words on the matter.

To show the flag we sent the Brigade band to the spring races at Deir es Zor, 260 miles down the Euphrates. McQjjil-kin and Ensor went with me for the big day. Some 10,000 Arabs were present with more horses than I had ever seen together. The racing was poor except that every rider appeared to be in earnest and we saw some very willing fights behind the totalisator. There were no bookmakers that we could see. At the conclusion I had to present the prizes, aided by the very attractive daughter of the French Consul. A Syrian band played the Syrian national anthem and our escort presented arms; a Foreign Legion band played the Marseillaise with another present arms; and then the

Brigade band played 'God Save the King'⁹ and all presented again. AU officers of course saluted each time, and the affair must have been quite impressive. There was a dance in the French Officers' Club, a torchlight procession, and a rather pathetic show of work done by the local schoolchildren, fancywork, maps, cakes, knitting, just as at a country show in New Zealand. We found that the British Officers' Club had a quite extraordinary supply of good liquor.

I made another trip to visit the Australians on the coast and saw the Duke of Gloucester take a parade of 9 Australian Division. There was space on the ground for only 200 men from each battalion and without exception they were the most beautiful troops I ever saw. Hardly a man appeared to be less than six feet and they drilled and marched superbly.

Then I suddenly became quite seriously ill with shingles in the head and chicken-pox, and was evacuated to our hospital at Zahle in the Lebanon. On recovery after a fortnight I went to convalesce at the Staff College at Haifa, where I was very kindly treated after an astonishingly chilly reception. Later I heard that Inglis had recently called there and had spoken of the deficiencies of the British armour in the winter battle with more candour and emphasis than tact. I was watched carefully for a few days, but at that time I had no particular grouch and gradually the atmosphere thawed.

On 27 May Rommel opened his offensive in the Western Desert, but all the first reports were optimistic and we had little expectation of being involved. Intelligence reports in the Middle East always breathed the same air of bland cheeriness and patronizing appreciation of the enemy's struggles no matter how badly things were going for us. I don't know at what level commanders were told the truth; corps and divisional commanders may have seen truthful reports. At the Brigadier level they were often infuriating.

There were projects for our employment on the Bosphorus or on the Caspian, with Libya only a likely outsider and Egypt in no one's minds. General Freyberg and Gentry went off to Iraq and almost to the Caspian. I returned from convalescence on 11 June and resumed command. During my absence Bob Dawson had gone to Division and Monty

Fairbrother,¹ an original Twentieth officer, had replaced him as Brigade Major, Ghesterman had gone to become second-in-command of the Maoris and the new Staff Captain was Dugleby, an original Nineteenth officer,

5 Brigade Group concentrated and we moved into the desert sixty miles south-east of Aleppo to do brigade training. At this time the Brigade Group theory was disastrously popular in the Middle East. We had been asked to adopt it with more than outward conformity. The General agreed to the extent that we were actually organized in brigade groups in Syria and remained so organized during all mobile periods of the war in Africa; but he made it very clear that we would fight as a division with our guns under the C.R.A., and missed no opportunity of making his intention clear. The brigade group organization had many advantages for desert warfare, particularly in mobility and quick readiness for action, so long as the groups kept touch and combined to fight as a division with the guns a single fire unit. Accordingly we went out to exercise as a brigade group. We found a fine piece of desert with good going everywhere and set to work in frightful heat. On the third morning I conducted a T.E.W.T.² on the subject of an attack by infantry advancing in their trucks at speed, with artillery support, and debussing at the last possible moment to assault, the whole combined and synchronized with a tank attack. Speed and determination were the essence of the idea and much depended upon the nature of the going. I had done this successfully at Bir Chleta, and without tanks did it with moderate success on two later occasions.

¹ From here on when I speak of 'Monty' I am referring to this officer, not to General Montgomery.

² T.E.W.T.: 'tactical exercise without troops'. A group of officers is taken out on to a suitable area and divided into syndicates each of four or five. An imaginary situation is described and each syndicate is asked to say what they would do about it, and how, with the imaginary troops at their disposal. Half an hour or less is given them to produce their solutions, during which time the director of the T.E.W.T. and his assistants, known as the 'Board', think up their own answer. The syndicates in turn give their replies. With the help of any ideas picked up therefrom the conducting officer then gives the Board solution, which is right. T.E.W.T.S can be useless or very valuable according to the manner in which they are handled. They are nearly always carried out in rain or a cold wind.

In the afternoon we formed up to try out our ideas. The heat was quite overpowering, low oppressive clouds and the feeling of being in an oven. The water in the bottles was too hot to bear on the hands, many trucks had stopped owing to petrol vapourizing, and one went up in flames, apparently by spontaneous combustion. I noticed how white and strained everyone looked and suddenly cancelled the whole affair and we all trundled off to the Euphrates to bathe. The river was yellow and cold, dangerously high and rapid with the spring thaws; but we were able to sit close to the bank up to our necks and there the whole Brigade remained for hours until the worst of the heat was over and there was again some energy in us. We had planned to practise a night attack and we now began preparations. The evening meal was finished and we were about to move out when a signal arrived from Division which ended all thought of exercises. 'Division moving. Return to Baalbek forthwith.'

10. Return to Battle:

Minqar Qaim

WE could return to Aleppo, sixty miles by good road, and thence by the main road, 180 miles to Baalbek, or we could travel across the desert direct, about 130 miles. Monty and I looked at the map: there was nothing to show that the going would be difficult, and I decided to go direct. We did an easy thirty miles that night.

The next day, 14 June, was difficult. It was again intolerably hot, and about half-way we ran into a knot of little villages and could find no way round. There were innumerable watercourses with narrow crossings and we got entangled among these on narrow tracks and causeways, at many places too narrow for our vehicles. We laboured for hours in the stifling heat; it was impossible to turn and go back, and sometimes I feared we would be stuck for days. Everyone was bad-tempered but determined and somehow we wriggled and struggled on. After about three hours my car at the head was out on open desert with clear going ahead. For miles back among the stunted palms and mud huts I could see files of trucks and guns winding at crawling speed. But the heads of each file were emerging into the open and the obstacle was obviously surmounted. I have seldom felt more relieved.

Monty and I went ahead fast and arrived at Baalbek just before the last of Divisional Headquarters moved. The General and Gentry had returned from the Caspian and gone on to Cairo by air. Many units were on the move, but 4 Brigade required all the road space next day and we would not be able to start our move for a day or two. It was annoying to find that we need not have been in such a

desperate hurry, but pleasing that we would have time for a rest and clean up before starting the long move to Libya.

We went back a few miles and found an excellent camping place with a stream. Only the guns arrived that night and the Brigade was not in till next afternoon. Everyone looked jaded and travel-weary, but the units were nearly complete and the L.A.D.S brought in the last stragglers by midnight. It was a fine performance with our tired old trucks.

There were two possible routes as far as Beersheba but only one road across the Sinai Desert and that was being used to capacity. The men thoroughly enjoyed the rest, the last they were to get for long enough. 4 Brigade was moved on the 16th and not until the 18th was there road space for 5 Brigade. I decided to leave Monty to make arrangements for the move and to get ahead to Cairo myself, and I told my unit commanders to do the same.

Ross, Joe, and I set off in our nice new Chevrolet early on the 17th. I always sat in front with Ross and occasionally took the wheel. Joe sat in the back seat wedged amid piles of luggage. We could have lived for a month on the tinned foods and drinks we normally carried and could have dressed for a year in the clothes. In addition Ross always carried as much spare petrol and water as could be jammed in. Our most precious possession was the primus and both Ross and Joe were adepts at making tea in the shortest possible time. I could never be trusted to work the thing.

We overtook the Twentieth on the road moving to the last of its disasters, and passed it with a wave and a smile from every truck. At Beirut I saw Dick Chesterman for a moment and we picked up Phil Levy, a very plucky anti-tank gunner who had been with me in Libya, and crammed him in somehow. Near Acre we lunched by the roadside with John Russell. He went on to Cairo that day but we were content with 270 miles and camped in the Sinai Desert near Beersheba. Next morning we were very early away and did the 260 miles in time for lunch at the New Zealand Club in Cairo. The Club was full of senior officers who had come ahead of their troops. There was a tense feeling and a fine sense of confidence. Things might be going as badly in the

Libya battle as was rumoured but we thought our arrival would make a difference.

George Clifton arrived and that night he and I dined very pleasantly with some of the sisters on the roof of the Turf Club, Next morning there was a conference at which the General explained the situation, a grim one, to all brigade and unit commanders. I learned that 5 Brigade, moving across the Delta by the new strategic road, would be near Alexandria by the night of the 20th and I should rejoin it there. In the afternoon while Ross changed our tyres for the last set of desert tyres in Maadi, and Joe had a busy day sorting out and washing my campaigning kit, I sat tranquilly watching a cricket match at the Maadi Club where I had a leisurely dinner in the evening. The next day, 20 June, I spent in similar manner.

I got back into camp about midnight and was hailed with relief by three very worried officers. They had black news. Tobruk had fallen. The General had left for Matruh and Brigadiers were to proceed there forthwith, travelling through the night. Ross was on leave but Joe and I packed the car with the help and advice of a Brigadier and two full colonels, Ross was back an hour later and we left immediately.

At daylight we stopped for breakfast near Amiriya, where Monty, who had come ahead of the Brigade from the Canal, joined us. He reported that the move was going well, our rather decrepit trucks showing no sign of a mass breakdown. We travelled on up the familiar, weary desert road and reached Matruh at eleven, reluctantly resisting the temptation to stop a little while and bathe in the sparkling waters of Smugglers' Cove.

At the divisional conference held underground in Fortress Headquarters we heard a very gloomy story. Eighth Army had unquestionably taken a bad beating and there did not appear to be much solid left. About a hundred tanks were still runners, many of them the light Stuarts; 1 South African Division was in fair order, 50 Division and 4 Indian Division were reduced to little more than weak brigade groups, and not much else remained. On the other hand, 10 Indian Division had arrived and part was already about Solium.

New Zealand Division would be complete in a couple of days, 9 Australian Division was following us from Syria, and in a few weeks another armoured division would arrive in Egypt. A few weeks sounded a long time. We also heard that the Desert Air Force had been weakened by the move of fighter squadrons to the Far East but had by no means been beaten, and the retirement of Eighth Army had not been seriously molested from the air. It was thought that Rommel would not have enough transport to move his Italian infantry and that supply difficulties would slow down his pursuit. I cannot remember anything about the Army plan except that Inglis and I thought little of it. Our own part was to hold Matruh.

Inglis took the western sector with 4 Brigade which, with the Maoris, had four battalions. 5 Brigade reinforced by 26 Battalion from 6 Brigade was to hold the eastern sector. This sector had been prepared and occupied in 1940 by an Egyptian Brigade, which withdrew with amusing celerity when Graziani advanced, and the defences were in very bad order. Most of the dug positions had caved in or filled with sand, much of the wire was on the ground, minefields were badly marked, communications non-existent, and the whole plan of defence obscure.

An Eighth Army memorandum said that a lesson of the battle was that a division had more infantry than its field and anti-tank guns could adequately support and recommended that infantry battalions should be reduced to three companies each. This it was decided to do and we were instructed to select one company in each battalion to return to Maadi.

My unit commanders appeared during the afternoon and we did a reconnaissance and allotted sectors. In the afternoon the troops arrived, very weary after their 900-mile forced move in the height of summer. I sent as many as possible for a bathe in Smuggler's Cove and they moved into position in the moonlight. Early on the 22nd we were hard at work.

During the next three days we worked hard. Eighth Army poured back through us, not looking at all demoralized

except for the black South African drivers, but thoroughly mixed up and disorganized. I did not see a single formed fighting unit, infantry, armour, or artillery.

On the evening of the 24th we were lightly bombed. Next afternoon there was another divisional conference in the deep dug-out of Fortress Headquarters. The General said that Gott's 13 Corps on the frontier had been overrun and that the enemy were already at Sidi Barrani, eighty miles away, in great and unexpected force. Apparently, the undamaged transport captured at Tobruk had enabled Rommel to carry his Italians and he was going all out for complete victory and Egypt. The Air report spoke of 3,000 vehicles in one of the advancing masses. Then the General said, to our delight, that we would not stay to be besieged in Matruh: 10 Indian Division would relieve us and during the night we would move south into the desert and meet the invasion head on. He told us to get our 'left out of battle' companies away; and in accordance with the opinion that there were too many infantry in a division, George Clifton and 6 Brigade would return to Amiriya. It had been a tense conference and we were all sitting silently when George heaved a prodigious sigh and we relaxed in laughter.

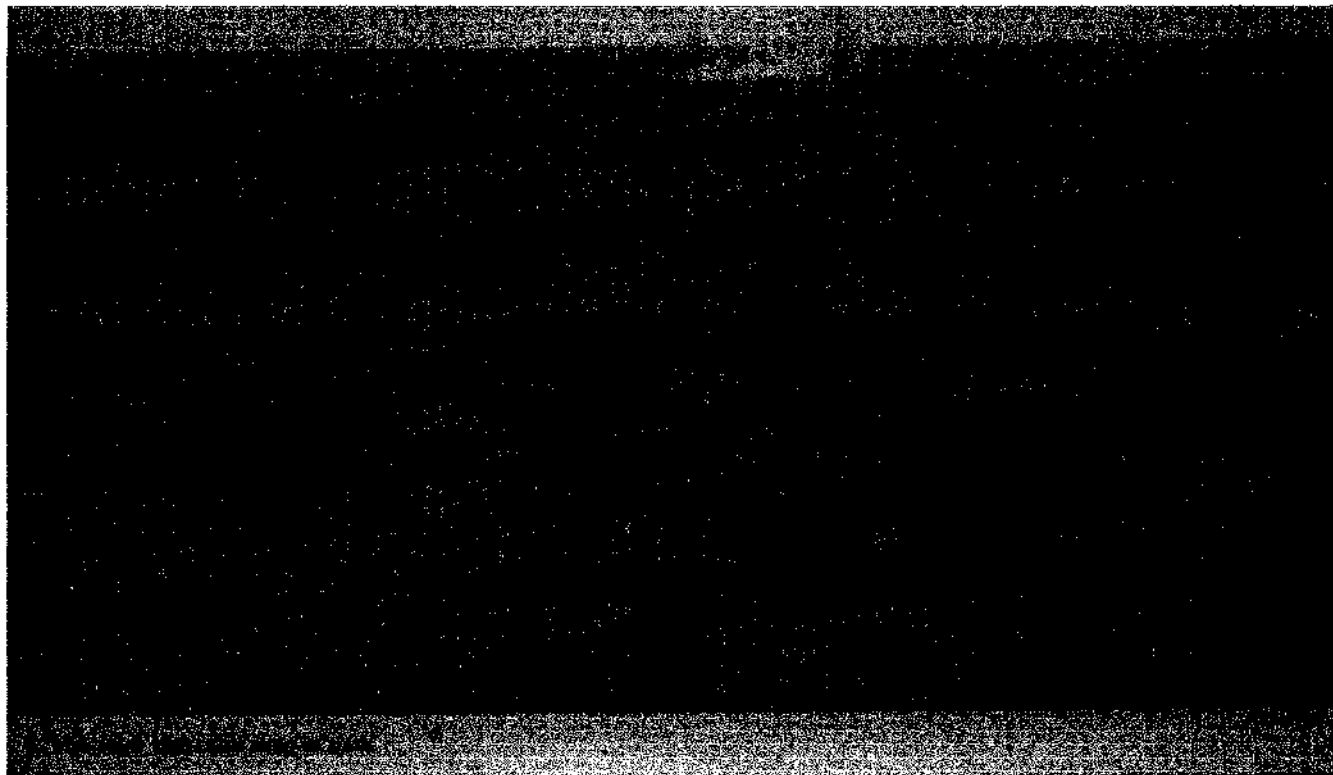
The relief was carried out during the evening. The brigade that relieved us had been involved in the scramble on the frontier, had been surrounded, had broken out, and was very weak. While the relief was under way I wrote a letter home. In it I said: 'It is a lovely cool evening. Matruh lies peaceful in the last light and the little ships are moving out to go to Alex. If we can only somehow gain a little time, a fortnight or so, ail will be well but it will be a hard fortnight and a great test.'

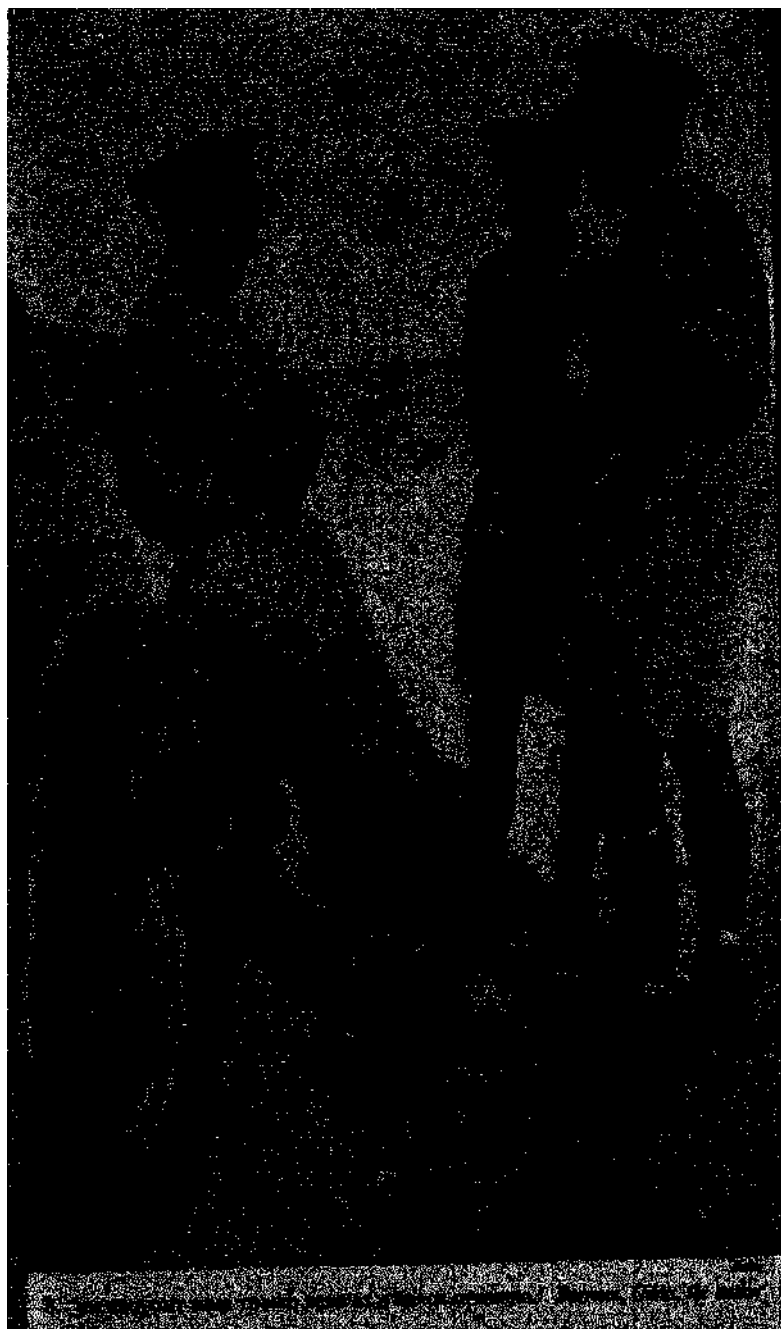
We moved out of Matruh that night and halted before dawn. During the move the Twenty-second lost some men in a random bombing. General Freyberg selected a position at Minqar Qaim—the cliffs of Qaim—twenty-five miles from Matruh. I was ordered to send a battalion to Bir Khalda, twenty miles to the south, to guard a petrol dump and reluctantly sent Sam Allen with the Twenty-first.

The Minqar Qaim position was a very odd one and I was

greatly puzzled to know how to occupy my portion of it. The escarpment was a definite tank obstacle over a hundred feet high, but it ran east and west and the enemy were just as likely to come along the top as along the plain to the north, so as an obstacle it was of no great use. 5 Brigade was on the left, with the Twenty-second on the escarpment mainly facing south and the Twenty-third, now commanded by Romans, as Leckie had been left sick in Maadi, on a lower terrace to the east mainly facing north. Then came the Reserve Group, newly formed under John Gray, and consisting of the Eighteenth and some oddments. It was on lower ground still and also faced north. 4 Brigade continued the line in open desert, as far as I could see in a north-easterly direction and facing every way but south. The guns were all out on the flat out of my area, but 5 Field Regiment remained under command. There was no room for transport inside my position so I grouped all but the fighting vehicles under the Staff Captain, gave him a wireless set and a signals detachment, and told him to remain on the lee side of the Division, which I expected to be the eastern side, to move as he might be required but on no account to get out of touch with me. It was also difficult to find a satisfactory site for Brigade Headquarters and we finally settled in a wadi running a hundred yards into the escarpment, perfectly concealed from all directions but the north. There was no information about neighbouring troops; they all seemed to be retiring. During the 26th the First Armoured Division, said still to have a hundred tanks, appeared a few miles to the south and an Indian Brigade was stated to be in a position some miles to the east at Minqar Sidi Hamza, the cliffs of Saint Hamza. My L.O.s failed to find it. The general situation was extremely vague and I could see no merits in the position we stood on, though I knew of no better and could not see one.

We moved on to the ground on the late afternoon of the 26th and dug in that night and until 9 o'clock the next morning. On top of the escarpment the solid rock was within eighteen inches of the surface and it was not possible to do very much.





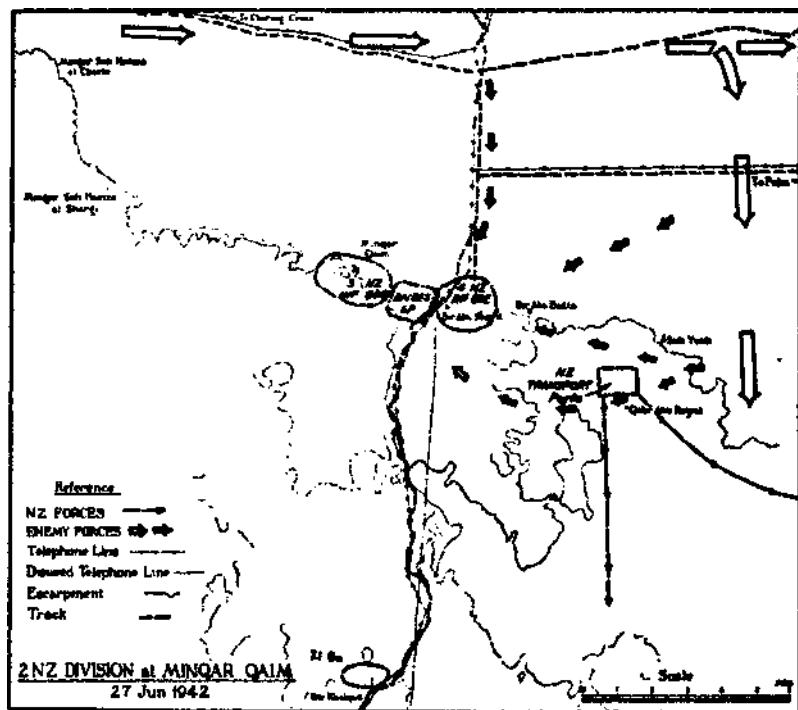
Early on the 27th some six-pounders arrived and the anti-tank gunners started to train with them. The infantry battalions at this time had eight two-pounders each and not enough six-pounders arrived for any change.

Late on the night of the 26th bad news arrived from the Twenty-first. The battalions reached Bir Khalda at last light and halted while Sam Allen looked round to see where to put everybody. The trucks, everyone having grown careless in months away from the field, closed up with a view to the evening meal. They were caught and bombed by a flight of Dorniers and there were sixty casualties.

About nine on the morning of the 27th, six or seven miles to the north-west, a huge column of transport appeared, shimmering in the haze and headed by a group of fifteen tanks. It moved slowly, growing in width and depth. A battery moved out from the Reserve Group position, unlimbered, and opened fire. The tanks moved steadily against the battery, disregarding and untouched by the twenty-five-pounder shells bursting about them. We saw a very pretty sight as the battery fell back, the two troops leap-frogging one another as in a drill movement and maintaining a steady fire. They passed north of my position apparently unhurt.

Some mines had arrived and at this moment Lincoln, my sapper officer, was laying a belt 200 yards from the mouth of the headquarters' wadi. The tanks were 4,000 yards away and Lincoln called to me, where I stood on top of the escarpment: 'Shall I finish?' He had two trucks and about ten minutes' work still to do, simply unloading and placing the mines on the ground in a pattern. I told him to go on.

The party worked furiously for five minutes while I watched with my heart in my mouth. Several batteries were now shelling the tanks, almost hidden in dust and shell bursts. Suddenly one tank moved swiftly in towards us and opened rapid fire on the sappers with its gun and heavy machine-gun, vicious-looking tracer. The second shell hit one truck and killed five men and wounded three. The other truck and its party went resolutely on until I could make them hear me and then came calmly in. One man ran back and drove in the damaged truck*



MAP 7

The tanks came no nearer, but an artillery O.P. truck came well forward, and try as they might our guns failed to disturb it. The vehicles in the headquarters' wadi were the only ones inside the brigade position and before long we were under a very unpleasant fire from 105'S. There were several casualties and we were obliged to stay in what little cover we had. A heavy artillery duel worked up. From my position on the cliff I could see shells bursting incessantly among our guns and admired the way our gunners were standing to their work. Soon columns of smoke rose where trucks in the divisional position had been hit and were burning. The great mass of enemy transport in the north-west moved about uneasily but as the morning wore on it gradually worked past our northern flank. In the haze it was hard to see what was happening.

The shelling on us died down and I visited the two battalion commanders. They had nothing to report and there was no sign of any threat from south or west, where we had Bren carriers well out. When I got back, as the shelling on us had stopped, I sent out a party to bring in and bury the poor sappers. The tanks had gone but the O.P. must have seen them; it called down accurate fire and two of the burial party were killed and were left to lie with the others.

Soon after midday we could see that the enemy had worked round the right flank of the Division. There was a steady thudding of gunfire, much dust and the smoke of many explosions and burning vehicles, and occasionally the distant mutter of automatics, but we could form little idea of what was happening. Everything remained quiet with 5 Brigade but we could see that 4 Brigade was heavily engaged and that the enemy was steadily moving east of us. North of 5 Brigade the great enemy mass remained out of range. We moved headquarters to a safer area with 22 Battalion.

Early in the afternoon Division informed us that General Freyberg had been wounded, Inglis had taken command and Jim Burrows had taken over 4 Brigade. A sharp attack had been repulsed but more attacks were expected. About this time a very agitated officer arrived in a great hurry and said that tanks had driven our transport away and were

now wreaking havoc among our guns. I sent him back with a savage reprimand for giving fake and alarmist information; but it was true enough that our transport had been driven away. Another officer came in with a message that the transport had been attacked by tanks and had retired nine miles to the south. We could not raise them on the air and then began a time of desperate anxiety. We called them without ceasing from then on but with no success. Transport was visible some miles to the south but whether friendly or hostile we could not tell. I sent out Bren carrier patrols and L.O.S to find out, with urgent orders to discover and bring up our own trucks.

I was called to Division for a conference about 8 o'clock that evening. We stood in a group at the back of the command truck. Inglis said that all attacks had been repulsed so far, but the enemy was fairly round behind us and we obviously were in a grave position. The going to the south was reported bad, the only sure going was due east, which meant that we must make a break-through. His plan was that 4 Brigade should make a gap by a night attack with the bayonet, the rest of us should drive through in a solid column, and then 4 Brigade should mount its own vehicles and follow. It was a shock to him when I announced that my troop-carriers had disappeared and that, though we would pack the men on to guns, carriers, anti-tank portecs, gun quads, and every fighting vehicle we had, there would still be five or six hundred who could not be carried. Bob Dawson, now G.2 on Division, said that some of the petrol and ammunition vehicles could be used and it was arranged that he should get them to a rendezvous. All vehicles, including guns, were to form up after dark, head to tail in nine columns ten yards apart, with 5 Brigade in the rear. Zero hour for the attack was 10.30 p.m. and we would move on the success signal from 4 Brigade.

General Lumsden, commanding 1 Armoured Division, was present. I asked him if he could let us have a squadron of tanks as a spearhead. He replied that he had to move south to Bir Khalda to refuel. I got permission to recall the Twenty-first.

On return to my headquarters I told Monty that we were going to have an interesting night. We still had no touch with our transport and now could not raise the Twenty-first.

I cursed the signals officer heartily for not having his sets in better order or his operators better trained. Years afterwards we discovered that he had stupidly sent all his charging sets with the transport and his batteries had run down.

We worked out a plan for withdrawing, moving to the rendezvous and cmbussing, and gave it verbally to the very anxious-looking unit commanders. I gave special, and I thought clear, orders for lifting our minefield so that the Twenty-second could safely move out north of the escarpment. The carrier patrols had reported that the transport south of us was friendly and for some time I was hopeful that the L.O.s would locate and bring in our missing troop-carriers; indeed at one time someone reported that they were doing so. Instead, both youngsters returned looking decidedly harassed and reported that the transport south of us was extremely hostile and that they had been unable to get through. Which report was correct I never found out, but they were plucky lads and I gave up all hope of seeing our trucks. We continued unceasingly to call both Twenty-first and our transport on the air, but with no success.

At ten we began to withdraw and move to the rendezvous. We were not yet finished with the unlucky minefield. It had not been completely cleared, a carrier struck a mine and twenty men out of a platoon of the Twenty-second marching alongside the carrier were killed or wounded.

Apart from this the Brigade assembled safely and was loaded on to our vehicles. The trucks were packed to the limit and the hundreds of men whom they could not carry were crammed on to the fighting vehicles. Men were hanging on wherever there was standing room, squeezed inside the gun quads, on the guns themselves, on carriers and anti-tank portees, everywhere imaginable. The loading was completed in a quiet and orderly manner and I walked round to check up. I found about twenty men still unaccommodated and they followed me round while I found places for them one by one.

I then returned to my headquarters which was at the head of the Brigade Group immediately following the forty vehicles of Divisional Headquarters. Meantime Monty had at last got into touch with our transport, very faintly. We had a poor map-reference code which it was hopeless to try to use. He said in clear, many times: 'Go east to AMIRIYA immediately.' The over-suspicious signals officer with the transport, although he was given nicknames as identification checks and recognized Monty's voice, refused to accept the message as genuine. He decided that we had been captured and that Monty had been coerced into sending this order. Consequently the transport did not move.

The position of 5 Brigade was therefore highly unsatisfactory, two battalions loaded anyhow on to the first-line vehicles and guns and completely incapable of fighting, one out of touch altogether and about to be left isolated and unaware of our retreat, and our troop-carriers miles away and obstinately determined to remain in the danger area.

I joined Inglis and Gentry at the head of the column. There was silence ahead where we expected to hear the sounds of 4 Brigade assault. We waited with growing impatience and anxiety. No message came from Jim explaining the delay, which in fact the Maoris had caused by being late on the start-line. After what seemed a very long time Inglis decided to move with the idea of passing south of the enemy flank or, if necessary, of breaking through. The assault actually began, at most, a few minutes later and was completely successful. A clean cut was made and the original plan would have worked, but Inglis was in a difficult position and daylight was not long ahead.

We moved off slowly due east, Inglis, John Gray, and Gentry personally leading. Then came some forty divisional vehicles, then 5 Brigade Headquarters, the divisional reserve group, 4 and 6 Field Regiments, and the medley of vehicles representing and carrying 5 Field Regiment and 5 Brigade. I settled down beside my driver and relaxed. Joe was in the back seat wedged among his piles of gear.

A few moments later firing broke out ahead. We continued eastwards and then turned south, when we must have

been quite near the scene of the assault. The sounds were confused and it was impossible to decide what was happening. We moved on, apparently just clear of the fight, and I was beginning to think we had found a gap when white flares went up close ahead. The column stopped, closely packed. More flares went up, no doubt a challenge, to which we had no reply to make. The Germans opened fire*

We had bumped into a laager of about a dozen tanks lying so closely together that there was no room to break through between them. Their fire simply hailed down on us. There were tank shells, 20-mm. shells, and automatics, all firing tracer. A petrol truck was hit at once and exploded. An ammunition truck was hit and the boxes of cartridges crackled and exploded in succession. The most dreadful sight was an ambulance a few yards away which blazed furiously, the wounded on the stretchers writhing and struggling utterly beyond help.

My car was jammed on all sides and could not move. I told Ross and Joe to get out and for a moment we lay flat on the ground. Many others had done the same. A few seconds later I saw the truck ahead of us turning to the left, and beyond it quite clearly saw John Gray standing with his head through the roof of his car and pointing in the same direction. 'We'll give it a go, Ross,' I said. 'Very good, Sir,' he replied, as polite as ever. We scrambled back and followed the trucks ahead, all bolting like wild elephants. For a few moments we ran on amid a pandemonium, overtaking and being overtaken by other frantic vehicles, dodging slit trenches, passing or crashing into running men, amid an uproar of shouts and screams. I recognized the men as Germans, pulled out my revolver and was eagerly looking out for a target when suddenly there was silence and we were out running smoothly on level desert. We were through.

There were vehicles ahead. I looked back and saw a steady stream following four or five abreast. The pace slackened and we settled down to run quietly at ten miles an hour. I thought of Joe, who had not got out of the car with us, turned round and poked him. There was no response. I prodded again and called anxiously and Joe woke up. He had slept

through the whole affair. Near morning, Inglis dropped back and told me to form a rearguard; we would assemble and reorganize in the Kaponga Box, a fortified position on the southern end of the Alamein line about twenty miles from the sea. Monty and I pulled out of the traffic stream, turned our cars about and, while breakfast was being prepared, advertised to the passers-by for a rearguard. There was no trouble in getting candidates. Everyone was only too anxious to stop and join us or perhaps to stop and have breakfast. We sent on all infantry, single guns, two-pounders, Y.M.C.A. trucks and sundries, and very soon had a nice little force of a troop of twenty-five-pounders, complete in all respects, some Bren carriers, and some six-pounders. We were also joined by Reg Romans in his staff car, four other 5 Brigade Headquarters vehicles, and a truck load of German prisoners.

We took up a position astride the line of retreat, got on with breakfast, and waited for the end of the column. By sunrise there was only a single file and soon only single vehicles. The intervals widened, at ten o'clock there had been none for half an hour, then a lone Bren carrier and no more. We realized that we had the whole of 5 Brigade with us in three staff cars and four three-tonners. I took a photograph of them.

We moved on, anxious enough, though I tried to comfort myself by remembering Earl Haig's dictum that things are never as bad, or as good, as they seem. I came on Inglis talking to a South African sapper who was laying a dummy minefield. He listened dubiously while Inglis explained what a dreadful hammering we had given to Afrika Korps. We went on together and joined Divisional Headquarters which had stopped to organize the movement down the escarpment running south from Fuka. An order of march had been worked out and there was consternation when I grimly explained how little road space 5 Brigade Group would require.

The move ended in the Kaponga Box, an almost circular ring of big sand-hills which 5 Brigade had prepared for defence in 1941. 5 Brigade was allotted an area and we waited fairly confidently for the Brigade to arrive. By midnight nearly

ail had done so and in the end our losses were no more than 165, the divisional total being about 700. All the afternoon there was a trickle of stragglers coming in with fantastic stories, so that we never had time to hear one out before another arrived with his story urgent on his tongue.

Keith Glasgow, C O . of 5 Field Regiment, brought in the largest group. Apparently when the head of the column came under fire most of the rear vehicles, under fire also from another direction, turned and hurried back the way they had come. Keith in his car went after them, got ahead, waved his blue flag ('Follow me') aloft through the hole in the roof and got most under control. He then led them south and east and either round the flanks or through a gap in the enemy line and got away unmolested.

John Russell in much the same way got control of a leaderless group and with it was not far south of the battlefield at daylight. By great good fortune he there met our errant transport coming pertinaciously to pick us up. He took the whole lot south to Khalda and thence safely eastwards.

Sam Allen was last to arrive, when we had almost given him up and in fact had heard he was dead. He had somehow discovered that we had gone and, though harassed by enemy parties, he showed fine decision and skill and came out with little loss.

It rather appeared that the break-out had been unnecessary and that we could all have moved south and east as these parties did; but that would have entailed an unjustifiable gamble on the going.

That first afternoon in the Kaponga Box was a wonderful one of reunions and mounting joy as each party arrived. At one stage, when only a few of my people had appeared, I ran out a few miles to the west and met a big mass of trucks moving in perfect formation, Jim Burrows and 4 Brigade coming proudly in after their great exploit. It was sheer happiness to see him and Brian Bassett, both graver and quieter than usual, with the Brigade and my beloved Twentieth in such soldierly order. I felt envious but very proud. Before evening 5 Brigade was reassembled and looking just as well.

11. The Stand at Alamein

THERE was no sign of the enemy all the next day. Whether we had hit him so hard that he had to stop to reorganize, as some still think, or whether he had maintenance and supply difficulties, I do not know. Certainly the pursuit was vigorous as far as Fuka where the road was cut. In any case we were left in peace all the 29th, and next morning we moved to positions east of the Kaponga Box. We were in thoroughly good fighting order again.

We were told that Eighth Army would stand and fight on the Alamein line, which ran from the sea to where the Taqa plateau overlooked the impassable Qattara depression, a distance of only twenty miles. There was no fear of being outflanked. We heard that 1 South African Division under Dan Picnaar was holding the Alamein Box in the north and that an Indian brigade was in the Dcir el Shein Box with 50 Division Group in a near position. Then came 2 N.Z. Division and south of us on the Taqa plateau was another Indian brigade. The armour was in support and the leading Australian brigade from Syria had arrived at Amiriya. In addition there were a number of 'Jock' columns, at this time called 'Monthly'¹ columns, between us and the plateau. We made contact with 'June', 'July', and 'August'. They were each composed of a battery of twenty-five-pounders and a company of motorized infantry and, acting independently as they usually did, had little fighting and no stopping value whatever. Nor could we ever find out where they were, which would have been annoying if they had been serious fighting troops. The whole position looked weak but it was reasonable to suppose that the enemy was getting weary and he was certainly at the end of a terrific line of supply.

I sent Alan McPhail to visit the Brigade Group on the

Taqa plateau. He returned to say that they had no water, guns, or orders and did not mean to stay much longer.

Division called me very early on the 29th and said that Inglis had disappeared and I was to come up and take command. I handed over to Sam Allen and went at once. Gentry and I talked things over. He had no idea where Inglis had gone and I decided to see 'Strafer' Gott, the Corps Commander, who was near.

General Gott was in his Armoured Command Vehicle (A.C.V.), the first I had seen. He came out at once and walked a few yards clear of it. 'Inglis has gone to Cairo*', he said, and handed me a letter. It was a short note from General Gorbett, then General Auchinlck's M.G.G.S. I remember very clearly the opening sentence: 'The Chief has decided to save Eighth Army.*' The note then went on to say that the South Africans would retire through Alexandria and the rest of us down the desert road through Cairo.

I asked what was meant by the first sentence. 'It means what it says—he means to save the Field Army,*' the General said. He went on to explain: a general retirement and evacuation of Egypt was in contemplation and Inglis had gone to Cairo to arrange for the evacuation of 2 N.Z.E.F. rear installations and hospitals; he supposed we would go back to New Zealand. I protested that we were perfectly fit to fight and that it was criminal to give up Egypt to 25,000 German troops and a hundred tanks (disregarding the Italians)—the latest Intelligence estimate—and to lose as helpless prisoners perhaps 200,000 Base troops. Strafer replied sadly that N.Z. Division was battle-worthy but very few other people were and he feared the worst.

I returned to Division and told Gentry of this unpleasant conversation. We said nothing to anyone else and were both sorely perplexed and depressed. In the evening a provisional order for our retirement arrived from 13 Corps. It certainly envisaged the abandonment of Egypt.

Inglis returned on the afternoon of the 30th, nothing else of importance having occurred in his absence, and I returned to 5 Brigade. He drew a vivid picture of the confusion he had seen on the Cairo road and of the prodigious 'flap' in

Cairo itself. This was the time of the famous Ash Wednesday when Middle East and B.T.E.¹ were said to have burned many of their records and the Navy left Alexandria in haste. Paddy Costello, later one of our best divisional intelligence officers, was always very upset that the elaborate draft he had prepared for a handbook on the Italian Army was destroyed at this time. We heard all sorts of peculiar and perhaps libellous stories, such as the one that all the reserve store of binoculars had been thrown into Alexandria Harbour, but despite General Gott's warning I do not remember that we were particularly depressed. We thought it too bad to be true.

On 13 July I issued to 5 Brigade Group a summary of the operations of the Division from 26 June onwards. There were ninety copies, it was to be read to all platoons and equivalent sub-units and returned to Brigade Headquarters by midnight on 15 July. As in the meantime we took part in the disastrous attack on Ruweisat Ridge it is probable that few copies were so returned. The composition of the Brigade Group, typical then and for the rest of the African campaigns, is shown by the Distribution List. It was:

21 N.Z. Battalion.

22 N.Z. Battalion.

23 N.Z. Battalion.

6 N.Z. Field Regiment—24 twenty-five-pounders.

33 N.Z. Anti-tank Battery—16 six-pounders.

43 N.Z. Anti-Aircraft Battery—16 Bofors.

7 N.Z. Field Company.

4 N.Z. M.G. Company.

5 N.Z. Field Ambulance,

Signals Section.

Defence Platoon.

The opening paragraph read:

This short survey of the operations to date of 2nd New Zealand Division in the present battle is prepared for the information of all ranks in and attached to 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade. It is not complete and many factors and circumstances are not known to the Brigade Commander.

¹ It was customary to say * Middle East', meaning Middle East Headquarters, and B.T.E., meaning 'Headquarters, British Troops in Egypt*.

It gives an account of this period better than anything I could write after this lapse of time. After dealing with Minqar Qaim and the break-out the summary continues:

June 30th. 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade held Kaponga Box while 4th and 5th Brigades moved to positions east of it. The main enemy advance appeared to be directed along the south of the coastal road.

July 1st. During the day the enemy attacked the Box at Deir El Shein between us and the South Africans at Alamein and stormed it after several hours' fighting. The situation on this day was extremely grave and a further deep retirement seemed inevitable.

July 2nd. However, it was decided to fight on and gun columns were organized by both Brigades and engaged the enemy to the North. In the evening our tanks attacked and though unable to gain decisive success, inflicted loss and reduced the German tanks to 20 or 30 effectives (plus 100 odd Italians).

How important this tank counter-attack really was I do not know but it certainly appeared to check the enemy drive in the centre. At one time in the afternoon we were hopeful of great things, but Corps did not bring us into the battle and the affair ended in noisy but more or less harmless long-range interchanges between the opposing tanks. I went out to watch and was distressed to find several very slightly damaged Crusader tanks making no attempt to get back into the battle. One officer asked me if he should and was disappointed by my emphatic reply.

July 3rd. 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade had an outstanding success when 19th and 20th New Zealand Battalions with 4th and 5th New Zealand Field Regiments working in two columns and with the timely aid of our tanks pushed off the artillery of Ariete Division on and north of Alam Nayil, took 350 prisoners and destroyed 44 guns. Ariete had to be withdrawn. 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade moved quickly west of the Box and struck for the enemy flank at El Mreir. Though it was unable to get on to the whole objective, it would appear that the two operations were decisive in forcing the enemy to abandon his projected attack on the South Africans and re-group his forces.

These were two well-conceived operations and that of

4 Brigade and the two field regiments, controlled by Steve Weir, the C.R.A., was brilliantly executed and most successful. Ariete, the Italian Armoured Division, was crippled by the loss of its guns and never again played any very important part. The enemy was attacked while advancing north of and past the divisional positions with the apparent intention of exploiting the serious gap made by the loss of Deir el Shein and the retirement of our armour after the fighting on the previous day.

I was with the Twentieth watching Steve's attack develop when I was recalled and given verbal orders to move west and south of the Kaponga Box, wheel northwards and seize the El Mrcir depression, three miles north of the box and in rear of the enemy advance. The depression was thought to be unoccupied. In this curious country the occasional depressions, fifty feet deep and more and steep-sided, were tactical features nearly as important as the low ridges which gave the only possible observation. Once ensconced in one troops were very hard to hit or turn out.

We had to move round the box on a single track some seven miles, a distance which barely gave space to get the whole group moving at once. Some carriers led as an advance guard, followed by Brigade Headquarters, the Twenty-first and Twenty-second, the guns, and then the Twenty-third. Progress was slow and erratic owing to patches of heavy sand. About four in the afternoon the head of the column turned right and all filed down the northern side of a ridge three miles south of the depression with open desert and good going ahead. The carriers were nearly two miles ahead and there was no sign of opposition. The guns were miles and hours behind and I decided to go ahead without waiting. The two battalions filed down the track and deployed abreast into desert formation on a mile front. Sam Allen and John Russell stopped with me on the ridge and Brigade Headquarters was set up immediately south of it. We were in plain view from the hummocks that marked the southern edge of the depression but the deployment was completed without interference. About six I told Sam and John to go ahead, one on either side of the track that ran through El

Mreir, with corresponding objectives just beyond the northern lip.

The battalions, the Twenty-first on the right, advanced at a steady pace for half the distance; and then suddenly there were four shell-bursts fairly among the Twenty-second, followed by salvoes from at least twenty guns. The battalions carried on with shells raining down. No trucks seemed to be hit though the fire was really heavy. Both battalions stopped short of the edge of the depression; we could see the infantry scrambling out and advancing and then in the gathering dusk could see no more. I ordered Walter to deploy his guns well forward on the plain, and the Twenty-third, now under Carl Watson, to take up positions covering them with special care for our open left flank, and I then went forward.

It took me some time to find John Russell. The Twenty-second had reached the southern edge of the depression without much loss but the northern edge was strongly held. John had judged it impossible to get on without a set-piece operation and was digging in. He was being heavily shelled and had his headquarters in a very unpleasant place. The Twenty-first had got two companies across and these were clinging on under the northern lip. It was impossible to reinforce them or push on because of heavy machine-gun fire sweeping down the depression from its eastern end. Casualties were not heavy, about thirty in all, but Ron Adams, a very good officer in the Twenty-first, had been killed.

While crawling back in the dark against the stream of troops and guns still coming into position, I decided reluctantly that it was unwise to make a night attack in strange ground with so little time for preparation, and that I would maintain pressure with the two battalions in and look for a flank with the Twenty-third next night.

July 4th, During the day 21st New Zealand Battalion struggled to get across the depression in its front but it met severe opposition from M.G.s difficult to locate and the companies across were unable to get really well established. They were later withdrawn under a smoke screen.

At 2130 hours 23rd New Zealand Battalion with heavy

artillery support attacked across the front of 22nd New Zealand Battalion from West to East. Unfortunately, the enemy were not on the ground mostly shelled and attacked and less damage was inflicted than was hoped. The enemy, PAVIA Div., shelled very heavily but our own total loss was only 17 and that of the enemy about 100.

22nd New Zealand Battalion had a very uncomfortable day and stood a lot of shelling but had small loss.

The gunners had good targets and were engaging them most of the day.

This was a most disappointing day for me. I went up to the Twenty-first early, crawled to the edge of the depression, and formed the opinion that though not comfortable the position could and should be held. I gave Sam authority to call on the guns direct, an unwise thing to do when there were reasonable communications and other units concerned, and went on to the Twenty-third to prepare a plot for its night affair. When I returned to Brigade some hours later I learned that the Twenty-first had called down a smoke screen and withdrawn its forward companies. This had to be accepted with so good and gallant a commander but I was unhappy about it.

The attack by the Twenty-third was even more disappointing. A daring carrier reconnaissance in the morning had discovered that the enemy right flank rested on the northern lip of the depression opposite our own left. I gave verbal orders to the Twenty-third to move by truck well out to the west, cross the depression, wheel right and sweep down the enemy position parallel with our own as far as the well-marked road and then return along the road. 6 Field Regiment was to fire a barrage working from west to east, parallel with our front, starting at 9.30 p.m. It was probably an over-elaborate plan and there was little time for preparation.

In the event the Twenty-third did not use its trucks, and so was late, and for some reason did not cross the depression but moved along the floor of it. Fortunately the Italian defensive fire was mostly too high or was directed on the Twenty-second and the battalion moved under it with slight

casualties. Near the road Peter Norris's company struck and destroyed a big Italian outpost but that was about all the damage done.

I went up with John Russell to the Twenty-second forward post by the road. When our artillery opened Italian defensive fire came down on us and we had a highly unpleasant time for half an hour. I went on to the road and met the troops coming in, a good many rather rattled, but Peter Norris's company in perfect order. Peter was a gallant little officer whom I well remembered from parties and dances in pre-war days, and he was one of those fortunate few with the knack of always doing the right thing on a battlefield.

On the way back we ran into a slit trench and crushed a man lying in it. Ross and I, both rather shaken, got him into the car with difficulty, and left him at a Field Ambulance. Long afterwards we were sad to hear that he had died. We took two prisoners only in this affair, but they gave us the important identification of the newly arrived Pavia Division which had come down in great haste from the coastal sector. It was some satisfaction that our move had produced a violent reaction and so must have affected the enemy plan.

During the day the Stukas were active and Divisional Headquarters and the Reserve Group had some nasty bombing raids. The Brigade B. Echelon transport was also severely bombed.

July 5th. This was another day of shelling and 5th Brigade Headquarters and B. Echelon were severely bombed and strafed with some thirty casualties.

During the day it became evident that the enemy were in their turn reaching round our western flank and 4th Brigade came into position SW. of 5th Brigade. It was bombed en route and Col. J. R. Gray of 18th Battalion was killed and there were some thirty other casualties.

During the morning there were constant reports of enemy M.T. movements on our open western flank and some of infantry debussing there. One alarming message spoke

of a line of infantry nine miles long! When this was checked it proved to be 'nine miles away*.

4 Brigade, now under John Gray, who was senior to **Jim** Burrows, moved round behind us and came into position on the ridge ccheloned behind our left flank. On the way it was attacked by some thirty Stukas. I saw the attack while with the Twenty-first and shortly afterwards Monty rang and said that he had heard that John Gray had been killed. I refused to believe it and told him to check up. Shortly afterwards he rang again: it was true enough, worse in fact than the first report—Brian Bassett had been killed with John, and Dick Chesterman and Mike Maloney as well, both of whom had been on my headquarters before going to the Maoris. Jim Burrows had resumed command. It was a sad blow. Sam Allen, for whom time was also running short, sat quietly for a while and then said: 'It's a good death.'

We had our turn about midday. I returned from a round of the battalions and was angry to see a dozen trucks clustered round the command truck, a carelessness to which our numerous visitors were always prone unless carefully controlled. I spoke sharply and they dispersed. It was stiflingly hot and I lay down for a short rest in the shade of some waterproof sheets that Joe had rigged from the bonnet of the car. There were enemy planes about but none appeared dangerous to us. Suddenly there was the terrifying scream of planes diving directly on us out of the sun and almost simultaneously the howl of their bombs and the racketing thunder of their guns. I rolled two yards in an instant and fell into a slit trench on top of Ross. Simultaneously we heard glass and wood splintering as the car got a direct burst and then the roar of exploding bombs. It was all over in a few seconds. I got up, apologized inanely to Ross, and we surveyed the damage. It was not very much, the car wind-shield and the waterproofs were riddled and the clothes in the back were burning but the engine was undamaged. The command truck was damaged and an L.O. was slightly wounded; but thanks to the dispersal and good luck no other harm was done*

July 6th. Small patrols from 22nd and 33rd New Zealand Battalions did good work in the evening and killed a number of Italians but took no prisoners.

This was a really quiet day and to fill in time I noted in my Field Service Message Book every slight event as it occurred. The day's notes give an idea of a quiet day at that period,

0650. Woke after peaceful night and instantly remembered that John Gray, Brian Bassett, and Dick Chestennan had been killed yesterday. All good friends and true soldiers. Joe brought a cup of tea. Slept on valise on ground by car.

0700. Tank fire in NE. surprisingly close. Went on to ridge but could see nothing in morning haze. No reports from Battalions. Our guns shooting quietly, harassing fire.

0730. Finished shaving and dressed in clean shirt and shorts. Joe remarked that one didn't often see Wogs on a battlefield. One has just gone to command truck.

0800. Walked 500 yards across wadi to breakfast. Found Wog was Major Danvers of Indian Cavalry, escaped and walked in from Daba. Fed him and then took him to my car, gave him water to wash and a clean shirt and shorts. Very flea-bitten. McPhail got his story and some information and Good took him on to Division.

0900. 5th Brigade guns shooting steadily. Little return fire. 4th Brigade guns to SW. shooting occasionally. Tank fight, not big, going on spasmodically to NE.

Am sitting in command truck, tidied up after yesterday. McPhail slowly posting up information on map. Have to get used to his deliberate ways. Fairbrother calling up units in turn, all had a quiet night.

0905. Have just told Monty to call on Battalions for strengths, personnel, carriers, and mortars.

0909. A stuttering officer from B. Coy. 25th in the Box arrives, very surprised and relieved to find us here. Wants 'some dope from the platoon point of view as to which is which of the bangs we can hear'. Monty is trying to explain.

Shelling is still going on. Breakfast was tinned sausages, onions, and tea. Bit hard but held on to it and am fitter than at start of battle.

0924. Arrived at O.P. Sharp tank fire to NE. at intervals.

Medium guas in fortress shelling targets 15,000 yards to NW.

My guns various targets to N. Day getting hotter and thick haze. Am running with sweat already but flies not so bad here.

0931. Firing to NE. renewed but not so intense. From O.P. on cliff can see NE. and W. round 180°. Stony desert. Horizon in haze . . . two miles ahead 5th Brigade vehicles sitting quietly. Occasional gun-flashes and white explosion splashes of shells.

0936. Off go the tanks again, hard. Area ahead of 21st Battalion being shelled. Must be our O.P.s or carriers. Now lifting on to right of 21st, four guns.

0940. Shelling increasing and now over 21st on open ground. One dud.

0942. Salvo of three, five hundred yards ahead.

0944. Salvo of four, three hundred yards ahead. All from North in open ground.

0946. Enemy shelling stopped. Mediums now shooting to NE. Visibility improving and several groups of enemy MT visible at various points in distance.

1000. Sudden heavy shelling of 21st from NE. Our guns replying.

1005. Stopped on us. Still heavy to NE. Six Kittyhawks passing.

1009. Kittyhawks strafing about six miles to N\W. Heavy enemy AA. Started fourth pipe.

1030. All quiet. Matches finished. Returning to command truck.

Returned to command truck, Maoris and 20th coming up on our left later. Dick Chesterman jumped out of his truck right into a bomb burst yesterday. McPhail still pottering with his maps and Monty getting sarcastic.

1050. 23rd rang to say their carriers were being shelled by our guns. Monty rings 4th Brigade, the culprits, and tells them to stop.

1051. McPhail says 'It's hot*.

1059. McPhail says 'We've been fooled the greater part of our lives.' No answers.

1100. Dasler says 50 Div. has one Brigade only. All just sitting flicking at flies. McPhail still playing with maps.

1101. 22nd report one three-ton truck destroyed in shelling last night.

1109. 6th Pipe. Matches pure phosphorus.

1115. Have three mouthfuls of tea and sweat it out at once. Discussions on shortage of talc.

1120. Warned for conference at Divisional Headquarters at 1200.

1125. Arty L.O. arrives and he and McPhail discussing location of O.P.s.

1135. Strengths in:

	<i>Men.</i>	<i>Mortars.</i>	<i>Carriers.</i>
2 1st Battalion	500	4	5
22nd Battalion	540	4	12
23rd Battalion	616	5	13

1240. Back from Conference. Present—Inglis, Burrows, Hansen (C.R.E.), Weir, Clifton, Agar (Div.Sigs.), Gentry, myself. Inglis showed situation map and Corps plan to break through opposite our left. Doesn't look real. Role today, harass and make ground if possible.

Jim told me ill news that my nice little cousin Derek Paterson was killed by the same bomb that got Gray and Bassett. He had a very near shave himself.

1242. 22nd report raises of heat-stroke and exhaustion.

Monty and I in truck with many Hies. Others gone to lunch, ours coming over.

1246. Officer of XIII Corps called asking way to Division. Nine Bostons going east.

1315. Had lunch. Salmon, tinned potatoes, and peaches. Twenty fighters strafing enemy on our front. Jim Watt called to enquire position.

1325. Hotter than ever. Not a sound. Many flies which Fin tackling with swatter.

1330. Eighth pipe.

1340. Everyone back from lunch. Discussion on prospects and reason for absence of air attacks today.

1420. Albert Cooper (4th M.G. Coy.) called. Says he should change his clothes, has to keep upwind of himself.

Staff Captain Dugleby called. Desultory conversation. Told him that he must not tell men they need not shave, on the contrary.

9th pipe. Hotter than ever.

1425. A little shelling. Can hear planes. Everyone looking for them. Have dropped four bombs on our guns.

1435. Have returned to ground sheet shelter to change into lighter footwear.

1450. Clouding over and a lot cooler. Going to visit battalions.

1730. Returned. Men dusty and thirsty but in good heart.

Arranged raids with Walter and Russell. 22nd to raid feature at 863280 this evening. One platoon. Silent. Guns standing by to deal with any retaliation.

23rd to reconnoitre crossings over Deir el Qatani during night.

22nd to raid depression about bend in road at 867277 tomorrow similar lines.

Both cloak and dagger affairs, socks over boots, grenades, tommy guns, and bayonets.

1731. Message that 1st Armoured Div. attacking from East this evening and expect to reach 880 grid with exploitation in the morning. 5th and 6th Field Regiments to co-operate. New Zealand Division to exploit success tomorrow. Fanciful.

1745. 5th Field Regiment coming in. Hope they don't stop in ou* wadi.

1815. Gentry just gone. We have only 45 Grants and 100 tanks in the army. Getting cooler.

4th Brigade may do attack tonight. Talked Bill Gentry out of idea of making it too complicated.

1835. Have had tin of lukewarm beer. 5th and 6th Field Regiments have opened their three-hour bombardment to help 1st Armoured Division. Wind and dust make visibility poor and they are shooting by map. 5th Field hasn't been able to register. Show doesn't look very hopeful. Feel certain tanks won't attack in dark whatever Corps may order.

9th Australian Division has two Brigades up and is in reserve and all its guns up.

1900. Dinner. Bully beef hash, onions, and peaches, also a spot of Curacao from remnants of our stock.

At O.P. Can see very little so talking to men.

1920-2300. In command truck. No need really but everyone talkative. Annoyed with 21st Adjutant because! neither he nor Sam was near their 'phone.

2305. Bed. Almost immediately up to check some drivers. They were halted on ridge above me when there were some near explosions, and they dispersed in a panicky way.

Both raids **were** successful, except that each left a man missing.

The Twenty-second's party went 1,700 yards and came on about thirty trucks parked close together with about a hundred men standing about. When challenged the party lay flat and made no reply. They worked round behind the

trucks and then charged in line right through the crowd, shooting, bayoneting, and bombing, and straight home. They lost one missing and one wounded and reckoned they hit at least thirty. The Twenty-third's party destroyed a truck and killed four Germans including an officer who would not surrender, and took one wounded German prisoner. They lost one missing and three wounded.

We heard nothing of any particular results from 1 Armoured Division's attack and suspected that it was not very resolutely pushed. This was before the time of the carefully prepared Montgomery battle with everyone thoroughly prepared and schooled for his share and success practically a certainty before the start.

4 Brigade put in its attack that night but found no enemy.

July 7th. 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade moved forward to west of and level with 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade but, in the afternoon, were threatened by a heavy force with tanks still farther to the west and withdrew in one bound to their previous positions. This left 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade's left flank exposed; there were several bickerings with enemy Armoured Cars, a good deal of shelling was sustained, and there was some anxiety. Overnight both Brigades withdrew to east of Kaponga Box and went into positions there, 5th Brigade next to the Box. This was a difficult move, many vehicles getting stuck in the sand and all had a restless night.

The outcome of these manoeuvres was therefore that our attempt to outflank Rommel and strike for Daba had failed and the enemy in turn was going for our southern flank.

Despite this, the time gained must have been invaluable. 9th Australian Division got up and the armour has received reinforcements.

It is correct to say there was some anxiety. I was feeling very comfortable with 4 Brigade up on my flank when they made the most sudden movement back I have ever seen. Before long Jim came over to explain, bringing some tinned beer as a peace offering. Division had decided that he was about to be rolled up and ordered him to move back instantly, which is just what he did. The messages reporting the move and its reasons arrived very shortly after it started.

Until sunset I expected that the enemy would attack with

the sun behind him and I made what dispositions I could. The Twenty-first and Twenty-second could not be moved in daylight and were in a delicate position* We were really heavily shelled but the anti-tank guns of the Twenty-third, boldly handled by Herbie Black, kept the armoured cars at a distance and even knocked one out. Without his usual reconnaissance the enemy would not attack and so we reached darkness in safety.

The night move was horrible. Every truck in the Brigade must have stuck in sand several times. It was not until well after daylight that the units were in their new positions and it was a good performance to be in so soon.

July 8th. Once more, everyone settled down to dig positions, the enemy closed up in our front but the day was comparatively quiet.

The night was marked by another night move which put the Division in a sounder position. 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade's front was long and the southern side could only be thinly held by 21st Battalion.

At least, I suppose it was a sounder position. It puzzled me considerably to decide how to hold it and we finished with 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ battalions facing north, half a battalion west, and one battalion south and other arms correspondingly disposed. The move, in the deep sand of the Deir Alinda, was exceedingly difficult and as usual Brigade Headquarters got lost for a while. Alan McPhail, on whom fell the duty of guiding us, was always careful and reliable and faultlessly gallant, but he had a bad habit. When he became uncertain of the route he would disappear without warning to look for some landmark, a cairn or such like, that only he knew about. An hour later it would become clear that he had got lost himself, the only clear thing in the situation, and Monty and I would go grumblingly and profanely on, according to our own inspirations. We never evolved a better method than this in Alan's time as I.O.

July 9th. Morning spent in digging again. Enemy stormed the box in good style but came no nearer. A patrol from 21st Battalion at night destroyed the crew of an Italian gun.

We understood that Italians carried out the capture of the box. If they did it was a very good show and the fact that there was no opposition hardly detracted from the merit of the performance. I watched with appreciation from one of 22 Battalion's section posts: some air bombing, then a violent artillery concentration on a selected sector, and amid smoke and dust armoured cars, tanks, and trucks advanced rapidly, infantry debussed and ran forward, sappers picked up mines, the infantry assaulted, and all was over. If they were Italians they must have known the place was empty before they took it on. It was all very pretty and I was sorry someone was not there to deal with it properly.

The Twenty-first raid was extremely well planned and executed. Bob Horrocks, later killed on the Sangro, who commanded, was awarded an M.C., but it remains in my memory principally because of Sam Allen's model report. Nothing better could have been produced at any school of instruction. We showed copies to the other battalions and begged them to emulate it.

July 10th. A stormy day for 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade with the enemy closing in on three sides and a great deal of shelling by both parties. In the evening an enemy column pushed swiftly past our southern flank, between us and the Taqa Plateau and just before dark a small attack was checked by 21st Battalion's left company.

The position was again untenable, however, and (during the night 5th Brigade leapfrogged through 4th Brigade and once more took up and prepared positions, this time facing north only.

The enemy put in a serious attack on 21st Battalion's empty position, witnessed only by one man who had overslept in a slit trench, and quite spectacular and successful.

This was a thoroughly harassing day. We were constantly warned by Division that we were about to be attacked and, with reports of enemy movement continually coming in from all three sides of the position, I was puzzled which way to look.

By this time the enemy were in possession of the Taqa plateau, which rose sharply three miles to the south. Possibly the waterless Brigade Group that Alan had found in the

vicinity had gone off for a drink; anyway, the plateau had been given up without fighting. Some of our 'Monthly' columns were out south of us; they used to come in to our lines at night for a rest and then be very upset because we invariably moved. During the day there was always a certain amount of desultory shelling in the area and we heard of attacks to retake Taqa and more often of intentions to attack.

Apparently the Germans got tired of the situation; for this afternoon a column of armoured cars, guns, and lorries made a sudden, swift advance along the foot of the plateau driving due east. Everyone fired at them but they drove on through the shell-bursts unhurt and in the most gallant style. The 'Monthly' column concerned could do nothing but fall back rapidly. My guns were all sited to shoot to the north but some turned round and joined in. Still the column pushed on. I got a platoon of machine-gunners on trucks, ran out with them and opened with all four guns at 'rapid' rate at 3,000 yards. We must have got hits but the Germans unlimbcred some field guns and before we could knock out the crews they had picked us up, got the range, and started point-blank fire for effect. It was no use staying and we scuttled back to shelter with great celerity. The gunners then shifted on to my headquarters which was rather exposed from the south and when I arrived back the place was fairly sizzling with bursting shells. Everyone kept cool, however, and we moved to shelter behind a nice big sand-hill with no one hurt. Then the Germans thought they had gone far enough, stopped, and settled down. Soon it was dark.

This was a most noisy and spectacular affair, and also quite harmless so far as I could see or hear. The attack on the left company of the 21st was probably nothing more than a patrol.

Still, as the brigade position was now decidedly uncomfortable, during the night we moved again, through 4 Brigade, and went into position facing north. At dawn next morning 21 Battalion's empty position was stormed. The enemy command must have thought us confoundedly elusive. The solitary soldier who had remained there arrived back very

indignant with everyone concerned, his mates who had for* gotten him and the enemy for having so violently attacked him, and gave us a vivid account of the transaction.

The night move was as difficult as ever and, as often, Brigade Headquarters got lost and was late settling in; but our drivers were really very good and in this awkward, complicated country the guiding was actually astonishingly accurate. By morning all was forgiven as usual and equally as usual the men were digging away in their correct positions.

12. Ruweisat

July 11th. By this time our armour was ready for action again and during the morning it swept west across the front of our positions and cleared the Alam Nayil Ridge.

It was hoped to get our infantry on to the Ruweisat Ridge by a night attack. At 1700 hours both brigades moved north in their lorries, debussed, and advanced to the intended assembly position. Heavy artillery fire was encountered and 23rd Battalion had twenty casualties.

Preparations were made for a night attack on the Ridge but cancelled.

In an astonishing way we now ceased entirely to worry about affairs to the south. We faced north and thought only of Ruweisat Ridge eight miles away. Inglis had sent the Divisional Cavalry to help June', 'July', and 'August', and we left the matter to them. Ruweisat Ridge, a long, bare, narrow ridge of an average height of 180 feet, ran east and west into the centre of the army position and gave enough command to make it of great tactical importance. Apparently Corps thought we might seize it by something in the nature of a *coup de main*.

During that morning of 11 July the armour cleared the Alam Nayil Ridge parallel with and seven miles south of Ruweisat and sat there among the Ariete Division's abandoned guns. The plan was a daring one and looked well on paper, or rather on the map, for there were no written orders. It was asking a great deal of the infantry. Two brigades were to move in trucks two and a half miles under fire to an assembly position, easily marked on the map but not so easily located on the ground. Then they were to form up and make a night attack without artillery support on an objective five miles distant. There was no time for co-ordination with the armour, through which we were advancing at right angles to the way it was

looking and thinking. To be sure, until Montgomery's time there was little thought of co-ordination with the armour or little result of whatever thought there was, but there was no time even to attempt it. There was no time to do any proper reconnaissance—or any at all for that matter—to circulate orders, to let the men know what they had to do. I spoke to several company officers during the advance and found that they had not the faintest idea of the intention. There was no time to make proper arrangements for bringing up anti-tank guns or clearing and marking any minefields we might encounter or ensuring artillery support in the morning. In fact these matters were not very clearly thought about by anybody in those days. The whole operation was typical of Eighth Army's methods and ideas while it was dominated by what I heard one very senior officer describe as 'the vested interests of the British cavalry'.

We set off in desert formation at 5 p.m., looking very impressive, passed through the tanks who seemed very surprised to see us, and came under heavy artillery fire. Parts of the Twenty-third on my left and the Maoris on Jim's right had lost direction a little and were mixed up and thickly bunched. The fire was heaviest on this target but heavy all along the front, the enemy gunners thoroughly roused and with the target of their lives. Several trucks were hit and there were many casualties but we trundled steadily on for another mile. A mile from the assembly position both brigades halted and debussed. The men shook out into long, extended lines and went forward steadily and unflinchingly. It was an archaic sort of movement but it was beautifully done and a fine thing to watch. We did not have a single gun in action; the enemy gunners, unmolested, switched on to the infantry and fired their fastest; but the men kept their seven paces intervals, never wavered, and trudged on line after line through the spouting bursts. From where I halted, ahead of the transport among some enthusiastic tank officers, I could see the whole of 5 Brigade and most of 4 Brigade. The advance went on steadily, disappeared into the wadi in which we were to assemble for the real attack, and halted.

The anti-tank guns went forward and after a quick visit to the battalions, who were busily digging once more, I returned to my headquarters, now established where the transport had stopped. There I heard with unfeigned relief that the projected attack was cancelled.

Darkness, an unusually dark night, came on before we had all the wounded in. It was quite dark when a stretcher party stopped by the command truck and asked for the Maori R.A.P. We gave the direction of the nearest dressing station. 'We've got the Colonel here', one of the bearers said. I went out and found it was Tui Love, the gallant commander of the Maoris, desperately wounded. I spoke to him and thought he recognized me, but he died very soon. 5 Brigade had about forty casualties in this move which could have been made in the dark without loss.

We sent out patrols during the night. They all made contact and reported big parties of Italians thought to be laying mines. Everyone was now very tired, but not yet exhausted, and the hardest times were still ahead.

July 12th. The day was spent on the position reached in this advance, again under heavy shelling at times, mainly on 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade and again the projected night attack was cancelled. Patrols found many indications that the enemy was consolidating solidly on our front.

One of these patrols was an unintentional one by Angus Ross, one of the Brigade L.O.s. He went astray in his jeep somehow and was challenged by four Italians who then approached him incautiously. He shot them all with his revolver in a most efficient fashion and returned very pleased with himself.

During the morning Charlie Mason, 23 Battalion carrier officer, went off alone in his carrier and by evening had not returned. The battalion was very worried about him and searched earnestly all day.

Inglis came up and had a look at the forward positions. He quite properly pointed out that the Twenty-second, which had dug in where it had halted, was very much crowded. This was straightened out and with a somewhat

guilty conscience I spent most of the day going round tinkering with everybody's layout and, no doubt, making a great nuisance of myself.

Our night patrols found big enemy working parties laying mines and shot up some of them. These were British mines lifted from the boxes we had so laboriously prepared at Bagush and the Naghamish Wadi in the previous year. They contained a high percentage of duds and infantry could walk over them with reasonable safety, though it gave one a tender-footed feeling to do so, and occasionally a man was lost.

We had a conference about the projected attack and heard with some scepticism that when we had taken the ridge our tanks would go through and exploit. I do not think anyone then realized how much training and care and forethought are required to get good co-operation between infantry and tanks. We merely cursed one another when it was not achieved. Nor was the problem of command dealt with: the tank brigadiers naturally and emphatically intended to keep their regiments under their own command and to act merely 'in support'. In the absence of any clear direction from Army they had to be left with their way. We knew there were minefields to be passed but I do not remember any particular plan for clearing and marking gaps: at least there is no mention of the matter in 5 Brigade Orders. Fortunately the Italians had left some gaps on their own initiative and had also gone to the trouble of marking them.

We asked for air photographs but none were available and, though the request was repeated again and again, none were taken. So we knew very little indeed of what was in front of us. There was a disturbing suspicion that one of the Panzer Divisions was south of the ridge; if it was, then there was nothing to be done but go through it and hope that our tanks would be up in time to deal with it. We heard that 4 Indian Division, advancing on a converging bearing, would be on our right, but there was no more liaison with the Indians than with the tanks. The affair was a Corps attack delivered by one armoured and two infantry divisions, but there was no Corps conference for lower than divisional

commanders and none of us had much idea what the other divisions were to do.

Code word for **the** operation was 'Bacon'. **Gentry rang in the** afternoon and said 'Bacon is off'.

We sent out patrols again that night. Again **they** reported **large** working parties and some successful shoots. Ominously, they also reported what they thought were German tank tracks.

Next morning I issued my summary. The final entry ran:

July 13th. Much valuable time has been gained. Our tanks and infantry forces are stronger and better organized than a fortnight ago. N.Z. Division has had 1069 casualties in the seventeen days, 500 in 4th N.Z. Infantry Brigade, 347 in 5th N.Z. Infantry Brigade. It has inflicted many more and has played a vital part in stopping the enemy onrush into Kgypt.

This claim still appears to be justified. There was no sign of Charlie Mason during the day and we gave up hope. There was an unpleasant amount of shelling, again mostly on 4 Brigade, who reported a number of casualties. I had a lucky escape, being left untouched by a small shell which burst two yards away. We went ahead with our preparations but again in the afternoon Gentry rang and said ⁴'Bacon is off*.

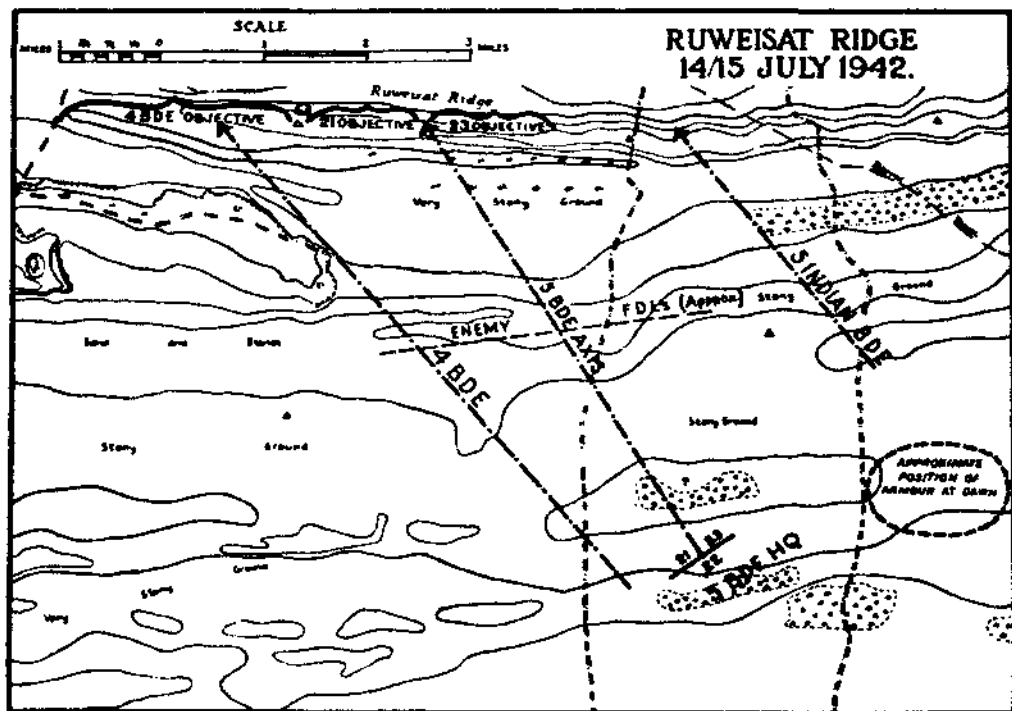
The final conference was held at Divisional Headquarters at 10 a.m. on the 14th. The task of 5 Brigade was vividly defined as 'to attack and capture Ruweisat Ridge from 880278 to excl. pt. 63, 876279'. This entailed an advance of nearly six miles and the seizure of the ridge on a front of 4,000 yards. On our left 4 Brigade was to advance alongside us and take the western portion of the ridge. 5 Indian Brigade was responsible for the balance of the ridge east of our right boundary. Its advance was begun from well out on our right and we saw nothing of it during the night. 1 Armoured Division was to secure the division's left flank in event of an advance from first light on the 15th; but 5 Brigade was warned that it must clear a suspected minefield about Point 63 (on the ridge) to permit exploitation by the armour **at first light.** As we broke up Inglis repeated this warning to **me emphatically.** I do **not remember that any representative**

of the armour or of the Indians was present and was not aware of any arrangement made for liaison with them.

As to the enemy, we knew that their positions were in depth, extending to three miles south of the ridge, that minefields had been or were being prepared, that they had at least thirty-six field-guns south of the ridge, and that there were almost certainly some tanks. We were confident of victory in this battle, in which New Zealand Division performed one of its finest feats of arms and gained a magnificent success, yet which ended in disaster and bitter disappointment.

The Brigade conference was held an hour later. I gave verbal orders which were later confirmed in writing. With about 850 rifles available in the three battalions for the assault I had to take an objective 4,000 yards in length. It was accordingly impossible to sweep all the ground during the advance even though we would approach the ridge from an angle. I decided to drive through on a 1,000 yard front with two battalions, accepting the certainty that pockets of resistance would be left on the flanks of their advance, and to keep one battalion in reserve to deal with difficulties as they occurred. 4 Brigade and the Indians did much the same; we were not in touch on the start-line and the assault was, as a result, made by three separated brigade columns. We sorely missed the companies which had been sent back to Maadi.

My plan was to attack with two battalions forward, Twenty-third on right, Twenty-first on left, on a frontage of 1,000 yards. The Twenty-second, with one company deployed on a wide front as moppers-up, and the other two in close formation, was to follow at 1,500 yards' distance. Twelve six-pounders and the twenty-four two-pounders of the three battalions were to move with and immediately behind the Twenty-second. Their dispositions on the objective could not be decided until daylight, that of the six-pounders was the responsibility of the anti-tank battery commander, the two-pounders would take the first opportunity of joining their own battalions after daylight. One troop of four six-pounders was allotted to Brigade Headquarters, which followed the reserve battalion at a short interval in its vehicles. First-line



MAP 8

transport, the vehicles carrying mortars, &c, of the three battalions, the carriers, and the machine-gun company in its trucks, were grouped and followed Brigade Headquarters. 6 Field Regiment was ordered to step up its guns and be prepared to give supporting fire at first light. I am sorry to note that no task was given to the sappers.

Other details given were the start-time, 11 p.m.; the start-line, a line of green lights laid by McPhail on a bearing of 230° from a map-reference point; the axis of advance, 320° from the centre of the start-line; the rate of advance, two miles in the hour; and the location of Brigade Headquarters after capture of the objective, a Point 66, on some rising ground 2,000 yards south of the ridge. The axis of advance was to be marked by lamps placed by the provost section after Brigade Headquarters had passed through; tools and one day's water and rations were to be carried by the men; the password was 'Speights*' (a popular New Zealand beer); and success signals were laid down, one or two red flares at five-minute intervals. The signals officer produced an intricate signals plan which I could not understand and unwisely accepted.

After the conference, at which there were no questions at all, John Russell came to me in some distress and said that his feet, always troublesome, had cracked up and he could not go into the attack. If John said he could not there was nothing more to be said and he departed to hospital forthwith. Sid Han ton, his senior company commander, took over for the battle.

Preparations went ahead all day but after three cancellations there was a feeling of uncertainty and, when 'Bacon is on*' came through at 5 p.m., everyone was a little behind time. There was then a terrific scurry, and people were warned in great haste: 'The show is on.' I found that the signals arrangements were particularly behindhand. The divisional phone line which was to be tied to a line trailed out by us as we advanced had not arrived and never did arrive. Divisional Signals had been given a rendezvous and had accepted an eight-figure map reference instead of a guide, which does not always do in the desert. Theoretically, no doubt, it was

Division's business to lay to us, so my signals officer had an easy conscience; but I had no communication with Division, except by a No* 9 wireless set carried in a van and quite certain to stick in the first patch of sand.

During the day my signals, on their own initiative, had laid a line to the nearest armoured brigade, which we surmised was the one that would pass through us. I now at the last moment decided to go off and see the Brigadier. It was infuriating to find that some idiot on Division had ordered this line to be taken up and that this had been done without reference to Monty or me. There was no certainty of finding the Brigadier quickly in the gathering dusk without this line to follow and the idea had to be dropped. I should, of course, have gone earlier and perhaps he should have come to see me.

At last light we found that the Twenty-first had ordered all its tools to be loaded in the platoon trucks and my last words with Sam were to order him to cancel this and carry tools on the man.

The anti-tank guns that were to move behind the Twenty-second, thirty-six of them all told, inexcusably failed to find that battalion and in the end most of them joined the transport behind Brigade Headquarters while some got hopelessly lost. This was the most disastrous of all our mishaps.

We made our final preparations, put on clean clothes, filled water bottles, loaded revolvers, wrote short notes home and had a late meal, with the feeling of tension usual just before battle. While the Brigade transport was forming up, Alan McPhail, who was to guide us to the start-line, went off to find his green lights. He got lost. He had asked Monty to flash a torch in five minutes for him to return on, but he mistook gun flashes (our guns were firing a few concentrations) for the torch flicker and he did not find us for many hours.

Odd things always go wrong in the preparations for a battle and the only course is to be patient, correct them as far as possible, and remember them for future reference. More than usual went wrong in the preparations for this unlucky battle.

We waited more or less resignedly for Alan and then moved to the start-line without him. The Twenty-first and

Twenty-third, whom I had wanted to see off, had moved. The Twenty-second was resting, waiting twenty minutes before its time to move. Monty and I walked along the line, always a poignant experience before an assault. The men were quiet, those I spoke to cheerful and resolute. Most were veterans, for the Twenty-second had had much fighting without ever being involved in a disaster. All three battalions had some reinforcements who had arrived during the afternoon.

The battalion stood up, there was a jingle and rustle of equipment, and then it moved silently forward, heartcningly orderly and resolute-looking. We waited ten minutes and then moved, a solid mass of cars, trucks, carriers, porttes, wireless vans, at less than walking pace, Monty leading with my car immediately behind him.

Forty minutes after we had started, at ten minutes after midnight, fighting flared up on the Twenty-third front. A moment later it had spread to the Twenty-first, tracer criss-crossing as the Italians fired on their fixed lines, a steady chatter of automatics, crunching of mortars, and, as the infantry closed, the coughing of grenades and sometimes faint, distant yells. The enemy guns opened, apparently not on any set defensive task but spraying the desert with many shells failing close to us. At about the same time we could see the tracer on 4 Brigade front and could hear the noise of its battle opening. From now on until 4 a.m. fighting was continuous but the advance was never checked.

We followed very slowly with frequent halts. Once on the right there was a check and for twenty minutes a dazzling display of fireworks where some group of posts was fighting it out. But the infantry this night were inspired, there was suddenly silence and blackness where the sparks had been flying and the advance went remorselessly *on*. Post after post collapsed but there seemed to be no end to the resistance. I wondered how long the men's high endurance would last but no call for help came back and the Twenty-second was never called on.

Communications broke down almost at once. The line from Division did not arrive and I understood the signals

officer had gone to find it; at any rate he disappeared. The No. 9 set very early stayed in some sand as expected. Monty had in his car a No. 18 set to the battalions which worked well for a while. We had regular communication with the Twenty-second who said at intervals that fighting was going on ahead, that they were advancing steadily, getting some fire but no fighting. For a while we occasionally got the Twenty-third but before long lost all touch. There was complete contact with the Twenty-first, until to his consternation Monty discovered that the battalion's operator had gone to ground, had lost touch with Battalion Headquarters, didn't know where he was or where to go. He was, in fact, behind us. Monty conducted over the blower a short, sharp (very sharp) lesson on how to find the north star but it was useless. So we heard no more from the forward battalions.

Quite early I went up in a 22 Battalion carrier to the Twenty-second. I found it steadily plodding on in good order, but paying no attention to its job of mopping up. I told Sid Hanton to attend to it. Most of the way Monty and I walked ahead of the headquarters group with a mass of vehicles following us. Once we came on tank tracks. *These are fresh/ Monty said. I thought of Crusoe and the footprint.

Somewhere about 4 o'clock we arrived at what we decided was Point 66 and halted. It was still dark. There were many dead and wounded Italians about, the wounded moaning pitifully but vainly. Monty and I stood for a moment and looked at one dead New Zealander, a mere youngster, lying half curled up and peaceful as a child asleep. Firing had died down. One of the L.O.s said the Twenty-second was halted close ahead. I sent him forward with an order to move forward and consolidate on the ridge, in rear of the leading battalions, who by the absence of fire appeared to have reached their objective, though no message had come back from them. I lay down for perhaps a minute. Then fire broke out again, coming from several directions and passing over our heads. Assuming that it came from posts that had been missed I sent the brigade defence platoon to mop up the nearest, on our right.

Then I decided to go forward to the battalions while headquarters was being set up and these posts disposed of. I travelled in the 22 Battalion carrier and took with me two LuO.s and the troop of six-pounders which had been attached to Brigade Headquarters under Mick Ollivier. Almost at once we came under heavy fire, disconcertingly heavy, I thought that the Twenty-second had not mopped up very cleanly, but the fire was high and with several narrow escapes we pushed on and to my delight soon came on the Twenty-second, halted in close order immediately south of the ridge and exactly where and how I wanted it. This was at 440 a.m. with the first streaks of dawn appearing and the light growing each minute.

I told Sid Hanton to get deployed quickly and pointed out to him roughly the areas to hold. I also told him to send a platoon back to deal with the posts that had shot at me and which were now firing towards the rear of the battalion. A hundred yards ahead I found 23 Battalion Headquarters. Carl Watson had gone forward but someone told me that the battalion was on its objective 700 yards to the north. I decided not to wait to look for the Twenty-first from whose direction a long column of prisoners was winding south, but to go back and hurry forward the anti-tank guns which I had expected to find with the Twenty-second. We went back through the Twenty-second which was breaking out from its close formation.

I felt very pleased with the situation, though quite reluctant to pass again through the surprisingly heavy fire that continued south of the ridge. I stopped for an instant to speak to McLernon, I.O. of the Twenty-second. The L.O.s, Ross and Carnachan, sprinted ahead in their jeeps. We followed and within a chain a solid shot screeched overhead in a streak of flame. I poked my head up and to my horror saw in the half-light five tanks, 300 yards away, heading towards us and all shooting hard, spitting flame like dragons. Poor Twenty-second! I told my driver to bear half right and step on it: the only hope was to get out and find our own tanks. 'O.K. but I can only do twelve miles an hour/ he said. I sat down low beside him and thought how difficult

the war was getting. Streams of fire passed two feet overhead and every instant I expected the knock-out. After a few yards I looked over the side again and there to the right were three more tanks, a hundred yards away and also firing furiously. We turned left and under a sheet of tracer ran safely through the gap of perhaps 200 yards between the two groups. Too late one of the tank gunners corrected his elevation and the last shot fired at us covered us with a shower of sand. Both L.O.s got through, though Angus's jeep was hit and he had to walk, which must have presented some difficulties.

I stopped a few hundred yards on and looked back. Mick Ollivier's six-pounders were putting up a superb fight from their portecs. One tank was blazing, but a dozen more were in action and the six-pounders couldn't last long. I turned and ran on, praying that by some miracle our tanks might be near enough to save the situation. We passed groups of prisoners hurrying back and met Ray Lynch, C O. of the Eighteenth, looking very worried. He asked me if I had seen the Eighteenth and went on to find it. He succeeded and later died of his wounds as a prisoner. No sign of our tanks. We reached Point 66, which I recognized by the dead New Zcalander. No sign of Brigade Headquarters or any of our transport. Almost frantic with helplessness we crawled on, scores of dead and wounded and abandoned weapons now visible. After we had passed through more clumps of prisoners and a battery digging in, a mile from Point 66 we came on Brigade Headquarters.

After my departure our mass of vehicles had come under heavy fire. Monty had stood it as long as possible and then, when he saw that some of the fire was coming from tanks, had very coolly led the whole group back in an orderly fashion to shelter in what we later called Stuka valley. He had just completed telling the bits and pieces of supporting arms where to go when I arrived and he was much relieved when I approved his action.

But it was broad daylight and still nowhere any sign of our tanks. I left my carrier, forgetting to get the name of its plucky driver, got into the car with Ross and McPhail and

set off to find them. Nothing whatever would go right in this battle and the car would only run on three cylinders* We chugged slowly along, through transport and guns moving forward, and reached Divisional Headquarters; or rather, where it had been, as Inglis was there alone. He must have had a frightful night, for communications with both brigades had broken down. He explained that Headquarters had moved forward and, of course, it was no use his following till it was established. So he was having a quiet breakfast. What could I tell him? I thought both brigades were on their objectives but I was being attacked in the rear by tanks. Where was our armour? He was able to give me the direction and we crawled off at a maddening ten miles an hour.

After ages, perhaps twenty minutes, we reached a mass of tanks. In every turret someone was standing gazing through glasses at the smoke rising from Ruweisat Ridge four miles and more away. I found and spoke to a regimental commander, who referred me to his Brigadier. The Brigadier received me coolly. I did my best not to appear agitated, said that I was Commander of 5 New Zealand Infantry Brigade, that we were on Ruweisat Ridge and were being attacked in the rear by tanks when I left an hour before. Would he move up and help? He said he would send a reconnaissance tank. I said there was no time. Would he move his whole brigade?

While he was patiently explaining some difficulty, General Lumsden drove up. I gave him exactly the same information. Without answering he walked round to the back of his car, unfastened a shovel and with it killed a scorpion with several blows. Then he climbed up beside the Brigadier, who was sitting on the turret of his tank. I climbed up beside them and McPhail stood within hearing. The General asked where we were and the Brigadier pointed out the place on the map. 'But I told you to be there at first light/ General Lumsden then said, placing his finger on Point 63. I jumped down and did not hear the rest of the conversation but in a few minutes the General got down and in a soothing manner which I resented said that the Brigade would move as soon

as possible. I asked for urgency, which both he and the Brigadier promised, and drove off.

We found on return that several batteries were digging in round Brigade Headquarters and there was a great congestion of vehicles, an ideal bomber target. Accordingly we moved along Stuka valley and established ourselves a mile farther east. No word of any sort had yet come back from the battalions, but the supporting arms had not got through to them and every movement forward of Point 66 came under heavy fire. The battalions were isolated on the ridge, without anti-tank guns or mortars or communications. There was no word of 4 Brigade except that it had sent prisoners back, had been abreast of us throughout the attack, and now was equally isolated. Jim Burrows and some of his staff were in fact forward with his battalions, and his Staff Captain was reorganizing a headquarters.

We spent a dreadful day of uncertainty and helplessness. The tanks arrived before very long, drove off the tanks of 15 Panzer Division without any difficulty, and settled down about a mile behind the rear of 4 Brigade, apparently without any clear idea of what to do next and certainly with no intention of exploitation. Big enemy pockets remained in the valley behind both brigades and every attempt to reach the ridge came under heavy fire. The field regiments got into position but their O.P. officers could not get through. McPhail and Dasler made repeated and most plucky efforts but were shot back each time. There were no infantry left to fight a way through with: even our defence platoon had disappeared. Everywhere there was confusion and uncertainty and a sense of frustration and helplessness that was desperately hard to fight against.

I went forward several times and gradually got a picture of the situation. On the right the Indians were plainly in possession of most of their objective, the eastern end of the ridge, and all was quiet there. Between them and 5 Brigade, near Point 64, there was still a big enemy pocket. There was a little shelling on where I supposed my troops to be, but I was fired on too heavily each time I tried to get through; and there was heavy and continuous shelling on

the left of the 4 Brigade objective. I thought I could distinguish two distinct enemy pockets of resistance in the broad valley between us and the ridge. I wandered round trying to evolve a plan to get through and wondering what could be used for troops. Now I cannot understand why I did not ask for the Twenty-sixth from Divisional reserve but it was not a good day for me and it was probably required to guard our left flank. At intervals I returned to the command truck and asked for news; there never was any, nor had anyone any suggestions. McPhail and Dasler kept trying new ways to get forward and getting stopped by minefields or fire. Inglis came up and remarked that my headquarters were too far back, which was true enough; but there was nowhere else to go.

Early in the afternoon I realized that the pocket about Point 64 had been cleared. Troops were moving about quite freely in the vicinity. Shortly afterwards I watched a British company belonging to 5 Indian Brigade attack one of the pockets in the valley and capture it easily. This made it possible to reach the ridge via the Indian position. Dasler promptly got there with a No. 11 set and from him we got the first confirmation of what we had feared, that the Twenty-second had been caught by the tanks in close order and had nearly all been captured. Carl Watson was also missing and Peter Norris was in command of the Twenty-third. Sam Allen had been killed and the Twenty-first appeared to be considerably scattered and not organized as a battalion. At about the same time as Dasler, McPhail led a column of anti-tank guns, machine-guns, mortars, and ammunition trucks on to the ridge by the same route. Reg Romans, second-in-command of the Twenty-third, also went round, took command, and soon reported cheerfully that he could hold his position. Despite the disaster to the Twenty-second the situation looked reasonably good. **I felt** sure that during the approaching night we would be able to reorganize and consolidate our substantial gains thoroughly. The Brigade had sent 1,300 prisoners back and **there were** reports of many more. At 5 o'clock there was **still no news of 4 Brigade, which was plainly getting a heavy**

pounding. I was about to go up in a carrier and find Jim when Division rang with the startling news that 4 Brigade had been overwhelmed.

I spoke to Reg Romans again. He said he had 190 men and several anti-tank guns and was sure he could hold on. The Twenty-first on his left was in bits and pieces, though all hanging on. The ridge was solid rock and it was impossible to dig in properly, anti-tank guns in particular being hopelessly exposed. So despite Reg's brave opinion I changed my mind and when Inglis rang after dark and asked if I could hold my position, I said: 'No, not now.' Without argument he told me to withdraw. We did so without molestation and during the night reorganized and consolidated on the low ridge parallel with and 1,200 yards south of Ruweisat. I hope someone told 5 Indian Brigade that we were going.

I was called to a conference at Division at midnight. We sat round a table in a canvas lean-to against the side of the command truck. Inglis, Steve Weir, Bill Gentry, and myself, probably one or two others. We were all very weary. The picture looked nearly as black as possible.

In 4 Brigade, Jim Burrows was dead; this seemed the last blow. Ray Lynch, C O. of 18 Battalion, was badly wounded and missing and Peter Pike had about a hundred men in hand from the battalion. Sid Hartnell, commanding the Nineteenth, was missing and there was only a handful of men left out of his rifle companies. All three rifle companies of the Twentieth, with my old friends Upham, Washbourn, and Maxwell, were gone completely. Charlie Upham was known to be severely wounded and there were stories of valiant deeds. Nearly all the anti-tank and machine-guns of the Brigade were gone and at best it could put 200 riflemen in line in the morning. There were of course the Headquarters Companies, but they were useless alone. In 5 Brigade the position was a little better. Sam Allen was dead and the Twenty-first was badly scattered, but I expected it to have a fair strength in the morning. Sid Hanton and his headquarters and all three rifle companies of the Twenty-second were gone except for one platoon. Carl Watson was missing but Reg Romans had 190 riflemen. I had lost only

four anti-tank guns and could expect to put 400 riflemen in the line with a good supply of supporting weapons and my Headquarters Companies intact. The divisional artillery was complete and had plenty of ammunition*

With little discussion it was decided that we should consolidate on the line to which 5 Brigade had fallen back and extend it to the left. This gave us possession of most of the spoils of victory, including fifty-five guns; and it enabled us to support the Indians still on the ridge. In fact it largely made our losses worth while. The Twenty-sixth from reserve was attached to 5 Brigade and the Maoris were to be brought up to replace the Twenty-second. 18 Battalion was also attached to 5 Brigade and it was decided that the remnants of 19, 20, and 22 Battalions should be withdrawn to Maadi to reorganize. It was further decided that 6 Brigade should be brought up from where George Clifton was languishing in reserve, the Twenty-sixth reverting to it on arrival. Before we broke up a ring came through from 5 Indian Brigade that Brigadier Burrows was not dead, had escaped, and was with them. Sid Hartncll, also captured, escaped likewise and returned for breakfast with me in the morning.

So ended this bitterly disappointing battle. There has been little recrimination about it among the participants, though much discussion. I think we have all felt that the fault largely lay with us. A truly brilliant victory was achieved, honestly earned by the eighteen rifle companies who made the assault. It was thrown away and we lost four battalion commanders out of six and 1,400 of our splendid veteran infantry, half of them taken prisoner helplessly. It is not right to say that the operation was laid on too hurriedly: we had several days for preparation. There were failures with guides, rendezvous, and signals, and no doubt faults in planning, but these things happen to some extent in every battle and are part of the friction of war. They are cancelled out by the mistakes the enemy commits and by the initiative and valorous deeds of the fighting men, on which one cannot base a plan but which good troops will always produce. The fundamental fault was the failure to co-ordinate infantry and armour. That is impossible without a

common doctrine, a sound system of intercommunication, and training together. The attitude of the armour commanders at that period was not helpful, but I do not think we of the infantry did nearly as much as we could or should have done to ensure that we fought the battle together.

The Division took 1,600 prisoners, but at one time my Brigade alone had over 4,000 in hand and 4 Brigade probably took more. Jim told me afterwards that when he reached the ridge at daylight there were 20,000 prisoners for the taking. Most of those who were captured were released by 15 Panzer Division in the morning, or by the late-afternoon counter-attack on 4 Brigade. During the next week I had a count made of the captured material remaining in our possession. There were twelve 88 mm., forty-three other field guns, sixty anti-tank guns and mortars, and automatics beyond counting. There was also a very large number of dead, more dead Italians than on any other battlefield that I have seen, and many Germans, as the German gunners mostly fought to the death.

During 16 July we settled down in our new position along the rising ground 1,200 yards south of Ruweisat, all facing north. After a day or two, we realized that this attitude suggested an unnecessary suspicion of the Indians who were holding part of the ridge directly north of us; so we occupied a Point 69 and placed half the Brigade to face west. When George Clifton came in he took over the Twenty-sixth and prolonged the line southwards, 18 Battalion went into divisional reserve, and the Maoris joined 5 Brigade, in which they remained for the rest of the war.

We spent the day licking our wounds and trying to decide whether we had gained a victory or had been defeated. The great amount of captured equipment in our hands was a real comfort.

To our astonishment our defence platoon had turned up during the night, intact. Their commander was a very good and genuine officer who had shown much gallantry at Minqar Qaim and who served with credit until the end of the war; but on this occasion he had made an extraordinary decision. He led his platoon off to deal with the posts shooting

at us near Point 66, as I told him to do, and in a few minutes found himself in the midst of an Italian position. Instead of attacking them with loud shouts and a show of determination, when they would have promptly surrendered, he decided that his first duty was to preserve the lives of his men, reflected that he was certain to be released by our troops in due course, and so surrendered himself with his men. In due course some of our troops did appear, the Italians found someone who would accept their surrender, and the situation was cleared up to the satisfaction of all parties. I was so astounded at this story, told with the utmost naiveté and a complete absence of uneasiness, that I was unable to say anything and never did anything.

I wandered about among the troops, who were on the whole in very good form and pleased with themselves, and to some extent pieced together the battalions' stories.

Some stretcher-bearers were left by the Germans to look after the Twenty-second's wounded. They told us that the battalion was attacked from the rear by about twenty tanks immediately after my departure and before it had properly shaken out. Ollivier's troop of six-pounders had fought for fifteen minutes until all guns were knocked out and the infantry, helplessly exposed under a hail of fire, had then surrendered with the tanks right on top of them. Satisfied with their success, the Germans did not follow it up by sweeping along the ridge and destroying the rest of the two Brigades, as they might easily have done. Instead they marched the battalion off in threes, with tanks on either side of and all round the column, past the rear of 4 Brigade and into their own territory. It was a humiliating and disastrous incident. One platoon only, under Sergeant Elliott and Corporal Garmonsway, escaped in some manner and fought its way back. Elliott was awarded a V.C. and Garmonsway a D.C.M. Incidentally, the bar to Upham's V.C. was awarded for his conduct in the night assault and during the

The Twenty-first had assaulted with an average strength of seventy-five in its three companies. It first met opposition at about 1.10 in the form of small posts which were quickly

cleared and for an hour fought its way forward against continuous opposition. Then a laager of about a dozen tanks was encountered, engines running and crews in their places. They opened a wild but heavy fire and started moving in a confused manner, but were at once fiercely tackled by the infantry. Unfortunately the battalion was not carrying its anti-tank sticky-bombs and most of the tanks got away. A sergeant climbed on to one tank, shot the commander, who had his head out of the turret, and then dropped grenades inside while other men fired through the slits. The crew was destroyed and the tank set on fire. Having got the idea the men then shot the commander of another tank whereupon the crew was quick to surrender. The remaining tanks scattered under a hail of small-arms fire and grenades. One Mark IV in its panic knocked out another that it came on unexpectedly.

The incident, however, had broken up the battalion's formation and when the advance was resumed it seems to have been in four parties. One party of about forty under Sam Allen crossed the ridge and proceeded a long way north. On the way they shot scores of the enemy, a great many of whom were bolting in their transport, destroyed trucks and lorries as far as their means allowed, and finally halted close to a battery of very heavy guns. Survivors thought they were two miles past the ridge, which seems incredible. A consultation was held at which all the officers present except Sam expressed the opinion that they were far past the objective. Sam stuck to his opinion and with Staff-sergeant Phillips of the Twenty-third went back to collect and bring up the rest of the battalion. During its advance the party had found it impossible to deal with all the enemy who wanted to surrender but whom no one wanted to be troubled with. Sam and Phillips collected a large number on their return journey and when near the position one of them shot Sam. He died some hours later. Sam Allen was a regular officer, extremely regimental, correct and unsmiling on parade, a delightful companion and inimitable raconteur. We missed him for longer than soldiers usually miss their comrades.

After waiting an hour the remainder of the party decided to come back. They met Harry McElroy, one of the Twenty-first company commanders, with a party of twenty-eight men, and at daylight reached the northern side of the ridge. There they discovered a wadi full of Italians facing south. McElroy lined up his party, evened up ammunition to five rounds a man, and charged. A number of Italians and a party of fourteen Germans were killed. The remainder, forty officers and 500 other ranks, surrendered, the full colonel in command weeping profusely. The prisoners were handed over to the Indian Brigade and so were not included in our tally. McElroy and his party remained on the ridge during the day. The remainder of the Twenty-first, in two groups, very much mixed up, got on to the ridge and remained there until withdrawn in the evening. Losses were not very heavy, somewhere about fifty.

The Twenty-third had an assaulting strength of 300 in its three companies. It had sharp fighting all the way and the two leading companies had lost forty men each when they reached the objective. The left company went through the tanks and a Private Clark set one on fire with a sticky-bomb. It blazed for hours. The rear company, under Peter Norris, was not engaged during the advance and was close ahead of the Twenty-second when that battalion was attacked by the tanks. Peter withdrew it somehow and took up position facing north. Until Romans arrived he was in command and he organized the position with notable skill and coolness. There was a good deal of shelling and mortaring during the day and when withdrawn the Twenty-third had had over a hundred casualties. When I saw the battalion on the 16th it was totally unaffected and perfectly fit for another fight.

13. El Mreir

WE settled down at once to the routine of static warfare. After a few days' respite the Luftwaffe was now giving us its attention again, its main target being our gun lines in Stuka valley. My headquarters was outside the area of the heaviest concentrations but we were not neglected. For the next few weeks the Stukas came two or three times a day, between thirty and fifty at a time. There was always an attack in the early afternoon and another about sunset. We felt aggrieved when occasionally another was sandwiched in. They were very nasty and until the gunners thinned themselves and their transport out, they inflicted many casualties.

6 Brigade came up and extended our line to the south. George Clifton at once opened a series of raids and offensive patrols; I was content with a quiet life for the time being. The Eighteenth and Twenty-sixth left 5 Brigade, and the Maoris, under a new commander, Baker, came in. Three days after the battle, 21 Battalion was 408 strong, 23 Battalion 464, and 22 Battalion had gone back to Maadi with 273. Ralf Harding took command of the Twenty-first and Reg Romans was confirmed in command of the Twenty-third.

I readjusted my line so that the Twenty-first held a short but difficult front facing the eastern end of the El Mreir depression with a No Man's Land about 300 yards wide. Farther south, opposite 6 Brigade, No Man's Land was as much as 4,000 yards wide, giving only too much scope for alarms and excursions. The Maoris held the northern flank facing the portion of Ruweisat Ridge in enemy hands, with one company in an uncomfortable position on a flattish knoll in the centre of the intervening valley. The Twenty-third was fairly close up in reserve.

Reinforcements were hard to come by and were of variable

quality. None had arrived from New Zealand since Japan came into the war in December 1941 and we were living on our fat. A great purge was carried out at Maadi, where it was laid down that only Grade 2 men were to be retained. Many a comfortable *embusque* snugly installed as a mess waiter or storeman found himself in an infantry draft; many others, who were fretting as instructors or in other ways doing the oddly named 'tour of duty' at Base, came up very gladly. It was at this time that I received a 'Report on Students who attended courses at New Zealand Signalling School for Battalion signallers'. Page 2 read:

<i>23rd N.Z. Battalion</i>	<i>Marks</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
10705 Pte. Fcnton, E. J.	Nil	Broke camp and marched out to
10755 Ptc. Erickson, C. H.	Nil	and New Zealand Division
10943 Ptc. Irving, F. C.	Nil	without authority.

I still retain it with pleasure for this was a bad time to come back to the Division for any but good men.

We set to work to lay minefields, to clear or mark the Italian minefields that we were sitting among, and to dig ourselves in. One truck carrying a load of mines struck a mine and blew up, leaving no trace of the laying party. The ground was very hard, and except in patches it was impossible to get deeper than eighteen inches without a compressor, so that most of the work had to be done at night and progress was slow. Summer was now at its height and the plague of flies at its worst. From ten in the morning until six in the evening, we sweltered and fretted, with one hand continuously waving the flies away. It was bad enough for us at headquarters where we could at least walk about, get into some shade, and rig up fairly fly-proof trucks for offices and messes. For the troops in the line, who all day long had to remain in their narrow slits, it was purgatory. After sunset the air became deliciously cool and pleasant and everyone came to life. The evening meal could be eaten and enjoyed and work done with some energy. The men remained cheerful and uncomplaining.

We buried the hundreds of dead and cleaned up and buried the filth that marks every Italian position. This made no appreciable difference to the flies but at least the odour

of death that lay sickeningly over the battlefield disappeared* Charlie Mason's carrier was found in the middle of an Italian strongpoint, riddled through and through by anti-tank shells. Charlie and his crew were dead inside. It was difficult to understand how or why he had got so far,

Jim wrote to me from Maadi giving an account of 4 Brigade's battle. He spoke with bitterness of the way in which the tanks had sat 1,200 yards away and, despite promises and assurances, had allowed an inferior number of German tanks to overrun his brigade, with its anti-tank guns all knocked out and more than half his men already killed or wounded. At one time he had had four Italian generals as prisoners and he was certain he had captured at least a Corps Headquarters, but all had been rescued by the Panzers.

At this time there was throughout Eighth Army, not only in New Zealand Division, a most intense distrust, almost hatred, of our armour. Everywhere one heard tales of the other arms being let down; it was regarded as axiomatic that the tanks would not be where they were wanted in time. It was impossible not to sympathize with the tank crews. They manned inferior tanks, either armed with the feeble two-pounder or, in the case of the well-armed General Grant, far too conspicuous a target. Their losses had been very heavy and it is a dreadful thing to be 'brewed up' in a tank. Many units were amalgamated because of their crippling losses. There was no doubt, however, that for a while their fighting spirit was low and they were resentful and sulky under the keenly felt criticism that they met and sensed everywhere. The atmosphere struck me as really dangerous and I did my best to check critics and put a strong curb on my own tongue. When General Harding, the Director of Training in the Middle East, an officer of great distinction then and afterwards, visited us and asked my opinion as to the causes of our recent set-backs, I spoke without reserve. For what it was worth, my opinion was that we would never get anywhere until the armour was placed under command of infantry brigadiers and advanced on the same axis as the infantry. Under command and on the same axis. In some operations I conceded that the armour commander should

control and that the infantry employed should be under him and still both arms should operate on the same axis. We fought one more unsuccessful battle on the old lines and then the principle, for which I argued and which must have had some very much more influential protagonists, was adopted.

On the evening of the 16th some German tanks emerged from the El Mreir depression and moved slowly eastwards south of the ridge. They were met by a group of our own tanks and a typical tank battle broke out, both sides firing briskly at one another from behind cover at about fifteen hundred yards' range. We were sitting in the command truck and did not trouble ourselves to go and watch, but one of the Brigade runners did climb the rise to a viewpoint. He came back excitedly and reported that there was a regular battle on, and said with genuine astonishment in his voice: 'Our tanks are fighting like hell!' The implied disparagement was cruelly unjust but in our then state of mind no one thought it was. I went out and watched the affair. Before long the Germans withdrew and an absurdly inaccurate account duly appeared in the Intelligence summary.

On the same day we got our share of one of the Stuka raids. A Bofors gun had planted itself a hundred yards from our command truck on the previous evening. The crew threw up a flimsy stone parapet and had their meal. I strolled across for a yarn and suggested that they should at least give themselves a solid blast-proof wall; they could easily do it in a few hours. They were all tired and said it would do in the morning. I had enough on my mind and let it go at that. Next morning the troop officer called and I spoke to him; but gunners are inclined to think they know their own business and by midday nothing had been done, I then went across to the gun and gave the sergeant an order to get on with the job directly after lunch and keep going until I was satisfied. Normally I deprecated excessive precautions against air attack, having got the idea in Crete that over-emphasis thereon had something to do with the low morale of many troops there; but this I thought a case of crass negligence and foolhardiness.

Directly after lunch the first Stuka attack came in, about forty strong. We were standing and watching them dive in succession on the gun lines when someone noticed that several Stukas had carried a little farther on and the leader was in the act of turning over to start his dive on us. There was an instantaneous scatter, each to his own slit trench. Mine was occupied and I ran on to another. Alan McPhail was already there but when he saw me he got out before I could stop him and ran somewhere else. The gun was firing furiously and the first bomber had released its bomb-load of four and was pulling out of its dive when I slithered into the trench and cowered in the bottom. The bombs screamed down and I heard the last round from the Bofors an instant before the first burst. There were four stunning concussions, the nearest almost smothering me with sand. I looked up and could see nothing but swirling clouds of smoke and sand but realized that the gun was silent. The next group was well away. I put my head up again and saw Alan standing at the side of my trench. He was looking at the gun, now visible again, with its barrel at a crazy angle, and no crew to be seen. 'I've seen some terrible sights but—,' he said, and ran over to it. He came back looking very white and said it was the worst thing he had seen; every one of the crew of eleven was dead and all dreadfully mangled. I looked later. The bomb had pitched a few yards away and a solid wall, such as they could have made with a few hours' work, would have saved them. I felt myself seriously blameworthy.

During the week following Ruweisat, the Indians made small attacks along and north of the ridge, without much success as far as we could learn. The Australians were fighting a grinding sort of battle at Tel el Eisa and on 22 July another attempt was made to gain a decision in the Ruweisat-El Mreir area.

This time 6 Brigade was to make a night attack on the salient of the El Mreir depression from the south, the same direction as that of my effort three weeks earlier. To do this the Brigade had to move out into the wide No Man's Land, form up with its left flank practically resting on the enemy front line and advance parallel with it. An armoured

brigade was to join the infantry and exploit at first light, the same old story. After daylight 23 Armoured Brigade, newly arrived from England, was to advance westwards, south of the ridge, at right angles to the infantry attack and pass into the presumably shaken enemy lines north of the depression, with some very deep objective. Farther north and later still the Indians were to deliver another attack also westwards, along the Ruweisat Ridge. To add to the complexity, or perhaps to confuse the enemy as well as ourselves, 18 Battalion was also to attack westwards but south of 6 Brigade forming-up line. Our numerous guns were to fire concentrations during 6 Brigade's attack—there was still no thought of a barrage and no training in following one; 5 Brigade was to support with fire and be prepared to exploit—the normal order to give when you cannot think of anything really useful. 23 Armoured Brigade was unfortunately equipped only with the two-pounder Valentine. Numbers of its officers had been up to look at the front and had called on us. We were delighted with their refreshing keenness and their eagerness to fight.

I was very unhappy at the divisional conference. Again there was no Corps conference although this was a Corps battle, and we knew only at second-hand what the other formations concerned were to do. It is an immense help to hear the commander of a neighbouring formation say what he is going to do and how and why. It is essential, and elementary, that such details as starting-time and start-line, axes of advance, objectives, boundaries, lateral communication, artillery support, siting of headquarters, should be co-ordinated, if commanders are to help one another and do their best for their own troops. We knew very little indeed on these points.

But the principal worry, of course, was whether the armour would really be up in time to support 6 Brigade. The armour Brigadier was present and swore that he would be up, but though George pressed him hard he declined to consider moving at night. We knew that the German tanks moved at night and, in fact, George's patrols had several times bumped into them; but the Brigadier insisted that tanks

could not move at night. This meant that with the best intentions and no mishaps or mistakes in map-reading or over routes or minefields, and no enemy opposition, there must still be an appreciable interval after daylight before the armour could arrive on the infantry objectives. If the infantry had three hours' daylight unmolested, they could get their anti-tank guns sited and dug-in, even in this hard ground, and once that was done they were always happy to look after themselves. But during those three hours they were vulnerable, in fact helpless. We would have been delighted to see 15 Panzer three hours after first light a week before.

I expressed my misgivings and had the feeling that Inglis was not very happy about the plan. But the tank Brigadier was emphatic and explicit with his assurances that his tanks would be there at daylight without fail, and George Clifton saw the difficulties only as matters to be overcome or circumvented. Inglis, on whom the responsibility lay, could hardly refuse to go on unless he was prepared to proclaim his distrust of the British armour and of the Corps command. He made the almost inescapable decision to go on, told Gentry to make sure the details were thoroughly tied up, and went out. George and I became involved in an unprofitable argument with the armour Brigadier and then the conference broke up.

I went back feeling profoundly uneasy. On return to my headquarters, I ordered everyone out of the command truck except Monty and Alan McPhail. Then I said to Monty: 'Take this down: The Brigadier has returned from the divisional conference and says there will be another bloody disaster.'

We did our best to give support by fire as ordered. Our machine-gun company was placed so as to search every part of the depression that it could reach and every mortar in the Brigade was brought into 21 Battalion area. Heavy fire programmes were worked out with no stinting of ammunition, from zero to the time when the infantry could be expected on the objective, and then lifting beyond it. Most of our fire would inevitably fall on empty ground but it seemed

certain that it would at least make unarmoured movement impossible within the enemy position. The Twenty-third was held in readiness to be thrown in if opportunity offered.

During the afternoon before the attack I called on Jan Peart, who had dressed my wound on Belhamed the year before, and who was now commanding the Twenty-sixth. He was most unhappy about the prospect and I did my best to get him to take a more optimistic view. We sat in his car and talked for a long while. He remarked that he was the survivor of the original senior officers of the Eighteenth: John Gray had been killed a fortnight earlier, Evans had been killed in Crete, John Allen had died on Sidi Rezcggh, and Ray Lynch was known to have been desperately wounded when he was captured. Jan felt that his own time was short and said so, but it was not quite yet. In civilian life he was the Headmaster of King's College in Auckland. He was a sensitive man, nervy and yet cool in action, unhappy amid the sights and sounds of war, very able and modestly conscious of his own ability, and a most charming companion.

I decided to watch proceedings from Ralf Harding's headquarters, which was not more than 500 yards from the eastern lip of the depression, and for some reason I went up with Ross in the car instead of with Twigden in the jeep. On the way up we called on 23 Battalion. It was not yet dark, nor time for the attack to commence, when the enemy artillery opened up vigorously. Later, we heard the infantry had been seen, moving out to their start-lines in daylight. Our guns remained silent. The enemy fire was partly by observation on to 6 Brigade infantry and partly defensive on us. Accordingly, I was able to see what his defensive fire plan was on our front. It was laid in two clearly defined belts, one on and in front of our forward posts, the other 800 yards farther back. This was nice to know, but it meant that we had to pass through a beaten zone on our way to the Twenty-first. I thought it might be wise to wait a while. This early outbreak of fire was *ominous*, the chance of surprise was gone.

Zero hour arrived and our guns opened on their concentrations. Some were directed on the enemy batteries, but

there was no perceptible slackening of their fire* 5 Brigade machine-guns and mortars opened with a tremendous racket. **Ross** had not been up to this area before and I was uncertain of the route though there was bright moonlight; so I asked Reg Romans for a guide, and of course he offered himself. We set off at a great pace, Reg leading. As we neared the beaten zone, I had a sudden access of caution; it really did look very dangerous. We stopped and took shelter in an old Italian sangar; Reg plunged on and disappeared. We filled in time looking through an Italian attache case, crammed with maps, holy and erotic pictfures. After a while, as the fire showed no signs of slackening, I screwed up my courage and we drove through, arriving at 21 Battalion Headquarters without any trouble, though a bit rattled.

I stayed there for several hours with Ralf Harding, trying to sec what was happening and getting far too much of the shelling to be really happy. There was no sign of Reg, and 1 was very worried about him. Actually, having no bump of direction whatever, he had got lost, wandered out into No Man's Land, had some queer adventures, and returned hours later, very concerned about me.

We could see very little, only flashes and bursts in many directions. It was clear that 6 Brigade was having heavy fighting. We kept in touch with Brigade, Monty rang to say that Division was out of touch with 6 Brigade and was anxious to find out if we knew anything. We could see and hear that the attack was progressing slowly but little else. Our fire programme ended but I ordered part to be repeated as it was clear that the infantry' were not yet on their objective. After the repeat, we carried on at a slower rate, for some ammunition had to be kept for the morning. We were concerned to see explosions and fires in the path of the advance.

Some time after midnight we could hear fighting going on in the depression, a few hundred yards away, rifles and Brcons, grenades, and the flare of a fire that might be a tank set on fire by a sticky-bomb. I sent the Twenty-first carrier officer, Henton, who was killed in the next battle, to find the nearest battalion and get some information. He went off in his

carrier through a **gap** in our **minefields**. He returned **about** 2 a.m., having found Jan Peart and got what information Jan could give him. The Twenty-sixth had reached **the** depression after hard fighting and there had found a number of enemy tanks. Two or three had been set on fire by sticky-* bombs but the supply of bombs had run out, there were several tanks still prowling round, and the situation was uncomfortable. Peart had sent two patrols to make contact with the other battalions but neither had returned. There was still firing in the direction of their objectives. He was out of touch with his Brigade Headquarters, but he had more bombs coming up and thought he could hang on.

I rang Division with this scanty information. Inglis was relieved to hear this much and it did appear that the infantry had done their part and that, if the tanks were up in time, all would be well. Firing quietened down to a few odd shots. Both artilleries became silent. It was disturbing that there were many more fires out in the old No Man's Land, but when I returned to my own headquarters, about 4 a.m., I felt fairly optimistic.

Soon afterwards, while I was chatting to Monty over a cup of tea, 21 Battalion rang to say that Colonel Peart had withdrawn his battalion and it was reorganizing in our area. As daylight approached, Jan had become very uneasy. The truck carrying his reserve of sticky-bombs was blown up and with tanks in and among his troops he would soon be helpless. Renewed efforts to get in touch with his Brigadier or the other battalions failed. He had had 150 casualties. So he took the decision to withdraw and came out with 260 men.

At daylight Inglis, unaware of the fate of the other battalions, told him to go straight back. He made the attempt and, feeling that his action had been condemned, led the leading section himself. The enemy had reoccupied his positions, he came under heavy fire, and abandoned the effort. Jan was very worried, for this was the second time he had given up a position, the first being when he side-stepped the Eighteenth into Tobruk while the Twentieth was overrun at Belhamed. He thought Inglis would write him off altogether;

instead Inglis recommended him for an immediate D.S.O, and he got it.

Soon after daylight, from wounded and a few stragglers who got in, it had become clear that there had been another disaster. After much hard fighting, all three battalions and Brigade Headquarters had reached the depression. The anti-tank guns and transport following them had run into a minefield and few or none had arrived. There had been no appearance of the tanks. The German tanks moving in the darkness, and some of them actually following the brigade through gaps in the minefield, had attacked at first light and the survivors, quite helpless, had surrendered. One battalion commander, Greville, had been killed, George Clifton and a second battalion commander, George, were missing. There was nothing left of the rifle companies of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth except one company of the Twenty-fifth, which had lost direction and had not reached the depression; little was left of the anti-tank battery and there were heavy losses in transport. Most of Brigade Headquarters was missing with the Brigadier. There was not even the compensation of substantial captures of prisoners and equipment: plenty of captures were made but hardly any retained. The Eighteenth Battalion attack had succeeded after sharp fighting but this small success did not affect the situation and the battalion later fell back to its original position. Worst of all, we had again relied in vain on the support of our tanks and bitterness was extreme.

This unhappy story was only pieced together during the day. I went back to the Twenty-first about 10 in the morning and found that another disaster had occurred in the meantime. About 8 a.m., 23 Armoured Brigade had thundered past our northern flank at a great pace. 'A real Balaclava charge/ Ralf Harding said. They had come under crushing fire from several directions, had pressed on and run on to a minefield, had still pressed on and very, very few had come back. It was reported that some had broken through as far as a Corps Headquarters. There were many rumours about this affair but we never heard anything official. One was that the advance had been made on a bearing of 277° instead

of along the 277 grid. If true, it would have made little difference. Eighty tanks were said to have been lost. One of the two eagerly awaited armoured brigades had been thrown away.

The third phase of this ill-fated operation started punctually at 11 a.m. when the Indians on Ruweisat Ridge attacked along the ridge. From 21 Battalion Headquarters I had a grandstand view at less than a mile. They had strong artillery support: either a ragged barrage or a series of heavy concentrations, probably the latter. The advance went forward smoothly for about a mile. It reminded me of a battle of 1916, waves following one another in good alignment. Then it halted under heavy fire and there appeared to be an attempt to consolidate, but digging was impossible on that stony outcrop. The men stood about helplessly for a few minutes and then the whole mass ran back, all the way to their starting positions. Some stubborn individuals refused to run and followed at a walk but the retirement could not be called anything but a rout. A few German infantry followed them up and reoccupied most of their original positions and the battle was over.

During the morning, the armoured brigade that was to have supported 6 Brigade was sitting about in our forward area and out in No Man's Land beyond. They had several tanks hit and after a while realized they were doing no good and departed. One angry regimental commander saw me and stopped to apologize about the affair. He said that he felt bitterly humiliated but I am afraid that I did not answer very graciously. When they had gone, the charred skeletons of about forty of 6 Brigade's vehicles remained on the sky-line.

I saw Inglis in the afternoon. He was angry almost beyond words, and swore that he would never again place faith in the British armour. I gathered that he had spoken very frankly to various people. All three New Zealand infantry brigades had now suffered crippling losses within a few days. 5 Brigade had come off best and it had lost almost a complete battalion. There was no question of our taking part in any more offensives for a while.

George Clifton escaped and appeared at my headquarters for breakfast next morning. It looked like becoming a habit for our senior officers to get captured, escape, and have breakfast with me. The practice was continued by Russell Young, one of the Twenty-second company commanders. He escaped at Daba, tramped back and somehow got through both lines and reached the Twenty-third in time for breakfast with me. As I had twice found for myself, the most difficult part was getting back through our own suspicious posts. He was very indignant that I would not allow him to stay in the field but packed him back to Maadi, a walking skeleton.

Two infantry and two armoured brigades had been employed. They had made three unrelated attacks from different directions at different times. A single small Panzer division of some twenty or thirty tanks and a fifth-rate Italian infantry division easily dealt with all three attacks in succession and inflicted crippling losses.

14. The Hard Summer

FOR the next five weeks we remained in our positions without any material change. 6 Brigade, with the Eighteenth taking the place of the Twenty-fourth, reoccupied its old positions and 5 Brigade remained where it was. We surrounded ourselves with minefields on all four sides and the position became known as the New Zealand Box. Our period there was perhaps the most trying that the Division ever experienced. Summer was at its height and the flies at their worst. Strengths were so low that there was little rest for anyone. We were depressed and cynical. The men's faces were gaunter and more strained each week and there were many cases of jaundice.

A series of reserve positions was prepared twelve or fifteen miles to the east. We were allocated sectors and took our officers back to look at them. Our transport was kept well forward and we did not know whether we would fight where we stood, or in the reserve positions, or run away. On 26 July there had been further attacks by the Australians on Miteiriya Ridge in the north. We heard of objectives being taken, got the usual fatuously cheerful stories from the intelligence summaries, and slowly realized that there had been another failure with the same old story of no tank support. The whole attitude of Eighth Army was that of having one foot in the stirrup, and it was evident that, for the time being, the initiative had passed to the enemy. In my own small sphere, I realized the dangers of the prevailing mood and did my best to be cheerful and optimistic, but I let myself go in letters home. One phrase, 'Things are not being done right in Eighth Army', rebounded violently a few weeks later.

General Freyberg returned early in August with his wound almost healed, and resumed command. He was suffering

from a frightful body rash, caused by his having **been given a wrong drug during his treatment. Me told me** that **it was** far worse than any wound. I cannot imagine how he endured it in that heat. He did not allow it to affect his temper or industry or judgement. Inglis returned to Maadi and resumed command of 4 Brigade, Jim Burrows returning to the Twentieth. A few months later, when the Brigade was nearly ready for the field again, it was decided that it should be converted into armour and it began a long period of training. We still received frequent Stuka raids, though our fighters occasionally broke them up before the attack had been delivered, and always inflicted losses. The Stukas were escorted by German fighters flying high above them and there were many air combats with the losses by no means one-sided. We were having lunch one day when one of our fighter pilots landed by parachute a few hundred yards away. McPhail went over in a truck, gave him my compliments, and invited him for lunch with us. He literally dropped in.

An American colonel visited us and went round the battalions with me. As he was going away he remarked that he had now seen everything but a Stuka raid. He had been shelled, been **under** mortar and machine-gun fire, had elsewhere seen an attack, reckoned he was entitled to a combat medal in fact, but he would have liked to see a Stuka raid. While he was talking I had been uneasily watching the sky and the rapid movements of people in the vicinity. I interrupted him to say that I had arranged a Stuka raid for him but he had better come to a slit trench with me. We were just in time, the first plane was diving as we got down. The raid was heavy and very close. Afterwards he produced a bottle of Scotch and went away with everyone well satisfied.

During this period 5 Brigade Headquarters started to play chess. We never stopped during my time, and in playing whiled away many a weary waiting hour, even in battle. Reg Romans frequently came in for a game with me. It was characteristic of him that he always attacked violently leading off with the Queen, and that he never resigned. McPhail was a formidable antagonist but I was able to



maintain a moral superiority over the rest of my staff by first teaching them to play and then regularly beating them,

I followed a regular routine. Breakfast before the sun was hot and then I would be sick. I was only slowly getting over my illness in Syria and never omitted this item until the cool weather. Then after looking through the overnight reports on progress of digging, wiring, mining, and the patrol reports, and giving Monty decisions on any points he raised, I set off with Twigden in the jeep to go round the battalions. At this stage, I was always watched suspiciously by the signals officer, who wanted to know my precise route and times of arrival and departure at various points. He was quite right but I hated to be tied down and always departed with the guilty knowledge that he did not believe for one moment that I would follow the route or observe the timing that I had given him. Eventually he put a wireless set in the back of the jeep, and as neither Twigden nor I could work it, an operator, who took a very gloomy view of the whole business, had to accompany us, perched more or less on top of the set.

My invariable rule was to visit the headquarters and at least one company of each battalion and one of the artillery O.P.s every day. This took several hours as I frequently stopped to chat with some men. At the end of the tour I had, or should have had, a very good idea of how everyone was shaping, what were their troubles, and what could be done to help them. Usually I managed to see the leader and some of the men of the previous night's patrols and get a better notion of what had happened than was conveyed by their stilted reports. Objects for the next night's patrols were settled during these visits; the plans were left to units. Very often, in fact almost always, we ran into trouble of some sort. 21 Battalion area was particularly lively and, with Battalion Headquarters practically in the front line, the visit there was always interesting. There was an O.P. nearby from which there was a view into part of the El Mreir depression. My old friend Carson, of Crete days, was often there and I sat with him under many smart shellings. Once I took General Gott there and admired his complete coolness under a very

heavy dusting. We had to approach this O.P. very carefully, and whereas we had been satisfied with stooping on the way there, we both crawled twenty yards on the way back and the O.P. officer was not very pleased with us.

On one trip I strayed out of my area to visit a British field regiment that had come in south of the ridge. While I was there it was bombed by forty-seven Stukas and several guns and trucks were knocked out, one of the most concentrated bombings I have ever cowered under. Monty was very angry with me for getting into this unnecessary trouble and thought little of my defence that I did not know the field regiment was going to be bombed. During my absence my car was wrecked by a 500-pound bomb which made a huge crater ten yards from the car and very nearly got Ross.

On my return we had lunch, sitting at a trestle-table out in the blazing sun, with one hand continuously waving over the food and fighting the flies for every mouthful from plate to mouth. The afternoon we spent in the command truck, swishing at flies and playing chess. After a time we fixed up a good fly-proof screen and, when a light sea breeze reached us about four, the day became quite endurable. In the late afternoon I frequently visited the brigades on either flank, either George Clifton or Russell of the Indians, and returned to bathe in a basin of water and dine pleasantly in the cool of the evening.

We started patrolling again. I laid down the object of each patrol and the units took turns. The enemy very soon had booby-trapped double-apron wire along their front but there were many gaps in it and we kept a careful watch on the progress of his work. The El Mreir depression was still a prominent salient. In the re-entrant south of it, there were several German-manned posts which appeared to be occupied only at night. It occurred to me that if we could clear them out of this area we would be in a position to attack or raid the depression from the south, getting in behind the strong defences that were being constructed round the tip of the salient, and also evading the defensive fire. Several fighting patrols accordingly were directed on to this task. They had some sharp brushes but we methodically

worked over the area until we could be sure it was clear for a depth of some 800 yards from the tip of the salient, and much of that flank was only lightly defended. Also, by carefully watching the tracer, when, as frequently happened, the Italians fired on their fixed lines, we came to realize that this flank was not covered by any heavy fire. The Italian Bologna Division held the depression, the German 105 Regiment held the line to the south. There is often a weakness on the boundaries of formations, especially when they dislike one another, as did Italians and Germans.

The stiffest scrap in this little enterprise was when a 21 Battalion patrol, led by Joe Tanner and his sergeant, Jack Bramwell, came on a post with fourteen Germans. They rushed them, shot or bayoneted twelve without loss, and took two prisoners. One of these tried to escape and was shot. The remaining one was regarded as a great prize, as German prisoners were very hard to get at that time. They usually fought to a finish. Unfortunately, he was a reinforcement only ten days from Germany and was very disappointing to the Intelligence people. I sent Bramwell up with the next batch of candidates for commissions and was very annoyed when the Selection Board turned him down.

Ingليس had departed before General Freyberg returned and I had a few days commanding the Division but with nothing particular to do. A few days after the General's return, Corps held a conference which all senior officers attended. General Auchinleck was there and General Gott in a brand new uniform. We were informed that General Auchinleck, who had been carrying the double burden of Middle East and Eighth Army, was handing over command of the Army to General Gott, who would first have a few days' leave. When the conference, which did not seem to be about anything in particular, had ended, Gott went straight off to fly to Cairo in an old troop-carrier. Almost as soon as the machine left the ground it was shot down, and he and fourteen others were killed. He and Jock Campbell, who had been killed in a motor accident near Solium a few months earlier, were two great leaders of the early desert campaigns. Gott was said to know every wadi and well from Matruh to

Tabruk, and probably did. The scientific soldiers were now to come from England.

For a few days General Freyberg went to Corps and I went again to Division. This time there was a little more to do. It was clear that the next move lay with Rommel and probable that he would go for the Army's left flank, held only by light armour south of the New Zealand Box. Gentry and I selected a line to hold on our southern flank. It was easy enough to select the bold Alam Nayil Ridge and we decided a few points such as inter-brigade boundaries and location of minefields. A new General, one Montgomery, arrived to command Eighth Army, and a new Corps Commander, Horrocks. General Freyberg came back and I returned to 5 Brigade.

The new Army Commander made himself felt at once. I saw him first when he called, unannounced, a few days after his arrival. He talked sharply and curtly, without any soft words, asked some searching questions, met the battalion commanders, and left me feeling very much stimulated. For a long time we had heard little from Army except querulous grumbles that the men should not go about without their shirts on, that staff officers must always wear the appropriate arm-bands, or things of that sort. Now we were told that we were going to fight, there was no question of retirement to any reserve positions or anywhere else, and to get ahead with our preparations. To make the intention clear our troop-carrying transport was sent a long way back so that we could not run away if we wanted to! There was no more talk of the alternative positions in the rear. We were delighted, and the morale of the whole Army went up incredibly. I was inspired to issue instructions to the Brigade which amused and pleased everyone.

TO ALL RANKS 5TH NEW ZEALAND INFANTRY BRIGADE AND
ATTACHED UNITS—17TH AUGUST, 1942

The NEW ZEALAND DIVISION has a very proud name in the MIDDLE EAST, no DIVISION has a better. It is fairly admitted on all sides that the arrival of the DIVISION, its action at MINQAR QAIM and in the subsequent fighting, together with the arrival of the

NINTH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION, were decisive in stopping the enemy advance. Further, it is freely admitted that at RUWEISAT RIDGE on July 14th the Division made a breach in the enemy lines which, if properly exploited, might have led to a decisive victory. But, instead of being satisfied with the credit given to them by all other soldiers in Egypt, many of our men are trying to insist on it by blaming or disparaging everyone else. Letters from the men of the Division show that many men are blaming impartially the South Africans, Indians, British, and the Armoured Formations, and by implication are boasting that we are the only good troops in Egypt. Many of the men in Base, who have taken no part in the fighting or very little, have disgraced themselves and the Division by unseemly boasting and insulting conduct in Cairo. •... LEAVE IT TO OTHERS TO PRAISE ITS. Everybody in Egypt is willing to give us full credit and we need not boast.

It must be remembered that we have seen very little of the fighting of other units. We did not take part in the great battles in LIBYA from May 26th onwards and many of the troops whom we are freely insulting have been continuously in the field since then. We were disappointed in the action of the Armour in failing to support us, disappointed and bitter. We do not know what difficulties prevented them, but we do know that many of the men whom we have freely charged with cowardice have had their tanks destroyed under them half-a-dozen times and that almost every armoured unit, owing to losses, is an amalgamation of several units. We freely blame the South Africans for losing Tobruk but we have not shown yet that we ourselves can face and defeat a Stuka bombardment and concentrated tank assault of the violence that they had to meet.

I appeal to all men in the Brigade to remember that we know only too little of what other units have done and suffered, that we are fighting the Germans and the Italians and not the South Africans, British, or Indians and that careless, ignorant, and thoughtless talk of the description that has been common does tremendous harm to our cause and to the good name of the New Zealand Division.

We are now facing a very severe test. For the next few weeks we will be on the defensive, and it is open to the enemy to make an attack which will test us to the limit. If he does not make it or if he makes it and fails, then the tide will quickly turn strongly against him, but these few weeks are critical. We hold an exposed and vital position of the line. Like the Australians, the

South Africans, the Indians, and British, we are burning our boats by sending our transport many miles away and it is our duty to stand and fight where we are, to the last man and the last round. It is probable, almost certain, that we will be subjected to extremely severe attacks by dive bombers, artillery, tanks, and infantry, and in fact it is probable that the supreme test of the New Zealand Division is close ahead of us.

We are in a strong position, mined and wired, with well over a hundred guns and an ample supply of A Tk guns and if we stand our ground firmly, we cannot be broken. There must be no question of surrender if there is a ⁴break-in. Every post must fight to the last, irrespective of the fate of its neighbour. This must be the guiding principle of the defence. The methods to be observed are as follows:—

Infantry Posts

These will everywhere be dug to a depth of five feet without parapet and weapon pits will not be connected by crawl trenches. Each man is then safe against everything but a direct hit from bomb or shell and a tank can roll over him without damage. Each individual soldier must fight until he has no means of fighting left. Small-arms fire will be concentrated on the enemy infantry who will either precede or follow his tanks. Enemy tanks coming to close range will be tackled with sticky-bombs and Hawkins grenades, but this is only possible if they have been separated by fire from his infantry.

Machine Guns

These will have pits dug sufficiently deep to remove the gun from its platform so that it is not crushed by a tank rolling over. Reserves of ammunition, spare barrels, will be dug in close by and MG positions will be defended with as much tenacity as Infantry posts. While the enemy is forming up and preparing his assault M M Gs will engage his tanks and supporting weapons so as to force personnel to take cover and the tanks to 'close down'. During later phases M M Gs will concentrate on *supporting weapons*.

Anti-Tank Guns

All guns have already been sited in defiladed positions and have already been dug in. Ammunition will be stored close by and every gun will be fought to the last. All guns will remain still and silent until enemy tanks are within decisive range.

3 Mortars

Mortars will be sited so as to cover the minefields and their principal function in the initial stages of an attack will be to stop enemy infantry or engineers from lifting the mines. For this purpose good observation of the minefields is essential. They will then engage his supporting weapons if within range and otherwise continue to engage his infantry.

2^m Mortars

Enough 2* Mortars will be placed forward in each battalion area to illuminate the minefields by means of the parachute flares if the enemy attempts to lift the mines under cover of darkness.

R.A.P.

RAPs will be dug in and cover provided for all personnel and as far as is possible, for wounded held at RAP. Ambulance vans may be retained but will be dug in and NOT occupied.

Dumps

Dumps of food, water, and ammunition will be made in each Coy. Area and will be well dispersed.

Headquarters

All Headquarters will be dug in and organized for defence and will be defended with as much determination as any platoon area.

Field Guns

Fire will be put down on enemy armoured vehicles from the limit of observation. If the lorried Infantry can be separated from the armour, the attack may collapse early. After the enemy has debussed, fire should be directed mainly at unarmoured supporting weapons and to blinding his supporting tanks.

A proportion of the guns may be used to engage the enemy infantry following the tanks.

When the A Tk guns become engaged it is of great importance that their view of the tanks is not obscured by artillery fire coming down among the tanks and raising dust.

Destruction of enemy mortars, when they can be located, is of paramount importance.

It is the tradition of Field Gunners to fight their guns to the last*

(Sgd.) H. K. KIPPENBERGER,
Brigadier

Comd. 5th N.Z. Inf. Bde.

This is a Secret Document. All Copies will be returned to this HQ, by 1800 hours 18th August, 1942, after being read to all Ranks.

I went up one evening and spoke to the officers of each battalion assembled at their respective Headquarters. If Rommel's final throw—and we were slowly realizing that it would be his final throw—was to have any chance, it seemed that he must smash the bastion of the New Zealand Box, and I fully expected a desperate fight. We got ourselves into the mood of rather looking forward to it. We organized the position for defence in depth. Wire fences marked dummy minefields so sited that we hoped any enemy penetrations would be canalized and led into trouble, while our own counter-attacking tanks would not be embarrassed. A squadron of tanks was put under command for the counter-attack and we faithfully exercised with them on several hot days. One innovation we practised was carrying machine-guns on the tanks, to be dumped and brought into action from selected positions. By the end of August our positions were so solidly dug, the spirit of the men so high, and our preparations so promising that I was almost sorry that the expected blow was never delivered.

On 24 August the General asked me if I could put on a raid. He told me that no prisoners had been taken on the whole Army front for a fortnight and some must be got. I said that we were ready to go into the El Mreir depression again if we could have the support of the divisional artillery. He replied that we could have two divisional artilleries, 144 guns, and to go ahead,

I decided to do the raid with two companies of the Maoris, who were the freshest battalion and had had the least fighting during the campaign so far, and told them to submit a plan. Preparing plans was not their strong point and a few hours later, with a touching faith in Brigade, they asked us to

produce a plan, Monty and I worked it out very carefully that hot afternoon and I took it up to Baker in the evening.

The date was set for the following evening, 26 August. Briefly, the plan was as follows:

First, a company of the Twenty-third was to move out after dark into the area our patrols had cleared, as a covering party. Under its protection a tape line was to be run out from one of our forward posts at a right angle to our front and 300 yards south of the salient. The two assaulting companies were to move out along this line, halt and face right when the leading file had gone 500 yards. They would then be on their start-line. The guns were then to open, all concentrated on the tip of the salient, and for 300 yards back. Under cover of the bombardment the troops were to advance up to the wire and gaps in it were to be blown by a detachment of sappers with Bangalore torpedoes.¹ The guns would lift and continue on the western portion of the depression and posts thereabouts and the infantry would assault. They were to go straight through, out on the northern side, turn right and return to our own lines. As it turned out it would have been better to bring them back the way they had gone out. Timings were very carefully worked out and we had detailed arrangements, which worked very well, for dealing with and evacuating wounded and getting prisoners quickly back to Division, where Army was to send a team of interrogators. It was a little like crushing a beetle with a steel hammer and I was confident of success. Indeed, I was rather afraid that the guns and the Maoris between them would kill all the unfortunate Italians in the area and that we would not get a satisfactory bag of prisoners. Accordingly I warned the Maoris that I wanted prisoners and not scalps. This was the first time the Maoris had fought under my command. I watched them during the next afternoon and was pleased to see that they studied the plan thoroughly, explained it carefully to the men, and made their preparations in a cheerful business-like manner. The men were delightful, laughing and talking with one another, working busily at

¹ Metal tubes about five feet long, filled with explosive*; a two-man carry; pushed under the wire and set off, they blew a sizeable gap.

oiling and cleaning and polishing their weapons, and all giving me the most cheerful grim.

Half an hour before zero I went up to see them off. Both companies, Ngapuhi under Porter and Arawa under Pene, were ready, waiting together at the near end of the tape. I walked about among them and was amazed and amused by the number of weapons they were carrying. Every other man had an automatic, mostly captured Spandaus or Bredas, they were loaded with grenades, many had pistols, very few had rifle and bayonet only. Otherwise they were lightly equipped. The Maori padre spoke to them, most eloquently and impressively. Then he said a prayer, very moving in the utter silence. Baker asked me to speak. I did so briefly. I said how many guns would be in support—there were grunts of satisfaction—that I was confident they would do well, wished them all good fortune and concluded by saying: 'The fame of your people and the honour of your battalion are in your hands to-night.' There was a pause and a moment's silence, broken by a long burst from a Spandau in the salient. A man said: 'Let her go, boy, that's your last.' Baker said: 'On your feet, men/ said 'Good-bye' to me, and they moved silently off and disappeared into the gloom. I returned to the Battalion Headquarters to wait and watch.

Of course I could see very little and might just as well have stayed in my own headquarters. The guns opened punctually, a ripple of flashes round a quarter of the horizon. For the first time I realized that the sound of the opening of a bombardment or of a barrage, however perfectly synchronized, is not a crash, as often described, but a series of rapid thuds, for the guns are varying distances away from the listener. Then there is the whirr and whine and scream of the shells passing overhead and a series of crunches as they burst. After a few moments it works up to an incessant hammering and drumming. The depression was soon ablaze with shell-bursts, the first concentrations were very heavy indeed, and it seemed impossible that there should be any resistance. The enemy guns replied promptly, putting down defensive fire just where we expected, and it was very pleasing that the men in the assaulting companies did not have to go

through it. But they made things very unpleasant for the rest of us and we had to keep our heads well down. We could recognize the moment when the bombardment lifted and when the assault was to go in, and could see the Bangalorecs exploding exactly on time. Then we had to wait as patiently as we could.

At the expected time, the company in the line rang to say that Ben Porter's company was coming back through them, bringing prisoners—Pcne and Baker came in soon afterwards. The first prisoner to arrive was gibbering with terror. He clung to me in the shallow dug-out and trembled violently with every near burst. We packed him off alone to Division, where he cannot have been of much use, and a few minutes later sent another batch. There were some late-comers, but half an hour after zero all was quiet again. The bag of prisoners, forty-one, was satisfactory in the circumstances. They came from two companies of Bologna Division, and the Maoris reported that there were scores of dead and wounded and that they had left no one unhurt or not a prisoner. These two unfortunate companies must have been annihilated. The Maori casualties were heavier than I had hoped—over thirty, including a very good officer, Mitchell, and a few men missing. Most appeared to have been incurred from our own artillery fire, either from shorts or through over-eagerness in pressing on. The missing were all wounded and would no doubt have been picked up if the raiders had returned over the same ground. A few pockets of Italians had shown fight and some Germans had also had to be killed.

This was the first offensive operation of Eighth Army under General Montgomery's command, and we received warm messages of congratulation from him and from General Horrocks, the new Corps Commander.

During the whole of the next morning we could see ambulances moving into and out of the depression, and a patrol just before daylight reported that the enemy forward positions were not yet remanned. I reported this to Division and was ordered to take possession of the tip of the salient, which would give us observation over the whole depression. I should have foreseen this, but I had thought of the

operation as a raid only and was not prepared, either mentally or with troops. We took it on very carefully* A platoon of the Twenty-first was sent forward well extended and with instructions not to press forward against anything but very light fire. Perhaps we were just too late, for they came under fire from several automatics before they had gone a hundred yards. Quite rightly they went to ground and slowly worked their way back, to my great relief, without casualties. No doubt we missed an opportunity.

In retaliation the enemy put down a very heavy concentration on one of the Maori company areas that afternoon. This was an uncommon thing, as they very seldom fired concentrations after our style. Ammunition was usually something of a problem for them and they favoured fire by observation on opportunity targets. However, this was a genuine concentration, so intense that we thought it was the overture to the expected attack. Everyone went to their battle positions, we warned Division, and I went forward to watch from a few hundred yards outside the danger area. All the fire was coming down on a belt about 500 yards long, pitching in well-spaced salvos of four. The whole of the company area was obscured in smoke and dust. The Maoris lay low in their single-man trenches, ten yards apart and four feet six inches deep, but every few moments I could see a helmeted head bob up, looking for attackers. I made an estimate that a dozen troops (forty-eight guns) were firing not less than two salvos a minute each and, as the bombardment lasted for twenty minutes, calculated and reported that about 2,000 shells had been fired. It ended as suddenly as it began, the dust cleared away, and nothing more happened. I did not expect many casualties but was surprised that there was only one, a man killed by a direct hit in his trench. General Horrocks came up in the evening and I took him along the line of forward posts in the moonlight. With the enemy nervous and irritated, it was quite an interesting walk.

15. Munassib

IN the last days of August there were many indications that Rommel was about to deliver his last offensive, and that he was going to come round our left flank. Intelligence said that he had about 250 German tanks.¹ It was decided that 5 Brigade should move to the menaced flank.

A brigade of the newly arrived Forty-fourth Division relieved us, and during the dusty night of the 29th we moved through the box and on the 30th occupied positions on its southern and eastern sides. Twenty-first and Twenty-third Battalions went on to the Alam Nayil Ridge, facing south. The Twenty-second had now returned from Maadi, again under John Russell (who brought me a bottle of Benedictine), and it occupied the eastern flank, facing east. The total brigade frontage was 12,000 yards. The Maoris were in reserve. On our right, also on the Alam Nayil Ridge, was 132 Brigade of 44 Division, under command of the New Zealand Division, and beyond them our 6 Brigade as before. Ample reserves of ammunition, water, and food were held within the box and it was intended that the Division should stay there even if Rommel's advance swept past us.

The New Zealand box was the southernmost solidly-held portion of the line. Several minefield belts ran south of the box as far as the Taqa plateau. They were only patrolled by our light armour and the enemy would have no great difficulty in making passages. Then he would have to pass through the bad going of the Alinda, Munassib, Muhafid, and Ragil depressions which we had known only too well in July, a perfect target for air attack with the bottle-necks of the minefield gaps behind him. We would be on his

¹ The number of German tanks was always a vital question. The number of Italian tanks might be a matter of interest but hardly affected plans.

northern flank with nearly 150 guns and three brigades in strong positions and available to attack. Directly ahead **he** would find the strong Alam Haifa position held by another brigade of 44 Division. Between this brigade and us the British heavy armour was massed and a long southern flank would be harassed by our light armour. The farther the enemy pushed on, the more troops he would have to detail as flank-guards. The whole plan for the battle was thoroughly explained to us and I liked it more than that for any action I had taken part in. More pleasing even than the plan was the ready, balanced feeling that we all had; and that feeling undoubtedly came down from Army Headquarters. It was the first and typical Montgomery battle. All our preparatory moves were made unhurriedly and in plenty of time, and we were completely ready when the blow fell.

At 2 in the morning of 31 August a runner came to my dug-out and said *Twelveborc\ This was the code word which meant that the enemy were passing the minefields south of us and that their offensive had begun. I thought for a moment: everything I could think of was ready. There was a heavy bombardment to the north in the Ruwcisat Ridge direction but it would not affect us immediately. So I went to sleep again, and slept well, though during the rest of the night our guns fired steadily at the minefield gaps, more or less over my head.

We had a lively morning. Despite shelling and bombing the enemy had pushed steadily on, and they continued to work forward all day. They did not appear to be interested in us, and although our guns were busy most of the day, we were only very lightly shelled. We were frequently bombed, however, and our Bofors were constantly in action. One bomb which pitched a few yards from our shallow dug-out set a truck on fire. The driver had taken shelter underneath and in an instant he was a sheet of flame. Someone beat the flames out and he writhed for a few minutes, blackened, smoking flesh, and was still alive when an ambulance took him away.

We were greatly cheered by the successes of our anti-aircraft gunners, who with constant practice were now

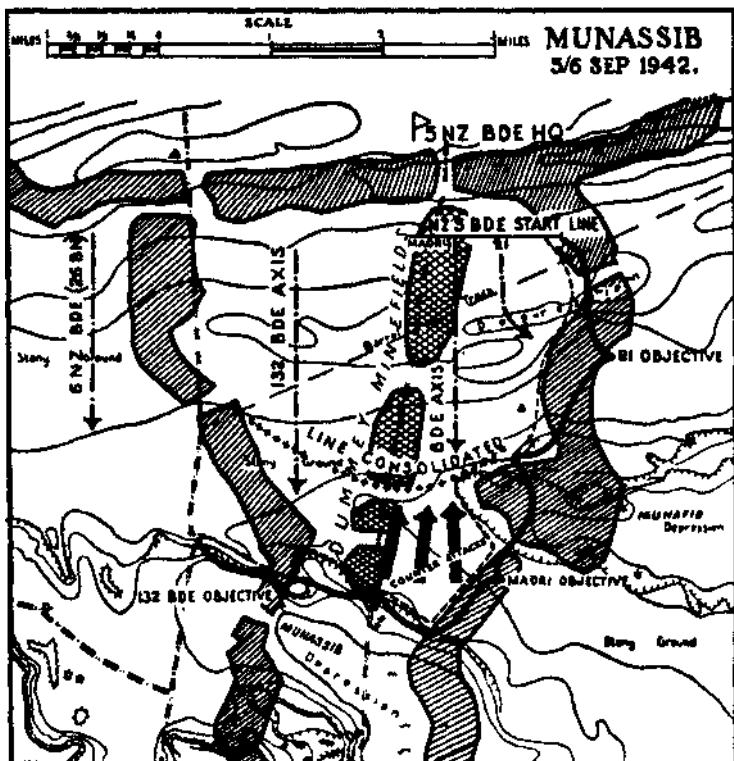
becoming very good. This morning they brought down three Stukas, in each case after they had pulled out of their dives and were running for home rather low. The Bofors at that time had a ceiling of only 6,000 feet.

A hot sandstorm stopped all fighting in the afternoon and made conditions extremely unpleasant. It cleared for a cool and noisy evening and a wild night. Both sides appeared to make a maximum air effort. Our bombers dropped flares over the minefields and depressions south of us, and bombed mercilessly. The enemy dropped flares over us in the box and bombed equally heartily. This was the first time that we saw butterfly-bombs, a dozen or so small bombs in a container which broke up on landing while its contents fizzed and spluttered all about before bursting. The sky was alight, and there were fires and bursts in every direction all night.

The day of 1 September was much the same as the previous day. Our guns kept up a steady fire and we got rather more back than on the previous day. The enemy advance continued slowly and cautiously, and by evening its head was well eastwards of us, but we had the feeling that the situation was well in hand. No attempt was made to sweep in behind the box, east of which many of our tanks were sitting snugly waiting in hull-down positions. All day there was an incessant thudding of tank-fighting farther cast, and we heard that matters had gone well. Bombing continued by both sides but we got less, and our Bofors again had successes. During the following night our patrols located the enemy flank-guard positions a little north of the series of depressions.

2 September and the day of the 3rd passed in much the same way. An exceptionally good patrol led by young Fred Marett of the Twenty-third gave us exact information as to the enemy F.D.L.s on the brigade front. There was on each day a great deal of shelling and bombing and tank-fighting somewhere. But it was becoming evident that Rommel had shot his bolt, had failed, and would soon be thinking of going back. At the divisional conference on the morning of the 3rd, orders were given for an attack by 5 and 132 Brigades and a battalion of 6 Brigade to seize the northern edge of the depressions. This attack was launched from the Alam Nayil

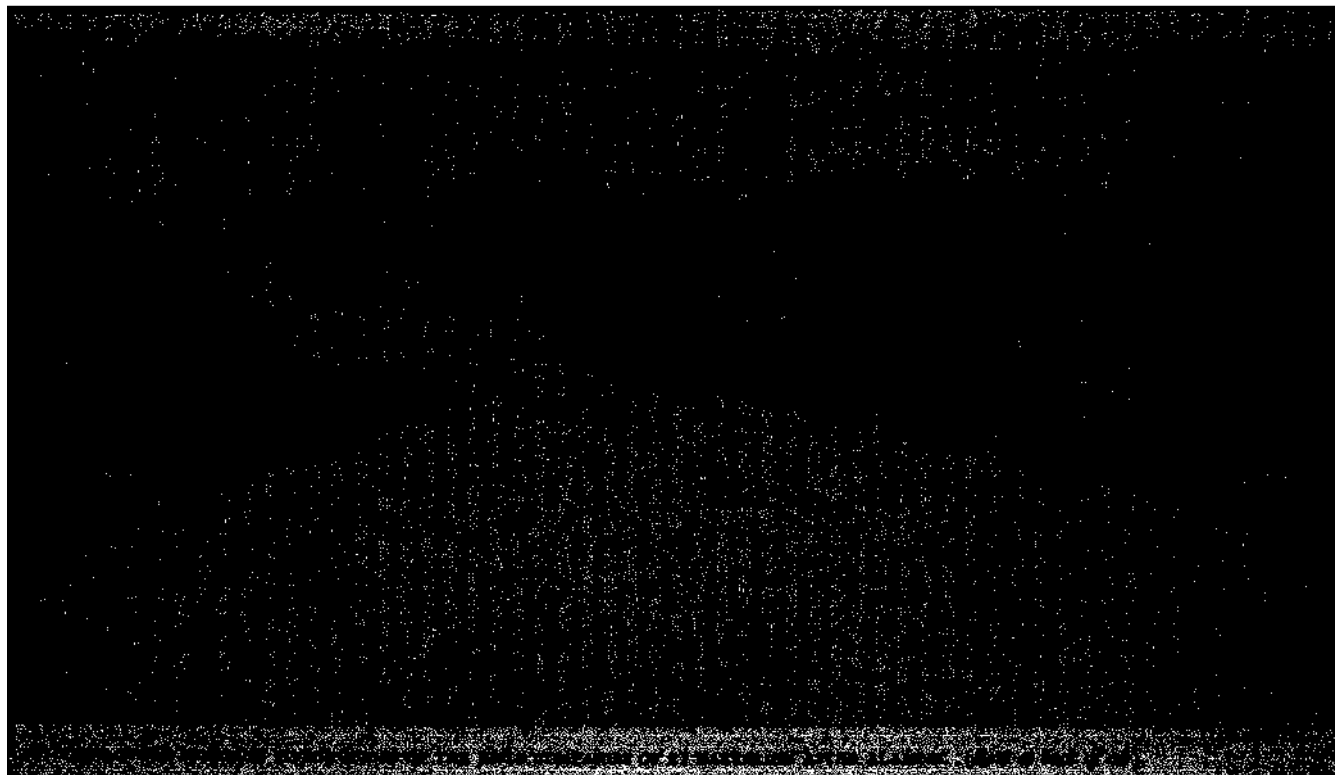
Ridge, the same area as that on Ruweisat six weeks previously, but in exactly the opposite direction. Once more and for the last time it was to be a silent attack with the bayonet, but each brigade had a squadron of tanks of 50 Royal Tank

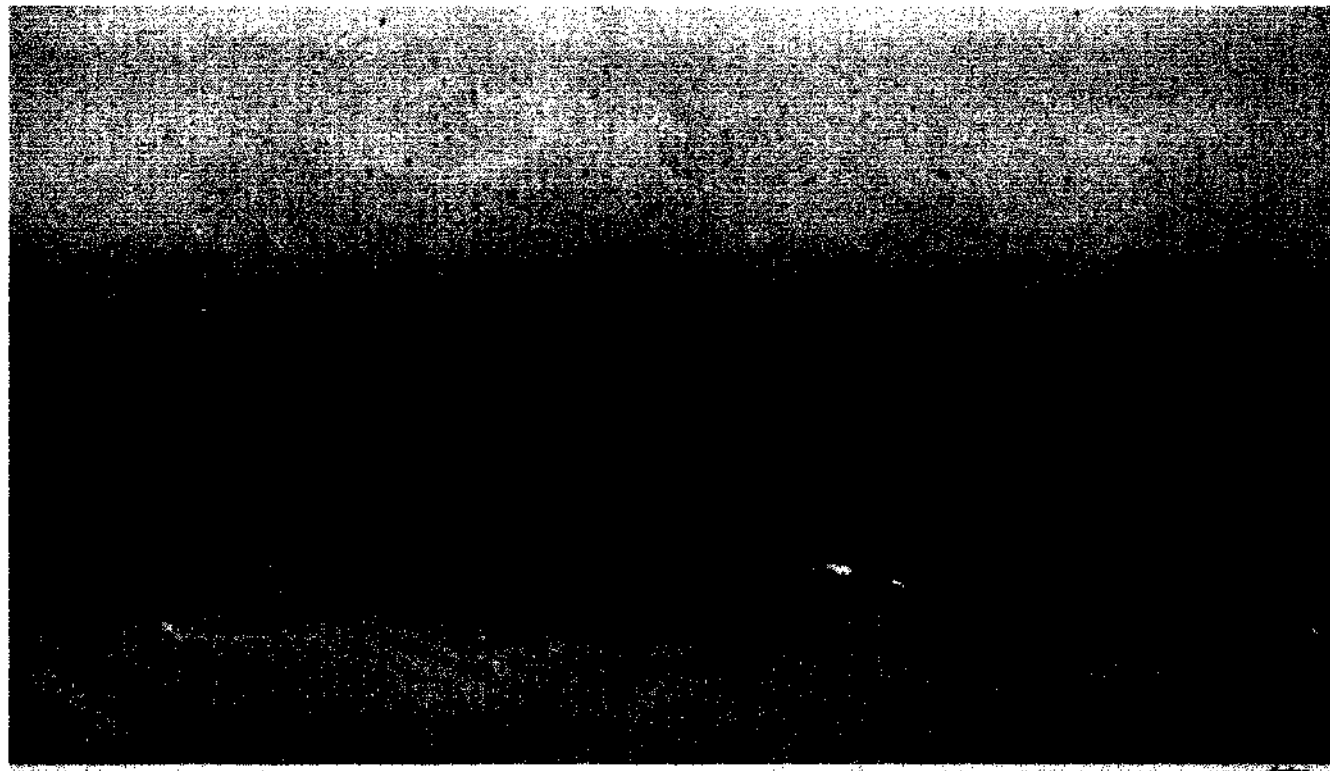


MAP 9

Regiment under command, as well as two anti-tank batteries and two companies of sappers.

5 Brigade front was covered by a minefield 600 yards wide. Two minefields, each of about the same width, ran south like fingers at right angles from our line. The westernmost field ran nearly 6,000 yards to the northern edge of the Munassib depression, the easternmost field some 4,000 yards to the Muhafid depression. Our attack had to be delivered down the corridor between them. I gave verbal orders at a





brigade conference shortly before midday, later confirmed in writing without change. The intention was expressed in the lingo of the desert war as follows: '5th N.Z. Infantry Brigade will attack and capture the line 88322632-88352632-88552655-88602690 holding the edge of the depression in squares 883263,884264,885265/ The eight-figure reference gave points to the nearest hundred metres.

The Brigade's attack was to be made by the Maoris on the right and the Twenty-first on the left. The Maori objective was the northern edge of the Munassib depression along a length of 1,000 yards with a 1,500-yard flank thrown back over open ground to the edge of the Muhafid depression, where they would make contact with the Twenty-first. The Maoris were to exploit into Munassib with their carriers and two sections of carriers attached from the Twenty-first. That battalion had to establish itself on the northern and western edges of Muhafid and also hold the long but not seriously exposed eastern flank back to our original line. It had a shorter distance to go and an easier task than the Maoris but was much weaker in number's. We were learning by experience, and there were several differences between our plans for Ruweisat and for this battle. All the preparations were made without hitch or misunderstanding, with very minor exceptions.

The start-line was taped forward of our own minefield by and under protection of the company of the Twenty-third. A twelve-yard gap through our minefield was cleared by the sappers, the mines being located by the primitive method of prodding every square foot with a bayonet, and plainly taped off. Brigade Headquarters was established close to this gap and as near the start-line as possible. In moving there we got lost, as usual, with the result that I was too late to see the troops on the start-line before they moved off. 33 Anti-Tank Battery, two platoons of 4 Machine-gun Company, 6 Field Company, an escorting company of the Twenty-second, and the first-line transport and carriers of both the assaulting battalions were assembled in groups under Dugleby close to Brigade Headquarters. With them was the squadron of tanks with six carriers attached from the Twenty-third.

So disposed, it was easy to peel detachments off and send them forward as required.

To assist the tanks and transport to find their way forward the provost section was to plant a line of lamps behind the advance along the inter-battalion boundary for 4,000 yards. Apart from clearing the gap through our own minefield, some of the sappers, under the protection of the company of the Twenty-second, were to lay a field between the two depressions covering the left of the Maori objective. We now had a new signals officer, John Shirley, very much on his toes, and he produced a good and comprehensible signals plan. A lateral line was laid to 132 Brigade Headquarters. The attacking battalions carried their No. 11 sets in jeeps and fearful plans were made for getting line up to them on the objective. I asked John if his plan would work and he replied: 'One hundred per cent., Sir.' Monty and I both smiled. 'This is your first battle, John,' I said.

The gunners were to have their O.P.s forward at first light. I pulled the Twenty-second out of its position and brought it forward in close reserve. We were in good communication with the divisional artillery, reinforced to 144 guns, which could all shoot beyond our objective. Things seemed well knit together, and Monty and I felt as satisfied with our plans as it is well to be.

During the afternoon the Brigadier commanding 132 Brigade called on me and asked if I could give him any tips. I disclaimed any expert knowledge of the technique for night attacks, but showed him our plans and made two points very strongly. The first was that Brigade Headquarters should not move up following the assault as Burrows, Clifton, and I had each done in the Ruweisat-El Mreir battles. We had each got into serious trouble and had been unable to command effectively. I urged that a better solution was for Brigade Headquarters to be established as far forward as possible before the assault, and to stay there, the Brigadier personally going forward to look at things when necessary. The second was that the supporting arms and transport should not move behind the assault, or go forward on any timed programme, but should be concentrated in the way

that we were doing and sent forward with guides on lighted routes as required and as possible. He decided not to accept my advice. Despite our careful planning and the fact that our unit commanders and troops were all thoroughly experienced, a great many things went wrong.

We were late in reaching our battle headquarters, a big hole in the sand with sand-bag walls and roofed by a tarpaulin. Our bombers were already pounding the depressions* We sat on boxes and piles of sand-bags, smoked and chatted, and waited. John Russell and Hughes, the tank commander, came in and waited with us. John had a bad cold and wheezed and coughed steadily. Hughes scarcely spoke. Monty sat at a table with phone and maps. I sat opposite him with another map. Alan McPhail, Shirley, two signalmen and their telephone exchanges and wireless sets, the Intelligence sergeant keeping a record of events and messages, Dugleby, and two or three L.O.s made up the party. Before long it was very hot and we were all dripping with perspiration.

The L.O.s reported that both assaulting battalions had got away up to time, but in each case a company short. Nothing could be done about this: the missing companies had miscalculated the time it would take them to reach the start-line and we could only hope they would hurry and catch up, which they did. We did not expect to hear from the battalions, all going well, for an hour or more, and I did not believe in harassing them by constant requests for progress reports. After a while I went out and with one of the L.O.s walked through the minefield gap to near the start-line. The depression was still being bombed with heavy bombs that shook the earth even where we stood. Directly ahead, in the direction of our attack, the line of lights ran south, apparently in order, and in the distance flares were soaring up in unbroken succession, but we could see and hear only the vaguest signs of fighting. But away to the right where 132 Brigade was attacking there was an alarming sight—at least a dozen vehicles ablaze and shells bursting incessantly among them.

Three other things were wrong. The gap itself was being

shelled; work on it must have started in daylight and been observed. Two Maori soldiers came back escorting one single Italian prisoner. I said we would take him back, he was not at all inclined to give trouble, and ordered them to rejoin their company. They said they would never find it and though they started off I was sure it was with no very firm intention. The third was that the provost officer was at the control post at the exit from the minefield gap, whereas I had expected him to be forward with his light-laying party. He assured me that he had a good sergeant there and, as the job he was doing was certainly important and as it was turning out dangerous enough, I said no more; but I felt uneasy. It was of the gravest importance that the lights should be correctly laid for the full distance.

We returned to the dug-out. There was still no news. I told the signalmen to get the battalions in turn. Quarter of an hour later the result was—21 Battalion no reply—28 Battalion no reply—132 Brigade no reply. Neither by line nor on the air was there any result. I am afraid that I rather sneered at poor John Shirley.

It was now midnight and the assault should have reached its objective. I sent an L.O. to find 21 Battalion. He returned two hours later with the good news that it was on its objective with slight casualties. Before long, the line party reached Battalion Headquarters and the wireless jeep, which had gone astray, had turned up. From then on we had unbroken communications with the Twenty-first. The battalion's anti-tank guns and transport were sent forward and arrived without mishap.

A few wounded came back from the Maoris but they could tell us little. About fifty Italian prisoners came in; their escort knew only that there was hard fighting and 'the boys were still going on'. There was no other word of the Maoris until about 2 a.m., when Keiha, one of the company commanders, came in, nearly exhausted and incoherent with excitement. Gradually we calmed him down. His company had led the advance, extended over the whole battalion frontage. He said that the idea was that he should take the whole objective, the other companies would follow and

consolidate, a startling piece of tactics. His company had met Germans and destroyed many posts in furious close fighting, getting and giving no quarter and losing many men, but the troops had become widely scattered and he was left alone. He had failed to find Baker or the other companies and had come back to report and ask for advice. After he had rested awhile I sent him back with instructions to collect what men he could, dig in, and find and report to his Battalion Headquarters, not so easy to do as it sounds.

Soon after he had gone, Baker himself arrived. Out of touch with his companies and with Brigade, he had come back in his jeep to give me the picture as well as he could, and I was very glad indeed to see him. It appeared that the objective had been reached after violent and most bloody fighting. Most of two companies had then carried on into the Munassib depression directly contrary to their orders and were slaughtering the transport drivers and burning the trucks there. A third company, Peta Awatere's, had strayed into 132 Brigade's area and was evidently still hotly engaged, and Kciha's company was scattered everywhere. 132 Brigade had unquestionably failed and was a long way behind on the right flank.

The situation was not altogether satisfactory, but there was something to go on. Baker went back with orders to reorganize and consolidate on his objective. I was a little doubtful whether he would be able to get his men in hand but decided to take the risk. Hughes was ordered to take his tanks, followed by the anti-tank guns and Maori fighting transport, to the end of the line of lights. When Baker got back to his headquarters he was to put up a series of white flares, the only ones he had, as a guide for the tanks and guns for the rest of the way. As an insurance, I ordered John Russell to move forward with the Twenty-second and dig in on a line extending the right of the Twenty-first, about 2,000 yards behind the Maoris and extending into 132 Brigade area.

These moves began about 4 a.m. but of course took time and the Twenty-second was not in position before daylight. Meantime there had been a disaster. Hughes and his tanks

moved out along the line of lights and found that they stopped 2,000 yards out instead of 4,000. He called us up. We called Baker and with Charlie Bennett, the Maori L.O., talking in Maori to the operator, told him to put up his three flares at a certain time a few minutes ahead. Then we told Hughes to steer on the flares.

They duly went up, and so did others in a wide arc, put up by the Germans. Hughes selected those he thought most likely and ran off his course into Muhafid, where twelve of his tanks were blown up on mines or knocked out at close range by anti-tank guns and he was killed. We heard this a few minutes after first light, and a moment later Baker reported that no tanks or supporting arms had reached him, that his battalion was still in a disorganized state with many men still down in Munassib, and that enemy tanks were moving up in his front and between the two depressions. The sappers had already reported that they had been unable to lay the minefield across the open space. It looked ominously like the familiar story of the tanks' counter-attack upsetting everything at dawn.

I decided to evade the impending blow and told Baker to withdraw his battalion at once through the Twenty-second, and to reorganize north of Alam Nayil Ridge. We would arrange a smoke-screen to cover the retirement. I left Monty to arrange this with the artillery and went forward in a jeep.

22 Battalion was on its ground and digging hard. I missed Battalion Headquarters and went through to one of the forward companies. It was a relief to see that the anti-tank guns had arrived and I stirred up a few people who were being unduly deliberate and scientific about siting their guns. By this time the smoke-screen was building up nicely and the Maoris emerged from it in parties and came quietly back. Baker had miraculously escaped injury when his jeep blew up on a mine. He was worried about Porter's company, with which he had not been able to make contact. Porter was a very shrewd, experienced officer, however. He guessed the purpose of the smoke-screen and withdrew through it with the tanks on his heels.

Every moment was now improving the situation. I drove

across to the edge of the Muhafid depression and was surprised that no O.P. officer was up to make some use of the view of dozens of German trucks closely grouped there within a few hundred yards of the Twenty-first. When I drove back through the Twenty-second the whole of its area was under heavy fire from tank guns and 88's. I was pleased to see how little notice anyone appeared to be taking. After all, they were only small shells.

I went back for breakfast and then out again to view the unsatisfactory scene in 132 Brigade's area, where reorganization was proceeding under heavy fire. Shelling continued throughout the morning but the enemy counter-attack was unaccountably delayed. At midday I went to the Twenty-second again. John Russell was standing looking south through his glasses. The smoke-screen had nearly disappeared and he pointed out, some 3,000 yards away, four or five tanks and perhaps a hundred infantry, with more coming into view every moment. 'This looks like it, Sir,' John said. I grunted agreement and said I would go back and get the guns on; there was time enough yet. More and more infantry and more tanks appeared. Several of the tanks were firing at long range, and from them and the 88's the Twenty-second was getting quite a preparation. The sight fascinated me and I still dallied. Another minute and John said: 'You'd better go now, Sir, this is where I do my stuff.' I rang Monty and told him to call for fire from every gun we had on to the map squares that I estimated the counter-attack would be passing through in ten minutes. Then I scrambled into my jeep and bolted off, not so much out of timidity as out of the virtuous realization that my right place was at my own headquarters. John at the same moment climbed into his jeep and went forward. One of his forward platoons, hastily and badly placed and feeling isolated, was retiring, and he went to rally and lead it back to its pits.

When I got in, within five minutes, Monty was still on the phone, carefully dictating co-ordinates to the Brigade Major, divisional artillery. He finished, said 'Make it snappy', and we waited in silence. The gunners responded splendidly. This was before the practice had developed of having

defensive fire tasks prepared, code-named, and issued to gunners, infantry, and armour, before any operations. With that system the infantry could get a 'stunk' wherever it was wanted within three or four minutes of asking for NAPIER or NELSON or whatever the appropriate code word might be. The quickest I remember was two and a half minutes. In this case it was eleven minutes before the first shell howled overhead. Very good for those days. A few seconds later every gun was firing, while we gloated. It was a magnificent, overpowering concentration. After five minutes it stopped. I called for a repeat, searching back. Down it came like the hammer of Thor. We rang the Twenty-second and asked how things were. 'That's fixed 'cm,' said the Adjutant. 'They're fixed.* So they were. The leading elements of the attack escaped the shells but were stopped short by the infantry and anti-tank guns. Four Italian M.13's were knocked out and there was later an argument whether the infantry two-pounders or the artillery six-pounders had got them. The main attacking force was caught in the open and suffered very heavily, and all the afternoon the survivors were crawling and dodging back. For the first time in our experience, the immediate counter-attack had been crushingly defeated.

There was another half-hearted effort in mid-afternoon, stopped in the same way by guns and mortars; but otherwise the remainder of the day passed placidly enough and we were content to complete consolidation on the line that the Twenty-first and Twenty-second were on. Gentry rang and told me that 132 Brigade had been badly knocked and the Brigadier severely wounded. I was ordered to take command. McPhail went over to find out the position and we ran another line to Brigade Headquarters as they had forgotten to take our lateral line forward. When Alan returned he reported that the Brigade was in a very bad way, all three battalions bunched together in a shallow wadi and under constant fire. A lot of their burned-out transport lay nearer the enemy positions. Many of the men were demoralized and he thought the Brigade had very little fighting value for the time, though Murphy, the Brigade Major, who was in

command, was doing good work. **The** Brigadier and **all** three battalion commanders had been hit or were missing and the squadron of tanks attached had been cut up. We saw to it that artillery support was properly laid on, helped in getting the wounded away and the numerous stragglers collected and organized, and kept some carriers in readiness. In the evening I moved the Twenty-third out to extend my line to the west and give 132 Brigade some support

Generally, the operation had not been particularly successful. 26 Battalion on the right had met severe opposition. Jan Peart was mortally wounded and when George Clifton went out in the morning to find a missing company, he approached the wrong troops by mistake and was again taken prisoner. Years afterwards, from repatriated prisoners-of-war, we heard that the company had fought until its ammunition was exhausted and then surrendered with fewer than a dozen men unhurt.

In 132 Brigade, Brigade Headquarters had taken part in the advance and had suffered heavily. It was said that the transport, observing a timed programme, had actually been ahead of the assaulting troops, who were late off the start-line. The transport had come under heavy fire at short range, many vehicles had been burnt, and the flames had disastrously illuminated the battlefield. Whether this explanation was correct or not, the Brigade had certainly had very severe losses, and I do not think it ever again took part in a serious operation. I spoke to many of its officers and men on that and the next day. They were quickly recovering and most said they hoped for better luck next time and not so much bloody messing about.

5 Brigade had 120 casualties, mostly in the Maoris, and took about as many prisoners. 21 Battalion had a simple task and did it neatly and efficiently. The Twenty-second had been quick and businesslike in getting into position and steady against the counter-attack. The Maoris had made a brilliantly successful attack and had killed quite an exceptional number of Germans. They had, however, got badly out of control and were lucky to have got out without disaster. Splendid troops as they were and easy for a hard

commander to handle, the Maoris needed an iron hand* It was the stern George Dittmer, their original commander, who made them a battalion, and throughout the war, the sterner and firmer their commander, the better they responded. The battalion was organized on a partly tribal basis. A. Company was Ngapuhi, B. Company Arawa, C. Company Ngati Porou, D. Company made up from the minor tribes* and Headquarters Company, of course, a mixture. This had to be remembered in posting and promoting officers but I never saw any serious signs of harmful inter-tribal jealousy. The great deeds of the battalion are now the heritage of all the Maori tribes and a bond between them.

I talked to every company and platoon commander afterwards and got them to give me estimates of the numbers of the enemy their men had killed. The Maoris are not boastful in this way. After making every deduction and allowance, I reported that they had killed at least 500 Germans and Italians. This is a very high figure and was questioned, but I do not think it was an exaggeration. Little quarter was given and I myself saw quite an exceptional number of dead in the path of their advance; and much killing had been done among the transport in the depression. One platoon commander told me that his platoon was pinned down at close range by a nest of Spandaus. In a momentary lull a German called out: *Come on, New Zealanders, we'll fight you.' With one accord the men charged in and killed everyone in the post.

Rommel's withdrawal continued slowly and methodically during the 4th and 5th, harassed by bombing and our guns but unhurried. On the morning of the 5th, General Freyberg came and talked to me. He asked if I thought the men had had enough. I had been round that morning and had been hurt to see their haggard faces and drawn, strained appearance, but I thought that they were capable of another effort if it was wanted, and said so. The General said: No, the men had had enough. In any case, there was no point in staving in our forward positions; we would withdraw and the whole Division would go on leave!

A battalion of Durham Light Infantry took over our old

positions on Alam Nayil and that evening we withdrew through them and marched several miles to assembly positions outside the box. I realized how near exhaustion the men were while I watched them dragging themselves wearily along. There was nearly a most unfortunate mistake. The withdrawal was a timed operation and the Twenty-third was intended to remain in its position until 132 Brigade had withdrawn through it. There was some misunderstanding and very late Monty discovered that the Twenty-third had gone without advising 132 Brigade, who were left isolated and without guides. He got the Brigade on the air and by the same medium guided it out, reading off his map the distances and bearings to the various minefield gaps. It was a great relief when they safely emerged about dawn.

The battalions rested during the 6th, which was a very lively day in the air, with five Stukas brought down by our gunners. Brigade Headquarters remained another day to help a Greek brigade to come in. Next day we were all to move to a rest area, Swordfish area, fifty miles eastwards, and get our leave parties away. There was one more blow to fall. Late in the afternoon John Russell came over to see me. His feet were again troubling him and he said sadly that he would have to give up command of the Twenty-second. He asked permission to leave that night and take himself to hospital at Hclwan, which of course I gave. We talked for a while, both glad and relieved to have a period of rest ahead. He left me to visit the Durham colonel, who was an old friend of his.

An hour later the Durhams rang to say that Colonel Russell had stepped on a mine after leaving them and had been killed. He was following a carrier through the gap in the minefield, when it struck a mine which had been missed and its crew were hurt. 'In his kind way', as his heartbroken driver told me, John got out of his car and walked forward to help. He stepped on another mine and was killed instantly.

His body was brought over in a lorry. The General and Gentry came down from Division, the other battalion commanders and all the officers of the Twenty-second came back,

and we buried him that evening—sad beyond words, John was a born soldier, with a gay, serene courage and a kindness and simplicity of heart that made him widely and deeply loved.

Next morning I left Monty to conduct the move and went to Cairo on leave* I felt that I had had all I wanted.

16. Alamein

THE four days in Cairo made a heavenly break, I visited friends in hospital, dined with the Twentieth, dined at Shephard's and the Continental, bathed and watched cricket at Maadi, played golf at Gczira, and at the end went back quite happily. 11 had been a great pleasure to see how quickly and greatly the men benefited from their leave. They came in dusty and dirty and tired and also thoroughly dehydrated. They had baths and clean clothes, as much beer as they could drink, and complete freedom, and they returned with their faces filled out, their eyes bright, and their old jaunty, confident air.

Until the leave period was over we rested in a pleasant area near the sea at Burg el Arab, almost free of flies. The Kiwi Concert Party put on some very bright shows, there was excellent bathing, we took life easily, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves for nearly a fortnight. The last leave parties returned and we moved twenty miles south into the desert and set to work to train hard. It was clear that the next phase was going to be our counter-offensive. Some people had even seen the new Sherman tanks.

The preparations and training were extremely interesting and thorough. Quite early we knew that we would be one of the assaulting divisions, and that when the break-through was made we were to take part in the pursuit. New Zealand Division was reinforced by 9 Armoured Brigade under John Currie, and additional artillery regiments, field and medium. We still had only the two infantry brigades, 6 Brigade now under Gentry.

Our training cannot be described better than by quoting the account General Freyberg circulated a few months later:

Time being short, we started our training with a full scale

Divisional rehearsal under conditions as similar as possible to the actual attack we were to carry out later to capture Miteiriya Ridge. Complete plans and preparations were made for the 'attack' which we carried out by moonlight on 26th September. Actual minefields had been laid in positions corresponding to those in which we expected to find them. The guns had been moved forward by night to positions which had been surveyed and by morning were dug in and camouflaged. The infantry lay up all day. The attack was carried out on a two-brigade front ... in accordance with an artillery-timed programme. To aid the infantry to keep direction, smoke and tracers were fired on the inter-brigade and inter-divisional boundaries. Sappers blew the wire with Bangalore torpedoes and cleared and marked gaps in the minefields. The route was lit, anti-tank weapons, machine-guns, and mortars were passed forward and a regiment of tanks went through in support of each brigade.

Live shell was used, and we had one or two casualties but all ranks gained confidence from the accuracy of the barrage. The new Corps Commander, Sir Oliver Lecsc, came up and followed the barrage to see for himself.

Following this exercise Brigades carried out Brigade and battalion training to perfect their drill. Each infantry brigade also carried out a special exercise on the attack in co-operation with tanks supported by artillery, using live ammunition. All weapons were zeroed and the artillery meticulously calibrated.

The more it was examined the more apparent it became that an infantry attack by moonlight over this featureless country' covered by minefields, booby-traps, and wire was a difficult and complicated operation.

These exercises were absolutely invaluable in giving us some experience to go on. We thought and worked and trained very hard. Air photographs and intelligence reports showed that the enemy defences were formidable. There were two distinct defensive zones, each covered by wire and minefields, then a third line of defended localities, and behind that our old acquaintances 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions and the Italian Ariete. It was not going to be easy and we spared no pains. I have never worked or thought harder than in these weeks, nor have I ever worked troops so hard; and all commanders and staffs did the same.

But we did more than merely train* 9 Armoured Brigade

was a new formation, composed of the 3rd Hussars, the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, and the Royal Warwickshire Yeomanry, and equipped with Sherman and Crusader tanks. The 3rd Hussars was an old desert regiment. It had sent a squadron to Crete and two 3rd Hussar tanks had led the counter-attack at Galatos. We knew many of its officers. The other regiments were fairly new arrivals in Middle East. Both they and we were resolved that there was going to be no more nonsense about tanks and infantry failing to co-operate.

The General gave a dinner party in Alexandria to the senior officers of the Division and of 9 Armoured Brigade, and it can be said that thereby a lot of reserve and shyness was broken down. The regiments put the New Zealand fern-leaf, our distinctive emblem, on their tanks and vehicles. We were pleased that they were clearly proud to wear it, We sent our men to examine and admire their Shermans, and our bands to play at their ceremonial parades and church services. We called on one another at every opportunity and got to know as many individuals and personalities as possible. Above all we trained together, did T.E.W.T.s, and prepared and carried out exercises together. The result was that throughout the battle 9 Armoured Brigade gave us magnificent support regardless of their terrible losses. No formation can have made greater sacrifices for the victory.

Towards the end of the training period we had a series of Brigade ceremonial parades and were inspected by General Montgomery. I thought that 5 Brigade, with its four battalions at full strength, looked splendid. As the General walked round I remarked to him that every man was a veteran. 'Yes,' he said, 'trained to kill in the moonlight.' We had our band out, gave a general salute, marched past by companies and advanced in review order in full peace-time style and, at the end, the General said to me that it was an inspiration to him to see such grand troops. A good ceremonial parade is a great morale builder for troops and commanders; though the troops grumble at the preparations, it does them good—as soldiers—and they enjoy the spectacle and the pride of disciplined corporate power. For a commander there is no

better opportunity, other than the test of actual battle, of judging the temper and spirit and standards of a unit. When all is well it is exhibited by the care and forethought revealed in the preparations and turn-out, the crispness and accuracy of orders, the steadiness of the men while waiting, by the freedom and confidence, even the swagger of their movements and, perhaps most of all, by the way in which they meet the inspecting officer's eyes. After the parade I felt very content.

The Army Commander called together all officers of the rank of Brigadier and above. With a big map he explained his plan for the battle and his view of the way it would be fought, in four phases: 'the break in, the dog-fight, the break-through, and the exploitation'. All the infantry Brigadiers were a little maliciously pleased when he said that he had altered his plan after seeing that the armour was not trained. A few days before the battle, we were given authority and instructions to explain the Army plan to our officers and men, with only a few reservations.

There were several conferences at Division. We sat round a relief model of Miteiriya Ridge and discussed point by point every phase and detail of our task. General Freyberg and the new G.I., Ray Querce, worked and travelled many hours a day. There was much to arrange with the two corps we were to come under, 30 Corps for the battle and 10 Corps for the break-through and exploitation, and with our neighbours on either flank, 51 Division on our right and 1 South African Division on our left. On several points, such as rate of advance of the barrage, length and timings of pauses, boundaries, and routes, compromises had to be accepted. At length the divisional plan was completed and issued, and brigades got ahead with their own planning.

We finished our training programmes about the middle of October and moved to the beach area again so that the men could swim and relax and rest. Commanders and staffs became busier than ever. We reconnoitred our assembly areas and the routes to them and thence to the lying-up positions, selected sites for headquarters and harbouring areas for transport and tanks and found out what our neighbours were doing, went up to the line and stared at the

ridge that was our objective. It all entailed long, tiresome journeys over dusty, crowded roads and tracks and had to be done without the units in the line suspecting that anything more than a relief was contemplated.

I spoke to all officers and told them the general plan and our own task and plan. I also told them that we were lucky to have lived so long to share in the great battle close ahead.

Each brigade planned to take its first objective with one battalion. I selected the Twenty-third, as I thought Reg Romaas my most fiery commander. Ralf Harding of the Twenty-first and Tom Campbell, now commanding the Twenty-second, were equally determined and skilful, and likely to keep better control in the long advance to the final objective. The Maoris were split between 5 and 6 Brigades, two companies going to each for mopping up.

I spoke to the Twenty-third, seated on the slopes of some sand-hills. I told them that this was the turn of the war and the greatest moment of their lives: they had the duty and the honour of breaking in, on which everything depended; our hats were in the ring and I expected them to do it, whatever the cost. Reg called the men to their feet and they gave three fierce, thunderous cheers. As I went away someone remarked that our first objective was as good as taken.

I meant to speak to the other battalions, but that evening we were told that *D' day was 23 October, when the moon would be full, and we moved during the night to assembly positions ten miles from the front. The following night, that of 22/23 October, we moved forward and before dawn were dug in immediately behind the line. There the troops lay, each man in his own slit trench, all day.

There was a final conference at Division during the morning. All the elaborate and complicated preparations and moves had been completed successfully and there was no sign that the enemy had any suspicions. We were confident of success but rather worried about the timings. The infantry were due on the final objective at 245 a.m. on the 24th. As sunrise was at 6.20 a.m, only two and a half hours of darkness were available to clear the final minefields and bring forward the supporting arms, including our own tanks.

We had wanted an earlier start and a shorter pause in the advance so as to have a longer period of darkness for these purposes, but the other divisions would not agree. I was particularly pessimistic on this point and Gentry said that even if it went like an exercise it was virtually impossible. Fortunately we were wrong. Fred Hanson assured us that his sappers would make their gaps in good time and would not be far behind the infantry, and he was right.

The Division had to advance to a depth of between 5,000 and 6,800 yards from its start-line. We had only 104 guns and these had to cover a front 2,500 yards wide at the first objective, and 4,800 yards wide on the final objective. That meant that each gun would be firing on a lane 24 yards wide and increasing to 46 yards wide, far too few shells to the yard to be worth much as a barrage, for a barrage must saturate every yard of ground with shells to be effective. Accordingly, the artillery plan was for a fourth of the guns to fire on the barrage lines to help the infantry to keep direction and for the other three-quarters to fire concentrations on particular spots where the enemy was known to have defences. Therefore, by later standards, there was no real barrage. The divisional objective was equally divided between the two brigades, 5 Brigade having a little farther to go. The rate of advance was 100 yards in 3 minutes, which proved too slow for our resolute infantry.

In each brigade one battalion was given the task of taking the first objective 3,400 yards from the start-line and 1,400 yards behind the enemy forward positions. There was then a pause of a full hour. The bombardment continued while the other battalions came up, put out tape for their start-lines, and formed up under protection of the leaders. The advance was then to be resumed at the same pace to the final objective. The right company of the Twenty-first had another 3,400 yards to go and would find a nasty-looking knot of posts when it arrived. I told Ralf Harding to put his best company at it and he chose Budand's. The left company of the Twenty-second had to go 2,500 yards. Every effort had been made to ensure that everyone knew his unit's and his own part in the plan. Diagrams were prepared

and issued, showing **the** position of **all** sub-units on the start-lines and their position on the objective with a line joining the two and the distance and bearing marked. Timings of the bombardment, pauses, and lifts were also shown.

The sappers were to clear, fence off, and light two routes for the transport and tanks of each brigade for the whole distance from our F.D.L.s to the objective. Two other routes, reserved for 10 Armoured Division, were to be cleared in the centre. Gentry and I both sited our headquarters on the start-line within a few hundred yards of one another. We now had Armoured Command Vehicles—A.C.V.s—huge clumsy contrivances but excellent to run a battle from.

We knew that the enemy positions opposite us were held by the German 164 Division and the Italian Trento Division, and were in great depth. We had no information about actual dispositions except what could be deduced from air photographs. It was evident that opposition would stiffen as we advanced and Miteiriya Ridge itself was solidly held. In the event, it proved that the forward positions were more lightly held than we expected.

There was complete quiet all the afternoon. I strolled about and came on a party from the Scottish battalion holding the line being briefed for a patrol that night. They were completely unaware that anything particular was going to happen. Hardly anyone else was visible.

Immediately after dusk there was activity everywhere. The infantry got out of their cramped slits and made their final preparations. The cooks came up with the last meals for many of them. The tracks from the rear, Sun, Moon, Star, Bottle, and Hat were lit with their distinctive signs and the transport moved up in orderly sequence. Exactly to the minute, the hundred first-line vehicles and anti-tank guns of the Brigade arrived and were parked close to headquarters. Equally punctually the heavy tanks of the Wiltshire Yeomanry rumbled up and Peter Sykes, their commander, reported in. John Currie called to make sure that everything was in order. It was evident that 9 Armoured Brigade meant business. The battalion commanders came in, all cheerful and confident, chatted a little while and went away with

more than our casual good wishes. We all continually looked at our watches.

About 9 o'clock, in brilliant moonlight, the infantry started to fall in by platoons and soon were moving smoothly on to the start-line, which had been surveyed in and marked as usual by white tape. There did not appear to be the slightest hitch anywhere but, although I was very confident, I felt more nervous and anxious than before any other battle.

I walked along the front of the Twenty-third. The battalion was doing the first stage of its advance with sections in single file, fifty yards apart. I went along the front of two companies and said 'Good luck, boys*' to every section. The responses were stirring: 'We'll do it, Sir'; 'We won't let you down, Sir*'; 'The Twenty-third will do it, Sir'—there was no doubt that the infantry also meant business. I stopped to speak to Reg Romans. He had his jacket off and his shirt sleeves rolled up and looked as if he knew what he intended to do. Pat Lynch, one of the company commanders, who was to die within an hour, said it was time to go. Reg blew his whistle and as one man the battalion stepped off. I watched till they had disappeared, remembering the same and other men on other nights, and turned to see the Twenty-first and Twenty-second coming up in two long lines stretching out of sight. They lined up to the tape and sat down to wait for their own moment,

I walked back to the A.G.V. and before I got there the bombardment opened, the memorable opening bombardment of Alamcin. Delivered by 800 guns it was the greatest there had ever been in Africa. The General was at the A.G.V., and we stood for a few minutes fascinated and awed and with our hearts praying for the gallant battalions going forward into the storm. 'If ever there was a just cause', he said to himself, touched my shoulder, and departed. I climbed into the A.C.V. and sat down across the table from Monty.

For twenty minutes the guns fired on all known and suspected enemy batteries; it was a twenty to one concentration, twenty troops of artillery battering each enemy troop. Then the fire switched on to the enemy F.D.L.S, pounded them for another twenty minutes, and at 10.20 p.m. started to lift

back, and the infantry assault opened. There was hardly any artillery fire in return; in a few minutes it was clear that we had gained tactical surprise and that the enemy gunners were pinned down or knocked out.

We did not expect any news until after the first objective had been reached at 11 p.m. I got restless and went out on to the low ridge behind which we were sheltering. There was nothing to be seen, not even the hundreds of bursting shells, through the thick dust and smoke. The moonlight was dulled. There would plainly be trouble in keeping direction and touch. Far away on our right I could hear clearly the skirling of the Highland pipes, warlike, stirring music. It was not easy to return to the A. (IV. and sit down again. The minutes passed slowly. Whenever anyone opened the door the maddening incessant clamour of the guns became deafening. A whole field regiment was firing directly over us from a few hundred yards back. The waiting group of officers and orderlies stood on the lee side to get some shelter from the uproar and concussion.

Two signallers with a set had accompanied the sappers who were to make the left gap. We had no set to spare for the other gap. At about the expected time they called to say that the sappers had started clearing the gap and were under small-arms fire. They knew nothing about the infantry except that there was fighting going on ahead. A few walking wounded came back and were immediately picked up by ambulances and rushed off to the dressing station. We had men posted on the ridge to look out for success signals and report what they could see. They said there was nothing but haze to be seen but they could hear small-arms fire. 'Scores of Spandaus', they said.

At 11 p.m. no one saw any of the flares announcing success; which was not surprising, for there was now a high cloud of dust obscuring the stars and darkening the moonlight. We could not get 23 Battalion on the air, nor on the line that Brigade Signals was running forward with them. I had told C.O.s emphatically that if communications **broke down** (and in 1942 they always did), an officer fully **apprised of** the situation **must be** sent back **when there was important**

information to give. Half an hour later there was still no news of the infantry, but in some way a message arrived that the right-hand gap was nearly cleared. I decided to wait no longer and ordered Max Coop to take forward 23 Battalion's transport by that route. A few minutes later the left gap was reported cleared and I told Sykes to take his tanks forward. Delay would be fatal and I had to assume that no news was good news.

About midnight, when the advance was due to be resumed, Coop called to say that he had reached the first objective with his transport, there were some dead and wounded scattered around but no other sign of the Twenty-third. Nor had he seen the other two battalions. Visibility was less than fifty yards. The Brigade appeared to have vanished from off the face of the earth. I told him to dig in his anti-tank guns and stay there. Shortly afterwards we lost touch with him. He had been blown up on a mine, badly wounded, and his set damaged. We told Division that the position was obscure, but that it seemed certain that the first objective had been taken and that the advance was proceeding. I supposed that the Twenty-third had lost direction and had got split up; the real solution of the mystery of their disappearance did not occur to either Monty or me.

After a further long delay the set with the sappers reported that the Twenty-second had gone past, that the tanks had come up and were crawling forward as fast as the sappers could clear and their own Scorpions flail. Before long all the Scorpions had broken down or had been knocked out.

Somewhere about 3 o'clock Angus Ross, now Adjutant of the Twenty-third, appeared. He was dusty and dishevelled and he brought a remarkable story. The first objective had been taken without nearly enough fighting to satisfy the battalion in its exalted mood. The men were surging forward; Reg said to Angus, or Angus said to Reg: 'We can't stop here, we haven't fought yet,' and on they went. They went through the standing bombardment and fought their way without artillery assistance to the foot of Miteiriya Ridge, about another 1,500 yards. There they had stopped, perhaps feeling lonely, for they were far ahead of anyone else and of

the barrage for the second phase. When this fresh barrage came it trampled over them, the Twenty-first and Twenty-second passed through on its heels to storm the ridge, and the Twenty-third fell back to the first minefield. Angus could not explain their action and I did not press him, being indeed very grateful for his invaluable information.

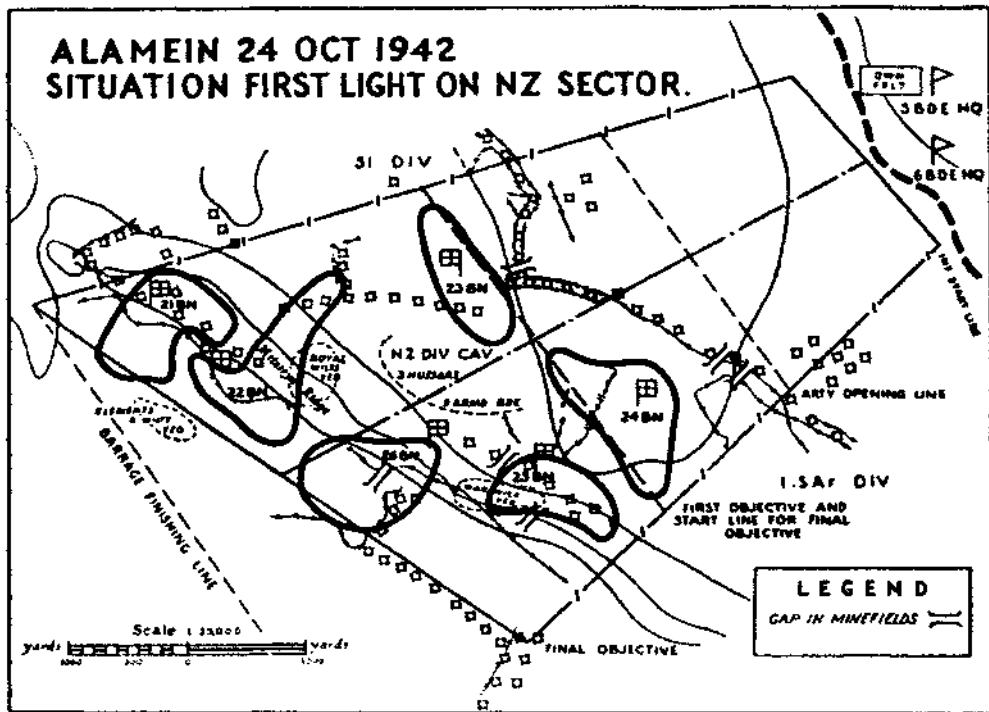
Angus went back, having made the position clear enough for me to order the transport of Twenty-first and Twenty-second forward by the right-hand route. By 4 a.m. both of these battalions had got into communication again and reported that they were on the final objective. There were two more anxious hours with daylight approaching. The sappers, splendidly commanded by Jerry Skinner, pressed on devotedly, tanks and supporting arms and transport kept on their heels, and before daylight we were able to report that both routes were completed and the situation was in hand, with the Wiltshire Yeomanry right up with and ahead of the infantry.

I had a hurried breakfast and went up the left-hand route in a jeep. There were many signs of the night's work. A few New Zealand dead around the first objective and stretcher-bearers at work, but very many casualties, friend and foe, all the rest of the way. There were a few damaged tanks and the disabled Scorpions on the route and a tank officer told me that Colonel Sykes had been gravely wounded.

I first found Twenty-second Battalion Headquarters on the reverse slope of the ridge. Tom Campbell told me of difficulty in forming up on the first objective and of hard fighting on and near the final objective. MacDuff's company had made a fine charge there. He was right on his objective with supporting arms dug in and was quite comfortable. Casualties were well over a hundred.

On the top of the ridge, I found John Currie looking at ten tanks of the Wiltshire Yeomanry from his brigade. They had pressed forward and had been disabled on still another minefield. After consolidation he had resumed command of his regiments. John Currie, who was later killed in Normandy, was a most fearless character, and he kept me with him for a quarter of an hour in full view while he watched

ALAMEIN 24 OCT 1942 SITUATION FIRST LIGHT ON NZ SECTOR.



MAP 10

the damaged tanks, a hundred yards away, being **shelled by** 88's.

I went along behind the ridge, passing unhurt through an area that we later found to be heavily mined, and visited Ralf Harding. His headquarters was being shelled and I got his story while sitting with him in a very cramped slit-trench. He had had the same trouble on the first objective and thought that Bunny Abbott, the new brigade intelligence officer, had done very well in getting out the tape. The Twenty-first had had very hard fighting on and just past the ridge. Butland's company had lost all its officers, Butland had been killed, Bailey had taken command and Sergeant Bramwell had done a great job. Bramwell was awarded a D.C.M. and when I told the General that the Selection Board had turned him down previously he gave him an immediate commission, one of very few. Another company commander had been killed, McElroy, the second-in-command, who had found some excuse for taking part in the attack, had been wounded, and altogether about half the officers and some 150 other ranks were casualties. The carrier officer had been killed a few minutes before my arrival. The battalion was on its objective, supporting arms dug in, and was quite comfortable.

One company which had been detailed to exploit beyond the objective, had done good work. It had destroyed seven field guns and taken 130 prisoners and could have done much more. I had ordered that the company should be back not later than 4.30 a.m., so that our front should be clear for the tanks and our artillery defensive fire if there was a counter-attack. These two considerations made us miss many opportunities for exploitation. I often thought of it after this experience, but every time decided that the important thing was to make certain of holding our set objective; which may have been an unnecessarily rigid attitude.

As I went away I nearly stumbled on a small metal knob just showing above the sand. It proved to be a booby-trapped 500-pound bomb.

I went across to see if there **was** a proper tie-up on the inter-brigade boundary. Our neighbours on the right were

a very depicted Black Watch company in good touch with us. While there I met George Murray, the Brigadier commanding 152 Brigade. He told me that his casualties were very heavy but he had all his objectives. I returned by the right-hand route, seeing an extraordinary number of dead Highlanders who must have strayed into our area. In front of one post there was a whole section, a corporal and seven men, lying in line, all on their faces.

The Twenty-third was being shelled, so I waited a few minutes before visiting Reg. He met me by saying: 'I won't let you speak to my men again before a battle'; but he frankly admitted that he had been carried away by the fiery enthusiasm of the men. I knew that his own and Angus's ferocious ardour had had something to do with the matter but decided no action was necessary. The battalion had about 170 casualties. It had now settled down rather too far forward and with the first minefield behind instead of a protection in front; so I told Reg to move back behind the field.

I returned feeling that, though the brigade losses were heavy, it had completely carried out its task and was solidly in possession. We had 288 prisoners. It was really the most satisfactory battle we had yet fought. The Maoris had lost about 50 and the total brigade casualties were 561 killed and wounded. These were nearly all incurred in the rifle companies, over 500 of them in the 12 companies that had made the assault, each about 100 strong.

There had been sufficient initial success everywhere to constitute a 'break in' and to open the 'dog-fight', but 152 Brigade and 5 New Zealand Brigade seemed the only brigades to have taken all their objectives. The situation map we saw in the morning showed, on our right, 9 Australian Division a little more than half-way, and the right brigade of 51 Division well forward but short of the final objective. On our left 26 Battalion of 6 Brigade was on and 25 Battalion, whose flank had been exposed by the failure of the South Africans to get much past the first objective, was 1,000 yards back. There had been no successful counter-attacks anywhere. New Zealand Division had taken some 300 prisoners,

and there were only 1,400 in all, which showed how thinly held the forward defences had been. Both Germans and Italians had on the whole fought well.

There was a great deal more fighting before the battle was won but 5 Brigade, except for the Maoris, was not called on for any more. 6 Brigade did an attack on the night of the 26th/27th to straighten its line, which it did after a stiff fight. We were not involved and next evening handed over to the South Africans and moved back into reserve.

The only incident had been the second last Stuka raid I saw, made at dusk on the evening of the 26th. Monty and I, sheltering all tangled up together in one slit, survived a very near miss and the Maoris had some casualties. There was no doubt at this time that we were rapidly gaining complete air superiority. The close formations of Bostons and Baki-mores, 'the eighteen impcrturbabls', were going forward and back all day and every day. Enemy fighter-bombers made occasional hit-and-run attacks, but the Stukas were being shot down like pigeons and we saw no more of them after this night.

New Zealand Division continued to control a sector, with a constantly increasing number of guns and British troops under command. General Freyberg, with his tactical headquarters in four Stuart tanks, spent most of every day well forward with his finger on the pulse of the swaying battle. It was often not very amusing making the trip up to him. On one track there was a dead Italian who had been rolled over so often that he was flattened out exactly like a hearth-rug. After a visit, I often reflected that the General's idea of safety was purely relative.

The rifle companies in both our brigades were now down to an average strength of fifty to sixty and no reinforcements were available. It was clear that another attack would cripple the battalions and the Division would be unable to take part in any operation to exploit success. The assaulting infantry were the twenty officers and 400 other ranks (at full strength) of each battalion. Actually, in this battle, the Twenty-second attacked with a total strength of 310 in its rifle companies and headquarters. After the capture of the

objective they were joined by 129 heavy weapon carriers. The remaining 244 men in the battalion were not brought forward at all. These figures would be typical. The rifle companies bore the brunt of every attack, particularly of the attack over minefields. The 'heavy weapon holders* of the mortar, anti-tank, carrier, and anti-aircraft platoons, the headquarters, intelligence, transport, signals, medical, and administrative personnel numbered fifteen officers and 328 other ranks. The C O . and a small tactical headquarters, the intelligence section, most of the signallers and some medical personnel normally went into an attack, but the remainder could not and did not come forward until gaps in minefields were cleared and the situation stabilized; of course, most of the transport and administrative personnel were never required in the forward area during an attack. Ninety per cent, of the casualties therefore fell on the rifle companies and a casualty list of 150 was a much more serious matter than it was to a battalion of the First World War, with its four rifle companies each over 200 strong. A couple of sharp actions, even if successful, usually left a battalion incapable of attacking again until reinforced and until reinforcements were assimilated. It was my opinion that rifle company strengths of fifty were adequate for defence, which is mainly a matter of guns and automatic weapons, but that nothing less than eighty per company was sufficient for an attack.

The battle continued violently in the 'dog-fight' phase, while we sat back in reserve and sent our men in relays to bathe. 9 Armoured Brigade remained in the fray and had tremendous losses. The Maoris, who were still fairly strong, took part under command of 151 Brigade in an attack on a Point 29. They took it with over 100 casualties in a very severe fight. Baker was very nastily wounded, his second-in-command Hart was killed, and Charlie Bennett took command. A member of a well-known Maori family, he was then only twenty-six, the youngest officer to take a command and the first who had not been a soldier of some sort before the war.

By the end of October a broad and deep salient had been driven into the enemy position, mainly by a series of

powerful infantry attacks with limited objectives and almost unlimited artillery support. On the early morning of 2 November a further penetration of 4,000 yards on a front of 3,000 yards was made by two British brigades and armour under General Freyberg's command. This salient was flat as a table and was most unhealthy under violent shelling and heavy armoured counter-attacks. But it was held. In the north 90th Light had been drawn in against the Australians and fought to a standstill. In the evening the General told Brigadiers that the enemy were cracking and warned us to have our transport ready for the break-through. No one else that we met had the same optimism.

17. Pursuit

NEXT morning there was still heavy shelling in the bulge. I went up, did not enjoy my trip, and felt very doubtful. But the General was certain. He said he had told the Army Commander that the battle was over and had sent a cable to the same effect to the New Zealand Government. In the late afternoon there was a divisional conference. The General said the gap was made to all intents and purposes and next morning we would go south through it and head westwards and north to Fuka on the desert road to cut off the Germans in the north. The six Italian divisions in the south, without troop-carrying transport, were doomed in any case. We were to load up with eight days' water, rations, petrol for 500 miles, the gunners with 360 rounds per twenty-five pounder and 200 rounds per medium gun. This was great news. Monty and I opened our last bottle of whisky to celebrate it.

Next day we did move out. It was quite impossible to move in formed bodies. All we could do was to work our way through the gaps in the minefields in single file, the armour leading. It was all most confused and difficult. 4 Light Armoured Brigade was to lead, but owing to the crowded state of the tracks it was four hours late. 9 Armoured Brigade and 5 Brigade were next, but in the thick dust and terrific congestion we had the greatest difficulty in even getting into the forward area. Our own divisional provost company was out in front marking the thrust-line behind 4 Light Armoured Brigade and there appeared to be no traffic control. At last, in the late afternoon, we found that the way was clear ahead.

The armour was going headlong. Plainly there was a real gap. I abandoned the idea of halting to form up and went on with my headquarters group, knowing very well that

everyone was getting on as fast as possible irrespective of anything I could do or say and we could concentrate from the rear later. A message came for me to go forward and join the General. I went up fast in my staff car, and after passing through Main Divisional Headquarters found him at the very head of the column, immediately behind the armour. He was sitting on the outside of his tank, happy as a cherub and pointing and smiling gleefully at each group of stranded Italians or abandoned guns that we passed. There were very many signs of complete victory.

With Steve Weir in his car on the other side of the General's tank we sped along briskly and elatedly until dark, when we had done twenty-three miles. The armour collected into a laager. Tactical Headquarters closed up to it and we started to whistle for the rest of the Division. Main Headquarters came in, guided by Very pistol flares, before long, but there were anxious hours before 5 Brigade arrived. Wireless touch was good but we were not quite certain of our location. Monty had halted and closed up the Brigade at dusk. We told him to look out for flares and put them up at set moments; but there were flares going up all over the desert and hours passed before the Brigade rolled in and halted behind Divisional Headquarters, nose to tail. I felt guilty about having gone off without warning and Monty was very annoyed with me.

Shortly afterwards, while I was talking to the General outside his A.C.V., there was an outbreak of firing at the rear of 5 Brigade. Evidently one of the numerous groups of escaping Germans had bumped into us. Roddick, commander of 4 Light Armoured Brigade, was near and I asked him to send some of his tanks to drive them away. He said it would be difficult in the dark and suggested that instead we should all move on a little. The General indignantly refused to move for a bunch of ragamuffins so I walked back through the vehicles to make sure that 5 Brigade was doing something. Before I got to my A.C.V. the firing had stopped, but one of our ammunition trucks was blazing merrily. Some 23 Battalion carriers had driven the enemy party away but not before they had done this damage and inflicted

about twenty casualties. They also kidnapped Tom Catley, my junior signals officer. He had got out of his truck to speak to some people who approached from trucks a few chains away. They were Germans and when they realized the position they grabbed Tom, hurried back to their trucks and opened a very nasty fire. Tom's disappearance presented us with a problem. He had been in the field for some months but had never told his wife that he was, and daily used to write long letters describing his imaginary doings amid the delights of Maadi. Now he would have to be reported missing and the truth would be out. Fortunately, a few days later, while we were still cogitating, he was picked up. His captors had got fed up with carting him around eating their rations and had set him loose.

6 Brigade arrived in the early hours of the morning, being directed by wireless on to the burning truck.

Two hours before dawn on 5 November we opened out into desert formation, still with the armour leading, and resumed the move. The intention was to get on to the escarpment west of Fuka and there block the road. Again 4 Light Armoured Brigade led, the General well forward with it. Very soon after daylight the armour surprised a German column at breakfast. Eight Mark III and IV tanks were knocked out and two captured intact. Little groups of transport could be seen in all directions making off as fast as they could. The G.O.C. Trcnto Division and his second-in-command were captured trying to escape in a little staff car. I was with General Freyberg when this G.O.C. was brought in and I thought him rather a soldierly-looking fellow. He started by saying that he had served with the British in the last war, to which the General replied that Italy had behaved very badly this time. He then said sadly that his fine division (and Trcnto was not a bad division) had been destroyed, but there was no offer of sympathy. He was then escorted away, being allowed temporarily to remain in his car, much distressed that no notice was taken of his offer to shake hands. General Freyberg took the war seriously and disapproved highly of the Italian Army.

About midday the armour was held up by two parallel

wire fences 600 yards apart running north and south from Fuka escarpment. An enemy rearguard with guns was in position behind and there was some brisk shelling. Some of our guns came into action and quite a heavy artillery duel began. I went forward in my car to find out what the noise was about and found the General sitting on the outside of his tank in a very exposed position and getting a fair share of attention. I climbed up beside him and he remarked that being on a tank gave one a great feeling of security. I did not have that feeling nearly so strongly.

After a considerable delay, 4 Light Armoured put some of its small supply of infantry through the minefield under cover of a smoke-screen, and sappers cleared and marked a gap. I had felt pretty sure that the two fences belonged to the same dummy minefield that the South African major was marking out when Inglis and I came on him the morning after Minqar Qaim, but fences had to be treated with respect in the desert, so I said nothing about my suspicions. No mines were found, in fact, but a gap was fenced off quickly and the armour went through. The enemy rearguard cleared off except for some 88s which continued to fire from the north. 4 Light Armoured Brigade turned in that direction and headed for the road but still met this opposition.

5 Brigade was then brought forward and passed through the gap under a brisk fire, at full speed and without a casualty. It was nearly dark so I formed the Brigade up in close formation under some cover. The General told me to go north to the road, but in effect to use my own discretion whether it could be done, and not to get heavily involved. The rest of the Division would make no further move after passing through the minefield and the probable intention for next day was to continue westwards south of the road and seize the Bagush landing-grounds. I moved a few miles to give space for the rest of the Division to get through the minefield and form up, and then halted to consider the position. We had lost touch with the armour. We calculated that we were still ten miles south of the road. I came to the conclusion that it was impossible to get into a solid position barring the road during the night, that we would only get into serious

trouble with the still powerful German armour if we made the attempt, and decided to stay where I was. This was a difficult decision to make and I do not know whether it was right, but no comment was made to me about it. During the day the total advance was thirty-one miles.

The move was resumed at first light next morning, directed on the escarpment south of Bagush, and 5 Brigade fell in at the rear of the column. Good progress was made for some hours and we expected to carry on and cut the road at Charing Cross, the junction of the roads from Matruh to Sidi Barrani and to Siwa. There were light showers in the morning and then a deluge. Water began to lie in sheets and many vehicles were caught in the mud. We struggled on to the Bagush landing-grounds, twenty-three miles, and then the bottom fell out of the desert and we were hopelessly bogged. Rain continued all night and next morning we looked out on a flood. My car sank down to the axles. All through the 7th we remained in this predicament, our supply columns a few miles away in similar circumstances and quite out of reach. The enemy, travelling on the hard road, made full use of this respite. Most of the year's average rainfall of six inches must have fallen in that twenty-four hours.

8 November was fine and the desert dried up amazingly so that in the afternoon we were able to move again, though delayed by many soft patches. We halted after doing twenty-eight miles. During the day I ran across to the old Minqar Qaim battlefield where there were 300 German graves in a neat cemetery. The skeletons of the men killed near my headquarters, and buried by us in shallow graves, had been uncovered. It was pleasing to see an Italian armoured car blown up on our unlucky minefield. I sent a party to bury our poor lads again and mark their graves.

The enemy had got clear ahead and next day we followed along the road to near Sidi Barrani where the armour had a small scrap. Progress was slow and difficult for the road was in bad order and there was a great congestion and jostling for room on it; but we did sixty-three miles.

We started again early on the 10th and again struggled forward slowly all day. I left a company of the Twenty-first

to clear up Sidi Barrani, **where enemy parties were** reported, and **we** by-passed the village. In **the** afternoon it was reported that Halfaya pass and the escarpment above Solium were held and I was ordered to outflank **the** Halfaya pass position by getting on to the escarpment to the south. We did a very slow and difficult seven miles across country and were then recalled and had much trouble squeezing ourselves back on to the crowded road. It was a long, tiring day and at nightfall everyone wanted to stop; but very fortunately I ordered the battalions to make good another twelve miles, which kept them on the move until nearly midnight.

Meantime I had gone ahead and found Roddick, who was halted with his tanks and motor battalion at the foot of Halfaya pass. He said that the pass was held and the road mined, but that he had enough infantry to clear it and did not want me to crowd farther forward than a certain line. I agreed gladly enough and got back to Brigade Headquarters, parked just clear of the road, about midnight. Everyone had gone to sleep, so Ross, Joe, and I had some supper and lay down to sleep by the car.

At 2 o'clock I was wakened by an officer whom Roddick had sent back. He said that his few infantry—I think he said there were only fourteen bayonet men—had been unable to clear the pass and he asked for help. The Brigade was scattered back over miles of road sandwiched in among guns and vehicles of many units and it would take many hours to assemble and deploy. But dawn was not long ahead, and it would never do to allow our great mass of packed transport to be caught by guns in daylight. The A.C.V. had been left stranded eighty miles back and we were so mixed up that I could not find Monty or my signals officer: so I roused Ross and drove down the road until we saw Twenty-first Battalion's '84' sign a couple of miles back. I found Ralf Harding and told him to bring his rifle companies forward and meet me at the junction of the road leading to the pass and the main road. He was a bit surprised to hear that I would then want him to storm the pass.

I then returned to Roddick and told him that we would fix the matter up. I thought that this rearguard, whether

German or Italian, was probably feeling very lonely and unhappy and would not resist a brusque attack. We waited anxiously for Ralf. He arrived very quickly with two companies under Roach **and** Smith, **only** no **men** all **told, and not as** many as I had hoped. I thought it would probably do, however, **and** told him to go up the road with vanguard and point **as** in the pre-war text-books, to deploy on either side of the road as soon as he met opposition, and go straight in with the bayonet. He debussed and marched off, many of the men still looking stiff and sleepy.

I returned to Brigade, woke Monty, who was surprised and rather indignant to find me waging war on my own in this fashion, and we set to work to rouse and bring forward the Twenty-third and lay on a serious attack with guns and all other amenities if the coup failed. I was quite confident that it would not. By dawn we had this well under way and **the** troops nearly ready to move. I went back to Roddick, on the way saw some tracer on top of the escarpment, and reached him to find that all was over. A message had just come in from the Twenty-first that they had the pass and many prisoners. His sappers were clearing the road and his tanks moving up behind them and would soon be through.

Very happy and relieved I returned to Brigade. We told the Twenty-third to calm down and have breakfast and then told Division of our goings on. After a cup of tea I went off again, met a long column of Italian prisoners winding down **the** pass, and found Ralf on the top. Naturally enough he was very pleased about things. He had attacked with both companies in line, firing from the hip and yelling, and after one blaze of fire the Italians had surrendered. The Twenty-first had one killed and one wounded. Sixty or seventy Italians had been killed and there were 612 prisoners, of whom a few were Germans. The Italians belonged to the newly arrived Pistoia Division. The General was always very amused by their motto: 'I am valiant unto death!'

The tanks had already gone through and captured a troop of 105*3 which would have made things very unpleasant for us if they had been left until morning. We discovered **that the road up the** escarpment from Solium had been **blown***

During the day the endless column of the Division and of Eighth Army stretching back far out of sight climbed the pass and moved on into Libya. There was no more opposition and during the afternoon the Division halted on the high ground above Bardia. 5 Brigade went into bivouac with headquarters at Menastir, a hundred yards from where I had been when the Twentieth had its fights a year before. The armour went on with the pursuit. We cleared football grounds and started a programme of training and a divisional football competition.

18. Agheila Line and Nofilia

WE remained halted for nearly a month* Rommel had stopped his retreat on the short and strong line between the Agheila marshes and the sea, at the bottom of the Gulf of Sirt. Twice before, the Axis army had stood at bay there and later emerged to reconquer Cyrenaica and Libya, on the second occasion to carry the war into Egypt and almost to Alexandria. There were pessimists who thought this might happen again. Most of us had no such fears, but our opinion of General Montgomery went up higher still when we saw that there was going to be no rushing of matters, but a thorough administrative build-up before the advance was resumed.

The Australians and South Africans had not taken part in the pursuit. The Australians were about to go home to meet the Japanese menace. The South Africans, whose battalions had been extremely weak in numbers at Alamcin, were about to convert themselves into an armoured division. 50, 51, and New Zealand Divisions and the British armour halted in various parts of Cyrenaica and Libya, with light forces watching the Agheila line. The work of opening the ports and the railway and bringing forward supplies went on swiftly, but the tasks were very big and we were already a long way from Egypt and were about to go much farther.

Almost at once I had a very painful choice to make, I was ordered to detail one of my four battalions to return to Maadi and become the motorized battalion for 4 Brigade. It was more than hard to part with any of them and there was no real basis for choice. But the Twenty-second had not been lucky under me: John Russell had been killed and

there had been its unmerited disaster at Ruwcisat, The battalion was farthest back, moreover, for it had been halted at Solium and was busy unloading supplies from tank-landing craft; and so there would not be the pain of seeing it go out from the midst of the Brigade. Small factors, but being a little superstitious, as most soldiers become, I accepted them as decisive and very reluctantly selected the Twenty-second. It was a bad day for me when they went.

Duglcby, who had been Staff Captain since Syria, left to go to the Staff College course at Haifa. When returning to the Division, four months later, he stepped on a mine near Medcninc in Tunisia and was killed. I had the choice of Denis Blundell and another officer to take his place. Against the advice of the G.i, who said that Denis had not worked at all hard at Haifa, I chose him. I had known him as a platoon commander in the Nineteenth in the very lint fighting in Greece and as Adjutant of the Nineteenth in Crete and in Libya. So I told Ray Qieree that Denis would work for me and was quite right.

Practically his first action was to send out parties to scour the country for mess comforts. One party returned with a nice little marquee and Denis then went on to establish a poker school. We played regularly until the end of the campaign in Africa, nominally for fairly high stakes but dividing by ten on settlement, and it was hard to lose more than £5 in a night. We made it a practice to square up before a battle.

Football and training went on busily and we had a very successful brigade sports. One item was a competition in stripping and reassembling a Bren gun, won by a Maori in the amazing time of sixty-six seconds. The average was about two minutes.

Brigadiers were issued with caravans during this period and from then on I campaigned in considerable comfort. I had no objections to sleeping on the ground, but enjoyed getting into pyjamas most nights and sleeping in a bed. I am entirely in favour of waging war in as much comfort as possible. Apart from that it was a very good thing to have a lighted room in which to work and be alone.

The question of whether the Division should return to New Zealand became a live issue once Egypt was saved. General Freyberg got opinions from Brigadiers separately. I do not know what the others thought but my own view was unhesitatingly that we should stay at least until Africa was clear. It was only a small Eighth Army that took Tripoli and, at the least, it would have been difficult without us.

The units all trained and exercised hard, Charlie Bennett in particular walking into the Maoris. There were still no reinforcements from New Zealand but a number of wounded and sick came back. All the battalions were now very fine, hardened, smooth-running machines. Every man had been frequently in action and all the officers and N.C.O.s were experienced in war and often tested under fire. But early in December there was a divisional conference and, on the morning after it, we set off on a 100-mile march to turn the Agheila line. The semi-finals of the football competition were postponed until our arrival in Tripoli.

The general plan was that 51 Division and the armour should make a frontal attack, while New Zealand Division, reinforced by a single regiment of heavy tanks, the Scots Greys, was to come up in one unbroken move, pass south of the marshes on which Rommel's right flank rested, and swing north behind him. A route had been reconnoitred by the Long Range Desert Patrols and British armoured cars, and we had air superiority. The operation was to be covered by what was then regarded in the desert as a fairly heavy bombing offensive—108 sorties per day, averaging 2,750 pounds bomb-load per sortie and 60 sorties per night, averaging 4,000 pounds bomb-load each. It was thought that Rommel would retire; if he delayed too long, he would be bottled up and annihilated.

Before starting on the campaign, Joe and I checked up on our supplies. Some big consignments of parcels had arrived and our larder was full. We had seven bottles of whisky, three of them sent up by Tom Campbell as a parting gift, eight plum cakes, scores of tins of various foods and dainties, and fifty-eight two-ounce tins of tobacco. With the caravan as well, Joe considered that it was going to be a picnic.

The first part of the move, across Cyrenaica, was made by brigade groups moving independently. We passed south of the old battlefields of Sidi Rezegh and Belhamed, south of our old box at El Adem and past the old Free French position at Bir Hacheim. I made a detour to look for the last time at Belhamed and the wadi where I had been a prisoner. We went on across the bulge of Cyrenaica, past the relics of many forgotten desert battles, and reassembled near Agedabia. At the old Italian post there was the first gallows I had ever seen. At one drift we saw a clump of trees and some green grass which the whole Division wrote home about.

After a halt for a day or so, we moved again for the final phase. It was known that Rommel had begun his retirement from the Agheila position. So far we had had good going, for many miles perfect, but now there was really difficult country to negotiate. Before long it was impossible to continue in our broad desert formation. We broke down into two or three columns and made good progress, though the column must often have been thirty miles or more in length. The main obstacle was a huge, steep-sided wadi which was crossed at ChrystaPs Rift, so called after the King's Dragoon Guards officer who had found this possible crossing-place. This was crossed during the night of 13 December. Our bulldozers did magnificent work—in fact, the move would have been impossible without them. Their drivers always amused me. They wore a curious slouch-hatted rig of their own that could almost be called a uniform, regarded all army ranks with easy contempt, never dreamt of saying 'Sir*' or taking the drooping cigarette out of their mouths even while having a casual chat with the army commander, affected a cynical and tired expression, and worked superbly.

Next day we crossed the Agheila-Marada track in a thirty-two-mile march. After a few hours* halt we carried on during the night of 14/15 December and covered a difficult twenty-four miles. The speed ordered was four miles in the hour, which proved too high. We observed complete wireless silence, no enemy air or ground reconnaissance appeared, and there was no opposition. Halting again only for breakfast,

we continued at ten miles in the hour and with a hundred yards dispersion, directed at first on high ground south of the road, a few miles east of Marble Arch. The distance we were intended to go was forty-five miles.

The Divisional Cavalry, acting as a screen on the right, became engaged during the afternoon and gradually direction was altered farther to the west and the march lengthened. 6 Brigade, under Gentry, was leading, followed by Main Divisional Headquarters, the reserve group, 5 Brigade, and an immense supply column. The bad going had slackened our speed: at sunset we had covered about sixty miles and the column had stretched out tremendously. Gentry was six or seven miles from the road at Matratin and he carried on slowly. Divisional Headquarters and the reserve group stopped. I went forward to Division—nine miles from the head of 5 Brigade—and left Monty with orders to continue moving until I personally ordered a halt.

Someone at Division told me that Afrika Korps was 'in the bag': the rest had gone, but we had Afrika Korps, 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions, and 90th Light, the dute of the German Army.

I waited as patiently as I could for the Brigade. About three hours after the halt a heavy rumble was audible to the south. It increased and came steadily nearer. I walked clear of the parked transport and in a few minutes more the Brigade loomed up, moving slowly in the nine columns, only a few yards apart and packed head to tail, all the hundreds of engines thundering in unison. When the head was a chain away I put my hand out like a traffic policeman. In an amazing way the column stopped almost as one truck, and in a few moments there was dead silence.

Monty and the orders group were at the front. I explained the position and said that we would move on until we struck the rear of 6 Brigade and then dig in facing east. It would have been a risky and difficult movement to execute on that dark night. We were about to move again when I saw the General and told him my intention. He considered for a few moments and then told me to get into position where we were. Feeling very disappointed I gave my orders: Brigade

Headquarters to come up to where I was; the battalions, which had their supporting arms with them, to fan out varying distances on different bearings that would put them roughly on a 4,000-yards line, 800 yards to the east, and dig in; all positions to be adjusted to the ground at first light and everyone to expect a terrific fight in the morning. I then went to bed, grumbling violently.

I was up very early and shaved and in a much better humour when I met the General in the first light. He congratulated me on being shaved at that hour and went off to shave himself. Ross then drove me along my front. I found the Twenty-first on the left, slightly agitated. A Mark III tank had driven through their left company just before dawn, firing in all directions and wounding an officer. There had been no other incident and the battalions had got into quite good positions and were fairly well tied up. I drove round making what adjustments occurred to me, highly elated and telling everyone that we had the Afrika Korps in the bag and would have the fight of our lives.

There was a sad anti-climax. At first all seemed to be well, large groups of German transport appeared from the east. Escorting them were parties of tanks, carrying on a running fight with the Scots Greys just like a naval action. Several tanks and some of the transport had been hit and were stopped and burning, and there were other columns of smoke farther east. Our guns opened fire and we braced ourselves for the clash. Nothing more happened. Transport and tanks all veered off to the north, ran out of range among some low hills and poured unmolested through the six-mile gap between 6 Brigade and us. I sent some carriers out and they were just in time to shoot up and capture the last truck—the very last truck!

It was profoundly disappointing, but it was nobody's fault. If 5 and 6 Brigades had been linked up, Afrika Korps would simply have slipped round our southern flank instead of between us, and our supply columns would have suffered. We needed several hours of daylight to get into position and a full armoured brigade to grip and hold with.

6 Brigade had struck opposition near the road, put on a

neat little night attack, and taken a number of prisoners and the rear headquarters of 90th Light; Bill Gentry and his orders group had run into trouble and had several casualties. The wounded officers were being taken back to Division in an ambulance when they were captured by Germans running through the gap.

We spent that day, 16 December, thinking things over. Early next morning we started off again. A strong enemy rearguard was reported at Nofilia and the idea was to cut it off by another 'left hook'. The advance was led by the Divisional Cavalry, the Scots Greys, and 4 Field Regiment, with General Freyberg and his Tactical Headquarters very well forward. Both armoured regiments and the guns got their B, Echelon vehicles into the column behind them, which was a great nuisance to everyone else. There are very different points of view on such matters. Then followed Main Divisional Headquarters and the reserve group, also with a large number of non-fighting vehicles. 5 Brigade Group came next and 6 Brigade Group and the supply column brought up the rear. The going was fairly good and most of the way we were able to travel in desert formation on a broad front.

About 11 o'clock we could see that the advanced guard, eight or ten miles ahead, was being shelled, and the vehicles ahead of us stopped. We were moving up a narrowing valley, there was a lot of crowding and it took me a long time to get forward to the General. By then quite a brisk fight was in progress, the Scots Greys had attacked and the General was looking with satisfaction at a group of 200 German prisoners. He told me to swing round south of the village, keeping clear of the fight, and get across the road wherever I chose to the west.

I had a wireless set with me and called up the Brigade. Monty had just given permission for everyone to brew up for lunch but he cancelled it and moved promptly. The orders group arrived in about two hours, everyone grumbling about the congestion; the Brigade struggled forward and formed up on a clear patch of desert well south of Nofilia. I waited until it was nearly complete before moving. The whole business

had taken hours **longer than it should have**. The maps and the going report **showed** good **level** desert for many miles but very broken country near the coastal road; so I picked on the map a point some ten miles from Nofilia where it appeared possible to get on to the road easily and directed the move on that.

As most of the advanced guard appeared to have become involved in the fighting still proceeding about Nofilia, I put out the carriers of the Twenty-first as a screen about a mile ahead. We moved in desert formation, 21 Battalion in nine columns with companies abreast on a front of about 1,200 yards in the lead, the Twenty-third on the right flank, the Maoris on the left, each in three columns. Brigade Headquarters, 5 Field Regiment, such machine- and anti-tank guns as had not been allotted to battalions, 7 Field Company, and 5 Field Ambulance travelled in the centre. It was much the same formation as 4 Brigade had used in 1941; we, too, had practised it freely and were very handy in it. My place, when contact with the enemy was likely, was in front of the centre with the orders group. I had been issued with a White scout car, a clumsy, thinly armoured, slow, and under-powered affair which I disliked intensely. It was equipped with wireless, however, so that I could keep in touch with Brigade Headquarters. Monty always remained in the A.C.V., where he was in touch with the units and with Division. On occasions such as this he used to travel with head and shoulders sticking out of a hole in the roof of the old battle wagon, looking like the cherub that sits up aloft. The roof was so high that this gave him a very good view and he never missed anything.

We proceeded in this way until about seven miles west of Nofilia, when I saw the General standing on a small knoll some distance to the north. I ran across alone and told him where we were heading. He said that the enemy were pulling out fast and told me to turn north and go direct for the road. With some difficulty I overtook the Brigade and we halted and turned to the right. This made the Twenty-third the leading battalion, with the Twenty-first on the left and the Maoris coming round on to the right flank. The carriers of

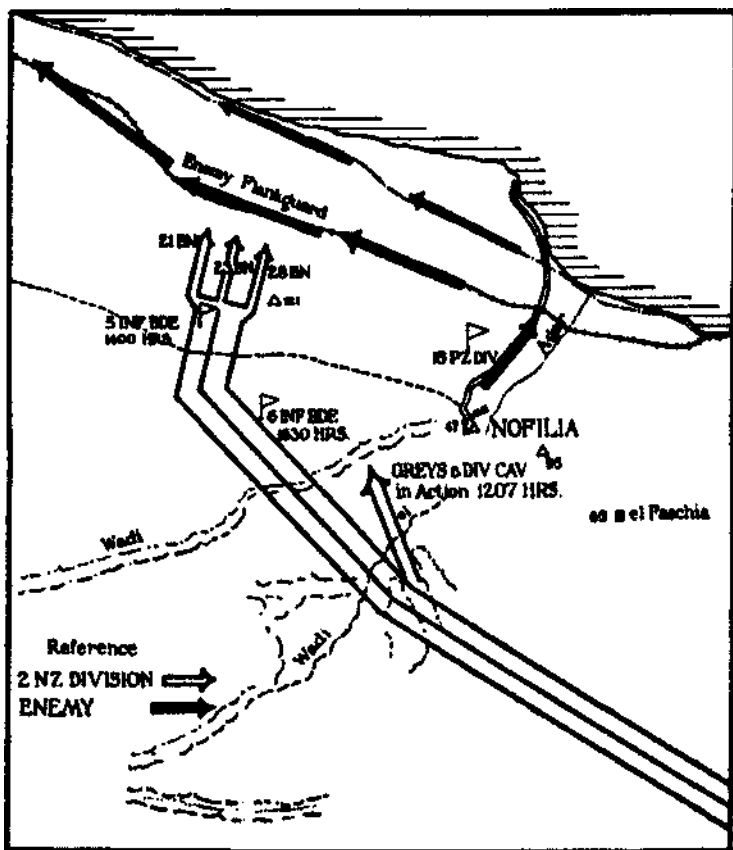
the Twenty-third went ahead to form the screen and we moved off at a good speed. After travelling about three miles, the carriers came under shellfire. They went on and disappeared. I halted the Brigade and went forward, to see a most interesting sight.

We were on a perfectly level plain, on the top of an escarpment. From the edge the ground fell away in a series of small ridges and hollows to the road three miles away. Beyond the road there was low ground to the sea, blue and sparkling in the bright sun. A stream of German transport was travelling west on the road, well spaced out and moving very fast. The carriers were below me and half a mile ahead, obviously in bad going and under fire from about a dozen guns. I could see the flashes of some and what looked like an 88 being unlimbered near the road. Two carriers had stopped and their Brcns were firing hard. Two thousand yards to the east, on the edge of the escarpment, there was a bald rounded knoll, and standing in full view on this a group of German officers, looking through their glasses at the Brigade. Long afterwards I met a German officer prisoner who told me he had been in this group.

I decided to attack at once with the object of getting astride the road and without waiting for reconnaissance or giving any time for preparation, which is against all the rules and is usually wrong. The orders group was waiting near by and I gave orders in a very few minutes: the Twenty-third were to advance and get astride the road, the Maoris to cover their right flank, the Twenty-first to cross the road and swing round to carry the line to the sea—all three battalions to go as far and fast as possible in their trucks and continue on foot when the fire got too hot or the going too heavy. Keith Glasgow had not waited for me and already had his O.P.s forward and his guns coming into action. I would have given a lot for a squadron of tanks.

The G.O.s raced back to their battalions. I waited with extreme patience for a timed ten minutes and then drove back and asked Reg if he was ready. He smiled in reply, stood up with head and shoulders out of the top of his car and gave the forward signal with his arm. As the line of

trucks passed me I noticed Peter Norris standing in the front of his truck. He saluted and smiled and I thought how handsome and debonair he looked.



MAP 11. 2 N.Z. DIVISION AT NOFILIA, 17-18 DECEMBER 1942

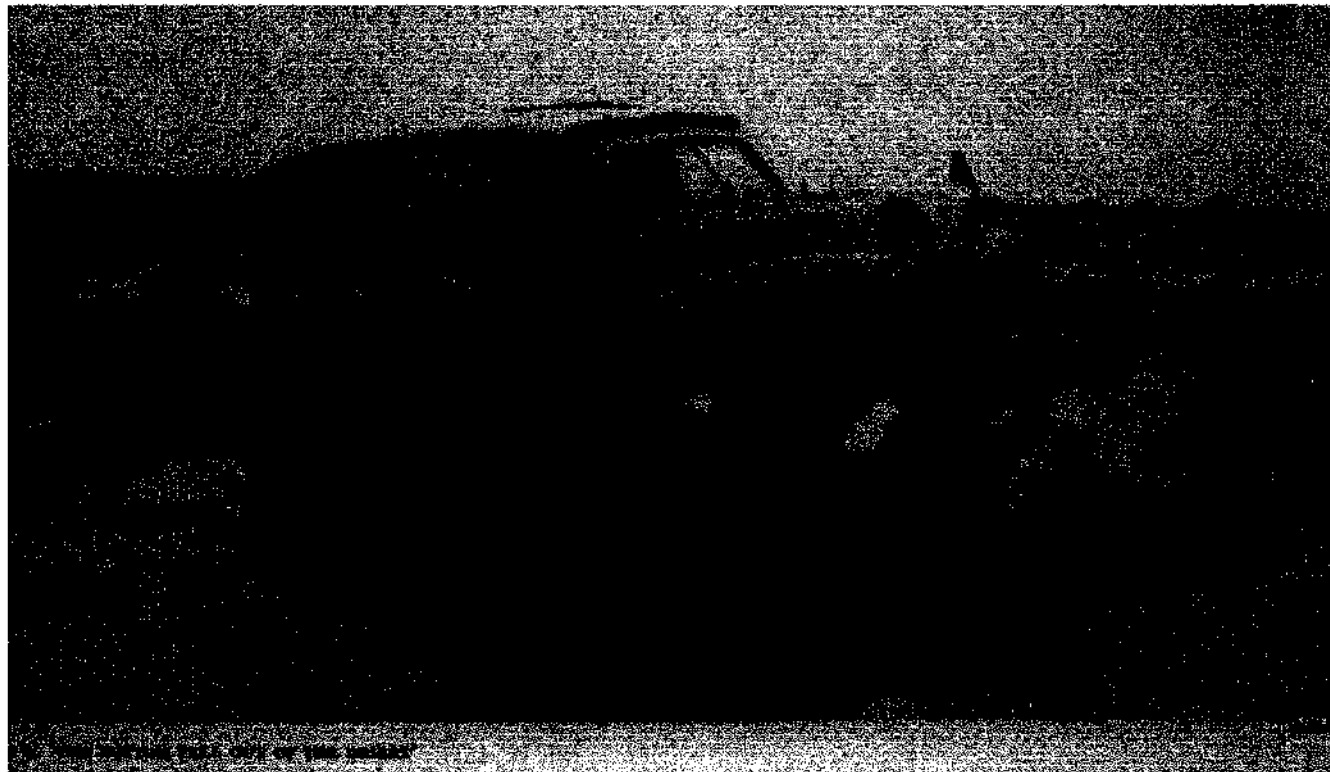
The Twenty-third disappeared over the edge of the escarpment. I followed them and stopped on the top to watch. The trucks were lurching and plunging forward, the men inside being thrown from side to side and shells raining down among them. In the heavy sand only a direct hit would do any damage. Out to right and left I could see the other battalions pouring down the slope and a ripple of flashes

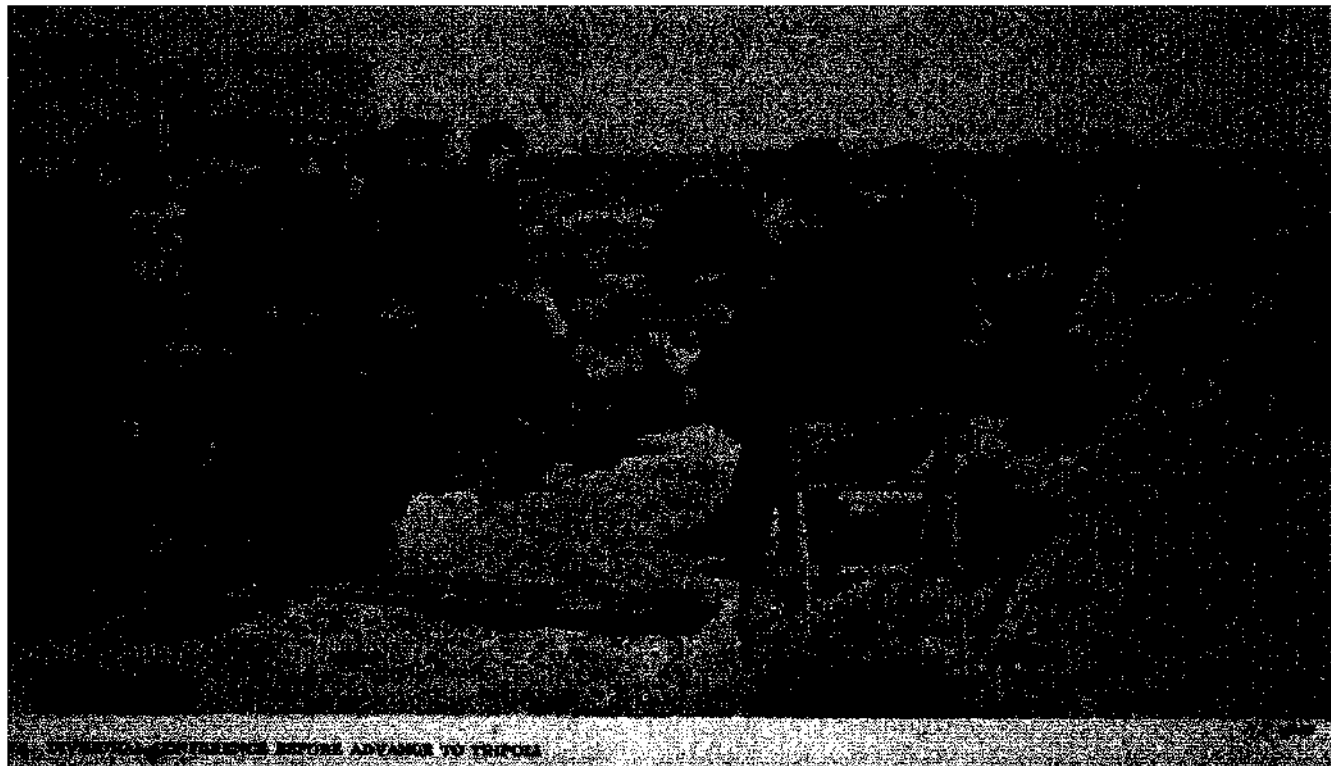
showed where our guns were opening fire. It must have been an alarming sight to the German gunnen but they stood to their guns and fired over open sights into the brown. Next day I counted 120 empty shell-cases round one abandoned 88. I did not know whether to hope that the heavy ground continued to the road so that the shell-fire would be ineffective, or that we would soon strike hard ground which would make some speed possible.

After a few minutes, when I could see Brigade Headquarters approaching with Monty's head sticking out of the top of the A.C.V., I followed the Twenty-third. We went down a very steep bank and with maddening slowness up a long sandy slope. Near the top I looked back and saw the A.C.V. charging down the bank and wondered why it did not capsize. Ahead the Twenty-third was forging on, three or four shells at a time bursting among them and one truck burning from a direct hit. On the road German transport was still streaming west, travelling at top speed and running through the spouting geysers of our shells apparently unhurt. We crawled on, Twigden and I, sweating and swearing. I wanted to overtake the Twenty-third and tell Reg to debus and assault on foot, but it was hopeless. However slowly they went, the White was slower still. I got out and walked on, but after a hundred yards saw that the trucks ahead had stopped and the men were jumping out. Reg was clearly visible, standing erect out in front signalling the advance with his arm.

That was satisfactory. I watched the companies shake out into extended lines and settled down to a steady advance. The anti-tank guns continued to struggle forward. The road was still nearly two miles away but I thought the infantry would get there and drove slowly back a little way to where Brigade Headquarters had halted. The signallers were already taking the line forward to the Twenty-third and it was nearly dark.

The fight dragged. Everything went slowly in the deep sand. A long way to the left we could see the Twenty-first crawling forward, still in their trucks and not under fire, and I sent several impatient *hurry-up' messages to them* They





could move no faster. On the right the Maoris were in similar difficulties. Both were well behind the Twenty-third, and from that battalion's front we presently heard small-arms fire and the familiar hated hammering of Spandaus. The battalion had met infantry in position.

The telephone got through to the Twenty-third and Dick Connolly spoke to me. He said that they had met heavy opposition, infantry and tanks, and were making no headway and, with grief in his voice, that Peter Norris had just been killed. I replied that the battalion was to press on and at least bring the road under small-arms fire. We could still see German transport streaming past, and fire as they might the gunners could not stop them, though they knocked out four field guns with direct hits.

The sun went down and in a few minutes it was dark. The ridge in front of the Twenty-third was alive with tracer, some of it plainly from tank guns, I ordered the Maoris to halt and take up a position facing east and covering the right of the Twenty-third, as there was a message that enemy tanks retreating from Nofilia were approaching south of the road. One of the L.O.s went over to Ralf Harding with an order for the Twenty-first to make a night attack on the left of the Twenty-third and reach the road. The Twenty-third reported that it was definitely held up. I told Reg to keep the pressure up, feeling sure that the enemy flank-guard must be very anxious to go and that there must be a gap or a weakness somewhere.

We could then only wait and hope that the Twenty-first had better luck. I found Charlie Bennett and told him to send a company wide to the east to reach and mine the road. This was an unfortunate order: the Germans had thickly mined the road and then gone, and Logan's company lost several men on mines. Firing continued briskly in front of the Twenty-third, and about 10 o'clock blazed up furiously in the direction of the Twenty-first. An hour later Ralf reported: he had struck a very strongly held infantry position, with tanks in among the infantry; it was too strong for him to assault; and, after being pinned down for a while, the battalion had been lucky to withdraw with only a few

casualties. I gave up hope of reaching the road and went to bed. Long before daylight the enemy withdrew to their waiting trucks and got away, leaving a few dead but no prisoners or wounded. In the following days we looked over the long ridge where we had been held up. We found lately occupied positions that showed that we had been opposed by not less than a battalion which had had several hours to dig in; and there were numerous tank tracks. There were about a dozen used gun-pits, four 75 mm., one 88 mm., and one 50 mm. had been abandoned, and one small car only had been stopped by our shelling.

Our own casualties were extremely light in the circumstances, about forty. Peter Norris was sadly missed. McElroy, back from his head wound at Alamein, had got another severe head wound. A sergeant in the Twenty-third who had just rejoined us after an adventurous escape from Crete, where he had been wandering in the hills since the evacuation, was killed. But though the heavy sand, treacherous because covered with the desert grass which made it look firm, had taken all the sting out of our attack it had also saved us from heavy loss. There was an extraordinary amount of firing in this little action and a great deal of it must have been very wild. We were all very disappointed; but it was ill luck that we ran against the only flank-guard of which we found any trace.

Next day we were told that we would stay where we were until after New Year, so we selected good areas in the vicinity and made ourselves comfortable. The Twenty-third stayed where it had fought, the Maoris went back on to the escarpment and the Twenty-first crossed the road so as to be near the sea. We got hold of some German prisoners who worked zealously and soon had Brigade Headquarters very well dug in. The marquee was erected and there was a severe outbreak of poker. Everyone paid social calls throughout the Division and for once training was relaxed.

There was no holiday for the sappers. All the way from Agheila to Sirtc the road had been mined and booby-trapped and they lost many men in clearing it. We had one nasty incident. A truck cut a corner when turning off the road to

go into the Twenty-first, struck a mine, and the driver was badly hurt. Two sergeants, both fine old hands, ran to help, stepped on other mines, and were killed. A psychiatrist, sent out by the War Office to study the psychology of veterans, spent a few days with us. He told me he saw an immense difference between the Twenty-first from Auckland and the South Islanders of the Twenty-third. One of the questions he asked the men was what enemy weapon they most disliked. The mortar was easily the most unpopular; my own pet aversion was machine-gun fire.

We were now 1,200 miles from Cairo, but great efforts were made by the supply people and for Christmas Day we feasted on turkey and roast pork, fresh vegetables, plum puddings, sweets, and two bottles of beer per man. It was a happy day, good wishes and good fellowship everywhere, much visiting, but a good deal of homesickness. The General called on brigades and many units, and some of us lunched with him. I attended church with the Twenty-third, a few yards from the graves of Peter Norris and the other lads killed a week before.

In the afternoon I came across three American war correspondents and their British conducting officer spending a lonely day in the Beau Geste fort at Nofilia. I asked them for dinner and they arrived bringing an astonishing amount of liquor. We had a very merry evening and heard some remarkable stories.

After recovering we did a certain amount of training and, of course, started football again. New Year 1943 was another day of feasting and celebration and I was touched when most of the officers in the Brigade came round to serenade me at midnight. Then we got back to war again.

19. Tripoli

OUR first task for the New Year was to clear a landing-ground for light bombers near the Wadi Tamet, sixty miles to the west. We had to clear an area 1,200 yards square. It was first bulldozed level and then the men had to pick up several million stones, load them into trucks, and cart them away. A squadron of Spitfires, with the pilots in their seats, stood ready to drive off any air attacks and we planted every Bofors we had round the field. But the German airfields were not far away, it was impossible to obtain immunity from their fast fighter-bombers and they raided us frequently. The Spitfires and Bofors did their best and several times brought raiders down or forced them to jettison their bombs at random and bolt, but sometimes they got through. There was never more than a few seconds* warning. In the nature of things there could be no cover except slit trenches clear of the field, and only a few men could reach them in time. We were lucky not to have more than sixty casualties. The men understood the importance of the work and stuck to it pluckily, but it was a hard test of discipline. Company officers worked with the men and senior officers were expected to be on the field as much as possible, and were. Apart from the danger the work was monotonous and made more trying by a cold, dust-laden wind, and we were all heartily glad when it was finished, one of the most unpleasant jobs 5 Brigade ever had to do.

One day the C.O.s came in with me to Sirte where General Montgomery addressed all senior officers. He gave us the general plan for the advance on Tripoli and concluded by saying in a supremely confident manner: 'We are going to Tripoli, going to Tripoli!*' He said we would be there on 23 January, which would be three months after the opening attack at Alamein.

We set off on 14 January. The Division came up and crossed the Wadi Tamet and 5 Brigade Group joined on at the rear. 51 Division moved up the road and had one or two sharp advanced-guard actions. New Zealand Division and 7 Armoured Division and 4 Light Armoured Brigade moved twenty to forty miles south in the desert and the Army Commander had another armoured brigade as army reserve. We took with us petrol for 500 miles, water and rations for fourteen days, and 500 rounds per gun.

Several wide and deep wadis, unfavourably reported on by patrols, had to be crossed. A range of low but very broken hills, known as the Gebel Nefusa, covered Tripoli from the east, running in a wide arc from near the sea to past Garian in the south-west. It was penetrated by three roads, the coastal road, one from Tarhuna, twenty miles to the south, and the third from Garian. Otherwise it was believed to be impassable for wheels. We expected stubborn resistance.

There was very little. The desert move was opposed by one of the Panzer Divisions but it fell back steadily, giving up one promising position after another. 4 Light Armoured Brigade, now under John Currie, and our Divisional Cavalry, had a few brushes; on the Wadi Zcm Zcm there was a brisk artillery duel, and for a while indications of a serious affair, but nothing came of it. Neither infantry brigade had to be deployed and we plodded monotonously along, sometimes over very rough country. We occasionally passed relics of a long dead civilization, belonging to times when Tripolitania must have enjoyed a very much heavier rainfall.

At Tarhuna, on the eastern slopes of the Gebel, we met the first Italian settlement and Italian civilians. Neither looked impressive or prosperous. Here too we saw the Fascist slogans, painted on every building: *Credere, Obbedire, Lavorare*. Here 7 Armoured Division plunged into the hills to fight its way along the road. We moved through Beni Ulid, where the sappers had many casualties on mines, one moonlight night. This was an old-style fortress, perched high on a steep bluff, looking very romantic with its turrets and battlements gleaming in the moonlight. Someone found a track of sorts, the bulldozers made it just passable, and very slowly, in

single file, the Division trickled through **the Gebel** and out on to the Garian-Tripoli road. We should have been easily stopped if there had been any opposition, but our appearance seemed to be a complete surprise. After two laborious days the Divisional Cavalry, Scots Greys, most of the guns, and 5 Brigade Group had emerged, with 6 Brigade Group close behind, and the only interference had been from a few fighter-bombers. Ross, Joe, and I had an extremely lucky escape in one of their raids and there were a few casualties.

We were out on a tract of sand-hills through which all movement was slow and uncertain. We gradually worked out of it until we were on and astride the Garian road; then we turned north and advanced on Tripoli. A few miles to the north the road passed beneath the prominent isolated hill of Azizia, topped by a gleaming white church with a cross. Behind, stretching along the horizon, there were hundreds of palm-trees, and behind them we knew, with growing excitement, was Tripoli, for so long and hard a time as distant and unattainable as fairyland.

Our old acquaintances of 21 Panzer Division were waiting in position south of Azizia, with some twenty tanks, the usual ubiquitous 88*s, and two or three battalions of infantry. No turning movement was possible in among the sand-hills without lengthy preparations. The armour made contact and began a game of long bowls with the German tanks and 88's, and our artillery came into action.

Next day, 22 January, the bickering continued. The Scots Greys gradually worked forward and knocked out one or two tanks. The whole divisional artillery got into action till, at times, there was quite an uproar. 6 Brigade oozed out behind us and it appeared that 21 Panzer meant to stay until turned out. I spent much of the day looking for an approach to Azizia through the sand-hills on the east. By late afternoon I had found one and was thinking out a plan.

Then an order came for me to go up to the General, who, of course, was with the forward tanks. I took the C.O.S with me, left them in the cars in a wadi, and walked as calmly as I could across an open stretch to the ridge where, under fire from 88's, he was with his four Stuarts. We sheltered behind

one while he told me the position. There were signs that 21 Panzer intended to retire that evening. The General thought that if I got my Brigade on the road at about eight I might find the way clear to Tripoli. He warned me to be careful.

Shells clearing the ridge were pitching in the open stretch and I had an uneasy walk back to the cars. With only broad accuracy the General had just remarked: 'Shelling doesn't hurt anybody/ There was a squadron of cavalry sitting behind the ridge and my own G.O.s were waiting as spectators. So I had to take it with a casualness that was entirely affected. I remember this little incident with uncommon clarity. I badly wanted to take cover behind my far too conspicuous map board and did in fact carry it on the weather side.

The Brigade got on to the road after dark, packed head to tail with its head fourteen kilometres from Azizia. The Maoris were leading and I went up to travel with Charlie Bennett. We set off at 8 p.m. with an advanced guard of carriers and moved at crawling speed. One kilo peg after another was passed without incident. At the five-kilo peg I halted and sent Pcne's company forward on foot, resuming the move when I thought he would be half a mile ahead. We crawled on until level with the two-kilo peg. I was beginning to think the way might be clear when a flare went up from the top of the hill and hung for a moment, lighting up the church vividly. It was instantly followed by a dozen flares on a front of half a mile on each side of the road, and then by a beautiful display of defensive fire. Clearly enough 21 Panzer was still there and very wide awake. All the fire criss-crossed on fixed lines across the front, most fortunately for us. If only a few weapons had fired directly down the road we should have suffered heavily. Enough came our way to be unpleasant and two or three men were hit.

I walked clear of the road and studied the situation for a minute. Thanks to the tracer, it was easy to see the whole pattern of fire, beautifully scientific defensive fire, laid on a zone a few hundred yards ahead of the enemy forward posts.

I counted twelve heavy weapons probably fired from tanks and decided that there was no case for putting on an impromptu night attack. Charlie sent a runner to recall Pene, who we were afraid might be trying to clear the way on his own. With some difficulty we turned the Brigade on the road and trundled slowly back, the pyrotechnic display continuing brightly behind us. Not far back the General was standing beside the road. I told him that I thought there was a bit too much opposition and he agreed. He also agreed when I said it reminded me of the grand old Duke of York who had ten thousand men, marched them up to the top of the hill, and marched them down again; though by then he was thinking of something else and was for a moment puzzled to connect that distinguished officer with the advance on Tripoli. We continued on to our old area and got to bed at 3 a.m.; and I was able at last to read some letters that had been burning my pocket all day. Pcn's company had been pinned down by very heavy fire but he managed to withdraw it with very few casualties. A few days later I went over the well-dug and organized position which we had tried to gate-crash and felt very thankful that we had got off so lightly.

Next morning early the road was clear and we drove on into Tripoli in great elation. At Suani Ben Adcm the General told me to go ahead and be the first New Zealander into Tripoli. We knew by then that the 1st Hussars had already entered the town and it was not thought likely that 51 Division would be far behind. Ross, Joe, and I drove on fast, hoping that 21 Panzer had left no stragglers, went in at the Garian gate, where there was already a red-capped policeman on traffic duty, and on to the square under the Citadel. There I found General Wimberley, the commander of the Highland Division. It had been expected that we would reach Tripoli first and areas and buildings had been allotted in advance. Now the Highlanders were in possession and there had to be a rearrangement, but everyone acted sensibly and it was made without difficulty. From the publicity and propaganda point of view it was desirable that we should have some part in the actual occupation of the city.

5 Brigade was allotted a very good sector with headquarters

in the beautiful state experimental gardens. The Artillery and A.S.C. stayed at Suani Ben Adem. 6 Brigade was to go to Bianchi and the General and Gentry and Mac Weir went out that afternoon to look at the area. It had been reported clear but they ran into an ambush at short range. Gentry's driver was killed and the party was lucky to get away. This was always afterwards referred to as the Battle of Bianchi. Later 6 Brigade came into the city and Bill Gentry had palatial headquarters in the Governor's palace.

We stayed in the Tripoli area for six very enjoyable and interesting weeks. After a few days I got tired of living in a house and we moved to near Gastel Benito and camped in the sand-hills amid plantations of some sort of gum. In no time everyone was very comfortable.

I thought it was time we had a little real soldiering and laid emphasis on ⁴spit and polish* in the training programme, as well as on route marching. Every soldier was by now a master of his weapons and further weapon training was superfluous, but we did some musketry. Guards were established by Brigade Headquarters and the battalions, and I enjoyed inspecting them every morning. At first they were very ragged but before long had become very smart indeed. The men were all veterans, as we had had no reinforcement from New Zealand since October 1941. In one 23 Battalion guard I found that the sergeant was an original who had served in Greece, Crete, and Libya and had been wounded; one man had been wounded three times, two twice, and three once. The junior soldier had joined two hours before the attack at Ruweisat six months before and had been in every action since.

Football was resumed and the semi-finals and final played. The Maoris beat Divisional Signals in a great game watched by the whole Division. For the first and only time in my life I bet on a football match and won £2. 10s. There were numerous other less important games and we again had a brigade sports meeting. The poker school quickly opened business again and Monty said that the A.C.V. should be called the Armoured Chess Vehicle. General Wimberley and his senior officers gave a party to General Freyberg and the

senior officers of New Zealand Division at an attractive cafe on the sea front in Tripoli. It was a very gay affair, with everyone dancing in the reels and much good cheer of every sort. Afterwards Ross and I drove home through the town, quite oblivious of the fact that a severe air raid was in progress.

In 5 Brigade the great social event was the party given by 23 Battalion officers to celebrate the one-hundredth birthday of Reg Romans's father. They had shown great self-denial for months saving up for this and it was a memorable affair. All the battalions gave concerts and invited the others; the Maori concert was delightful. We were able to organize leave parties into Tripoli and all the men got in, though there was nothing to buy and little to do beyond going to the army cinema or wandering round the waterfront. I made one visit to Leptis Magna, on the coast near Horns, a considerable city in Roman times. It had been excavated by the Italians, and it was pleasing to find that the British occupation authorities were continuing to pay and employ the enthusiastic Italian in charge of the work. He told me that the Emperor Severus was not nearly well enough known and that the reign of Pertinax had been only too short. I doubt if he was fully aware that the war was sweeping through Tripolitania. The ancient white city looked very lovely through the palms against the blue sea. It was in every way more attractive and interesting than I later found Pompeii.

The great event of our stay in Tripoli was the Churchill parade on 4 February. We trained and rehearsed for it and the troops tidied themselves up amazingly. The Division with its guns and trucks, with the Scots Greys in their Shermans on the right of the line, looked the magnificent instrument of war that it was, seasoned, hardened, and victorious. We were all thrilled to see Mr. Churchill and to hear the short, moved, eloquent speech that he made. We marched past to the music of the massed pipe bands of the Highland Division. The battalions marched in masses, nine abreast, a formation unknown to the drill book but ideal for such a parade, and they looked glorious. There were many well-loved ghosts with those proud, gallant battalions. I think we were all very proud and I know that when I

marched past at the head of 5 Brigade I was fairly bursting with pride. At the tea afterwards I asked General Jacob, the Prime Minister's Secretary, if Mr. Churchill was not weary of military parades. He replied that on the contrary this was the happiest day of the war for him and that the sight of such splendid troops would do him the world of good.

The previous afternoon the Highlanders had marched past General Alexander in Tripoli. They had brought their kilts with them—where they found room in their transport I cannot imagine. The battalions moved along the Corniche and passed the saluting base in the little square under the Citadel. As they turned into the square they caught the skirl of the pipes, every man braced himself up, put on a swagger, and they went past superbly. I had climbed on to a tank to watch and for an hour was almost intoxicated by the spectacle.

We had one curious affair. Senior officers, some very senior indeed, came from England and from the First Army and from the Americans, then struggling towards Tunis, and Eighth Army put on three demonstrations of the technique of modern war. General Alexander, Generals Montgomery, Paget, and Dempsey, together with the American Generals Patton and Bedell Smith, were present, and the lowest form of life evident was the Brigadier class.

7 Armoured Division in a 'telephone battle' showed how an armoured division should attack, or rather how it did. Highland Division demonstrated how to make a night attack through minefields, and New Zealand Division, with a relief map on the floor, how to move and deploy in the desert. Before the visitors arrived we rehearsed our demonstrations before one another and free criticism was invited and obtained.

7 Armoured Division representatives met such violent criticism that they were told to think again. The second attempt showed some awareness that a divisional artillery could be used to support a tank attack and so met more favour, but it bore no resemblance to any operation that anyone had seen the armour put on. Highland Division's effort was received more respectfully though we disagreed

on many points. I had been detailed to make the comments on behalf of New Zealand Division and was itching to deliver a furious attack. Fortunately, at the last minute General Frcyberg made the comments himself and did so much more tactfully than I should have done. No one made any remarks on our demonstration, in which Ray Queree handled not only the Division, but our old friends 15 and 21 Panzer and 90th Light, with a delightful freedom and confidence in their habits. This may have been because the General was a very formidable character, or because we were demonstrating one phase of a highly specialized type of warfare, in which no one else had so much experience and which also was soon to become obsolete.

The rehearsals took two days and the demonstrations the same time. We sat round the dance floor of the Hotel Uadden in Tripoli. There was a notable difference between the two groups, the visitors correctly dressed in serge and Sam Brownes, with gleaming buttons and even some field boots and spurs; Eighth Army like a gang of pirates. The Americans were particularly smart. I was opposite General Patton and watched him with delight. He sat looking at the ceiling and chewing gum. When a piece was finished his Chief of Staff handed him another. At the conclusion a story went round about his views. General Dempsey was said to have asked him what he thought of the exercise and he was alleged to have replied: he had been in the U.S. Army, man and boy, for forty years, he had watched and listened for two days, and it meant nothing to him, nothing at all!

General Frcyberg went back to Cairo for a few days and I went to Division with very little to do. The port was open again and we were supplying big parties to unload ammunition and supplies. There were strict orders against smoking. One morning 5 Brigade reported that there had been an explosion on an ammunition barge being unloaded by the Maoris and that three men had been killed. The port authorities were convening a court of inquiry at once.

An hour or two later I was ordered to report at Army Headquarters. I went up at once and was shown into General Montgomery's caravan. He looked at me. 'Your men have

been smoking/ he said. Being *MI loco* Freyberg I felt unable to admit anything, so replied: 'No, Sir/ 'Yes they were. Three men were killed and what is worse five hundred tons of ammunition was lost/ the General said. I said that a court of inquiry was sitting and that I understood that there was no evidence as to the cause of the accident. He said that he knew all about courts of inquiry and, whatever the court found, *When I say your men were smoking they were smoking!' This was clear enough, but I did not feel that it was conclusive and said so, feeling rather thankful that I was not in the British service. 'Well, see that it doesn't happen again,' the General then said. I could see no objection against agreeing to this. The court brought in a 'don't know' finding. The survivors of the working party denied stoutly that there had been any smoking; but this also was not conclusive.

During the Tripoli period all Brigadiers and above received from General Montgomery a signed copy of his little book *Notts on High Command*, It consisted of a most interesting and instructive account of the principles and methods on which Alamein had been fought.

All officers within reach of Tripoli were addressed by the Army Commander in the theatre. He started off by saying: 'You may cough for one minute; then there will be no more coughing.' Each quarter of an hour he paused to give time off for coughing. We were given an account of the campaigns, a scornful summary of Rommel's qualities as a commander, and an indication of future events. This meeting had a very good effect in more widely impressing the General's very decided personality.

The first reinforcements from New Zealand for over a year joined us at Tripoli. The Eighth Reinforcement was particularly good and well trained, nearly all young and keen, and their arrival was like an infusion of fresh blood. They had a number of very good young officers, several of them Duntroon graduates. At the Twenty-first one evening I met three, Donaldson, Taylor, and Upton, who impressed me very favourably.

20. Medenine

AFTER evacuating Tripoli Rommel had fallen back to the Mareth line across the Tunisian frontier. This was a short and heavily fortified belt, running from the sea to the rugged Matmata mountains, and it had originally been prepared by the French to resist an Italian invasion from Tripoli. Modernized and strongly held, it looked like being a hard nut to crack. 7 Armoured Division and 51 Division moved up to Medenine, a few miles east of Mareth and there halted for observation. The advance could not be resumed until Tripoli harbour had been cleared of mines and wreckage, supplies brought in, and more troops brought up. Tripoli is 1,400 miles from Alamein, 1,700 from Suez; and it was not callousness that made General Montgomery regard 500 tons of ammunition as more important than three lives.

On the morning of 2 March 5 Brigade was ordered to move to Medenine, 170 miles away, with the utmost dispatch. I went off within an hour, taking Monty and the C.O.s—*till Harding, Romans, and Bennett from the battalions, and Glasgow from the artillery—and leaving Denis Blundell to get the Brigade on the move. We reported to General Lcese in the evening and were very well received. He explained that 10 Panzer Division, after its recent success against the Americans, was on its way down to join Afrika Korps, which would then attack. The Medenine position was held by the Highlanders and 201 Guards Brigade, with a long, refused left held by one battalion of the Buffs and some anti-tank guns. In reserve the General had 7 Armoured Division, well below strength. He told me that I was to take over the left flank and that the rest of the Division would be in reserve when it arrived.

It was too dark to do anything more that night. First thing next morning we looked at the ground and selected a

line 13,000 yards long, running from the left of the Guards to the Mcdcnine airfield. The airfield was guarded by a battalion of the R.A.F. Regiment which was put under tfty command. Next day I took over from the Guards another 1,000 yards, which included a wide wadi running into the position and a likely line of approach. This made a total of 17,000 yards or over 4,000 per battalion. I decided on the line of F.D.L.S and allocated areas, Twenty-eighth on the right, Twenty-first in the centre, Twenty-third on the left linking with the R.A.F. Regiment. The C.O.s took over their units as they arrived and all were roughly dug in before nightfall.

We had two full days to prepare and got thoroughly comfortable. Although our front was very long it was not a difficult one to occupy. The ground in front fell away steadily, so that we had very good observation over all approaches except that along the wide wadi on the right. This was held by a company of the Maoris with some British anti-tank six-pounders. On the evening of the 5th we got 500 mines and 3,000 yards of plain wire with pickets. As we now had a squadron of tanks under command and I did not want them to be embarrassed by any doubts about mines, I decided not to use any. Instead we put a wire fence across the wadi and sited a pair of six-pounders in a re-entrant in the bank at one end of the wire. On the rest of the position we had no wires or mines.

Each battalion position had a depth of about a mile, with three rifle companies forward, and six-pounders echeloned in depth. The men were dug into single rifle pits seven or eight yards apart so that each section was on a front of about sixty yards and no amount of shelling would do much harm. The greatest possible emphasis was placed on concealment—I preached that a post spotted is a post destroyed, and hardly one was visible from any distance in front. The British officers who looked at the position later thought that this would have been too great an extension if we had been attacked at night but, knowing our infantry, I did not agree. We had a troop of the new anti-tank seventeen-pounders, then known as Pheasants, which we were not to use without good cause.

and they were sited well back. The whole divisional artillery and several British regiments were able to fire on any part of the front with good observation and the gunners had mastered the technique of quickly putting down massive concentrations. I arranged with them not to fire at any tanks without my request as I wanted to save them for our numerous six-pounders. All weapons had orders to hold fire until decisive range. We always thought this Mcdenine position was our masterpiece in the art of laying out a defensive position under desert conditions and, after the battle, General Leese sent senior officers from all over the Corps to look at it.

One sad incident occurred while we were waiting. A road ran from Mcdenine through the centre of the brigade position to the Matmata hills six or seven miles away. One day the 30 Corps mess truck missed a turning and ran straight out across the plain and into the hills and was never heard of again. Rumour alleged that it was full of the most delectable foods and spirits, particularly spirits, which must have been most welcome to some German unit.

On the 5th a long-range gun opened from the hills on to the Mcdenine airfield. The fighters there got up and flew disconsolately round like a flock of disturbed birds and then had to make off. Our R.A.F. Regiment had some 3-7 inch anti-aircraft guns which they had been dying to use against ground targets, and they entertained themselves by firing back, but, as it was a very big gun and far away, without any effect.

During the early hours of 6 March, a carrier patrol of 21 Battalion had a sharp brush with a large group of German transport working along the foot of the Matmata Hills and inflicted a good deal of damage on the crowded lorries. There were reports of lights in the hills and other patrols reported that they could hear the rumble of tanks and transport. At daylight a heavy bombardment opened on the front of 51 Division and the Guards Brigade. Soon the shelling spread to our area and numbers of German fighter-bombers appeared. They flew low and with unusual determination attacked everything they could see behind the

13. THE TRAILER BEHIND THE GREAT CANYON, ARIZONA

14. THE TRAILER BEHIND THE GREAT CANYON

Mr. Churchill, General John Alexander, Secretary, United States Army



actual forward positions. For some time matters were very lively. Our ack-ack was kept busy and before long our fighters intervened. Many of the attackers were shot down by one or the other. They continued apparently regardless of loss.

We had breakfast a little uneasily, for the big gun was firing directly over our heads into the town and we had to keep a wary eye on the fighter-bombers. Shortly afterwards air bursts appeared over the Maori position and Charlie Bennett rang to say that if I cared to come over I would see the sight of my life. I thought this was an odd time to invite me, but got into my new reconnaissance car, a top-heavy little armoured thing called a Dingo, and went over. There were so many air bursts that I was inclined to regret that I never wore a helmet; but I was too superstitious to change my red-banded cap. Charlie was standing at his headquarters, admiring 10 Panzer Division deploying to attack.

They certainly looked most impressive. In front of the right Maori company and about a mile away fifteen tanks in line abreast were advancing swiftly, heading for Mctaur. Behind them was another line. We counted forty-three in all. Still farther behind, and partially concealed by dust, we could see hundreds of lorries, presumably carrying Panzer Grenadiers. It struck me as a very badly co-ordinated attack. While we watched the leading tanks stopped. The commander of each one was standing with head and shoulders out of the turret staring through glasses and they looked almost comically undecided. We had not yet fired a shot. After a few moments they made up their minds, moved on again and slid down into the wadi out of sight. I thought it was time I was at my headquarters, thanked Charlie, and made off. I stopped a few hundred yards away for a last look. The second line of tanks was following into the wadi and the lorries, on a front of more than a mile, were coming slowly forward.

Our guns opened just as I got back. Monty said that Keith Glasgow had reported that enemy infantry had debussed and he was getting concentrations on to them.

The guns were hard at it for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Then the firing slackened down to troops shooting on observation. The attack had been stopped short before it had properly developed, Charlie Bennett rang delightedly. He said that the tanks had come up the wadi until almost up to our wire fence and had then shied off to get round the end. The two six-pounders had knocked out five at short range and the remainder had bolted, one capsizing down a bank in its fright. The infantry had been smothered by the concentrations and after a while had run back to their lorries and cleared off. In fact it was all over on our front.

I went round the battalions. Reg Romans was in a bad humour because an attractive-looking group of armoured cars and lorries which had approached the Twenty-third had been scared off by some wretched gunner opening too soon. The Twenty-first had seen nothing. The total of the brigade casualties was six and we had eighteen prisoners and the six dead tanks. Next day we found about fifty bodies where the infantry had been caught in the open and signs that there had been many more wounded.

The Guards and Highlanders had rather more severe fighting, but the defence was never strained and we understood that the reserves were not moved. By evening Afrika Korps had withdrawn to its starting positions, having lost fifty-two tanks and for the second time failed completely in an attack on Eighth Army under Montgomery. Medcnine was a model defensive battle, reminding us very much of the battle in early September. There was exactly the same feeling of complete balance and readiness, and that, though Rommel was attacking, Montgomery had control. There was less severe fighting because Rommel realized more quickly that he was foiled and this time we had no opportunity for counter-attack.

During next day we had scores of visitors to look at our little bag of tanks and, on General Leese's orders, at our dispositions. I went out to where the infantry had been caught and counted the bodies. There I came across Kellett, the second-in-command of 8 Armoured Brigade, holding a

T.E.W.T. The problem was: 'What orders would you have given if you had commanded 10 Panzer Division yesterday ?* In the discussion, which I stayed to hear, he pointed out how completely the German commander had failed to co-ordinate the action of his armour and infantry. Times had changed since July.

21. Left Hook at Mareth

HEAVY reinforcements now arrived, including i Armoured, 4 Indian, and 50 Divisions, and the authentic Eighth Army was assembled. Preparations went ahead for the attack on the Mareth line, and at one of his conferences General Montgomery gave senior officers the outline of his plan.

The Mareth line itself, less than twenty miles long, and very strong, was held by 90th Light and the Italian Young Fascists, whose description was always slightly modified in conversation. In reserve were the two panzer divisions with their infantry and 164 German Division. Pistoia Division held the extension of the line into the Matmata hills beyond its southern end. The Matmata hills, impassable for any large force, ran back at right angles to the Mareth line and more or less parallel with the coast for more than a hundred miles to the narrow Tebaga gap. Beyond this gap another precipitous range was a barrier to all movement. The only way in which the Mareth line could be turned was through the Tcbaga gap, which gave access to Gabes and the coastal road. A mixed Italian force, scraped up from Saharan garrisons and odds and ends—'Manncrini's mannikins', as Paddy Gostclo called them—was preparing defences in the gap.

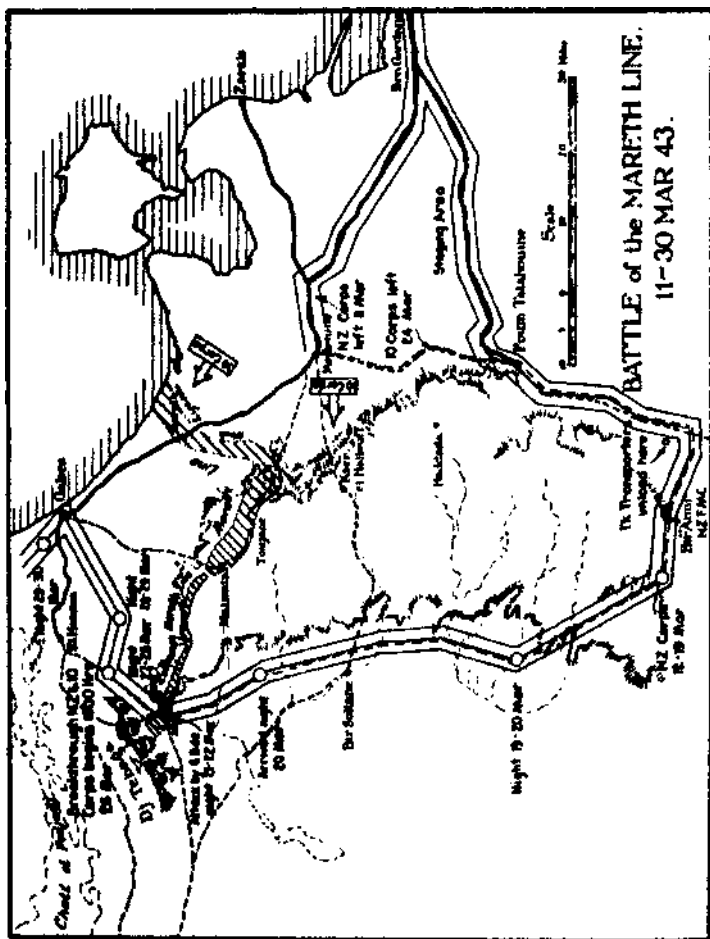
We were told that 50 Division would make a breach in the Mareth line by a frontal attack. This would be expanded and extended in a dog-fight battle for which the other two infantry divisions and the two armoured divisions were available, until opportunity came for a decisive blow. Meantime, New Zealand Corps was to carry out a tremendous turning movement through the Tebaga gap. The Corps consisted of New Zealand Division, 8 Armoured Brigade, British medium and field artillery regiments, the King's Dragoon Guards, Leclerc's Fighting French, and the Greek Sacred Squadron,

in all about 27,000 men, 120 tanks, and 120 guns, Lecirc's force consisted of some two or three thousand Senegalese with French officers, carried in light trucks each mounting a captured automatic and with a few light guns. The Greeks were all Royalist officers, about a hundred of them. They had about thirty jeeps, each mounting a Breda or Solothurn 20 mm. and were most war-like. Naturally, General Montgomery gave the impression that he expected the frontal attack to be decisive. 50 Division had to attack across a nasty steep-sided wadi and our open opinion was that it was attacking on too narrow a front, 2,000 yards, and that its bridgehead would be difficult to extend or to hold.

We had to make a march of 260 miles, of which 140 miles was over trackless and very rough desert. Daring reconnaissances had been made by light car and jeep patrols and it was clear that once more a great deal would depend on our bulldozers.

5 Brigade Group moved, late in the column, on 14 March. We went back towards Tripoli as far as Ben Gardanc, into the hills to Foum Tatouinc by road, and out on to the desert, where the whole Corps assembled and halted for a few days. The last stages of this move were made by night and we never did more difficult and tiring marches. I took advantage of the halt to go round with a big map and explain the situation and the plan to every unit. I was confident enough to predict that the war in Africa would be ended shortly.

On the 19th we moved on again, the King's Dragoon Guards and our Divisional Cavalry leading, followed by 6 Brigade. Most of the way we could only travel in three columns, often on bulldozer tracks. 5 Brigade was a long way back in the column, often twenty miles from the head. I travelled with the General, always very near the forward squadrons, or with Gentry or with Queree at Main Division, and in the afternoon would stop and wait for the Brigade to arrive. If the General became a casualty I was to be in command. We moved on again during the 20th and 21st, meeting and brushing aside slight opposition from a German armoured car unit. We travelled on quite a narrow tract of passable country, to the north the wild, utterly barren



MAP 12

Matmata hills and to the south the rolling dunes of the sand sea.

On the late afternoon of the 21st the advanced guard reached the approaches to the Tebaga gap and struck solid opposition. There was a broad minefield right across the gap, here not more than three miles wide, with troops in position behind it and an anti-tank ditch. In the centre of the gap behind the minefield there was an isolated, flat-topped feature, Point 201, about 300 acres in extent and strongly held.

There was not much daylight left when the position became clear, but the General decided to attack that night. It could only have been done by very efficient and experienced troops. The survey necessary for the artillery to fire a barrage without prior registration was completed before dark, the guns were deployed, and at 11 p.m. 6 Brigade attacked behind an excellent barrage with complete success. Eleven hundred Italian prisoners were taken with only some sixty casualties and, although the opposition was not stubborn, it was a brilliantly executed operation.

It was also most timely, for during the night 164 Division, sent post haste from Marcth, arrived to find that Point 201 had been lost. The Germans took up another position still barring the gap some two miles to the north-east and were there in strength in the morning; but we were through the minefields.

5 Brigade watched this action, which was most spectacular, from six miles away. About 4 o'clock in the morning I was awakened by a bleating noise and found it was caused by 500 prisoners whom their escort had halted near by and who were all complaining to one another. Highly indignant at our sleep being disturbed, I ordered them to continue moving till daylight. They gave a general moan and then trudged on, the bleating chorus gradually diminishing in the distance. In the morning another 600 prisoners appeared, led and escorted by a single private of 26 Battalion who walked at the head amid a crowd of be-ribboned Italian officers. I stopped him and asked if he wanted any help; his destination was the supply point, still twenty miles on. 'Oh

Lord, no!' he said, *They trust mc'; and he proceeded cheerfully, his charges chattering like parrots and apparently quite happy*

I went up to 6 Brigade Headquarters to find out the form and congratulate Gentry on his brilliantly handled action. He had settled down in a most unhealthy area and was being steadily shelled without appearing to notice anything. While 1 was there some fighter-bombers came over, machine-gunning and dropping some light bombs, but not so very light. Ike Parkinson and I took cover in the same slit trench, rather crowded, until the atmosphere became more peaceful—then thanked Bill for his hospitality and departed without undue delay.

It is not often that an officer who has failed in action succeeds in redeeming himself later. One of my officers in the Twentieth had done indifferently in Crete and afterwards I had told him that he was not tough enough and sent him to Base for administrative duties. He got himself a job at the Field Punishment Centre—Rock College, the men called it—in order to toughen himself! After a while he got back to a battalion and he commanded a company splendidly in this affair, showing fine dash and resolution at a critical moment in the assault. Unfortunately, he was mortally wounded; but he left a good memor)'.

We expected to follow up this action with another attack on the following night. Probably if we had attacked again at once we would have scrambled through the gap somehow. But the General was determined to have no half measures and to make a clear break-through when he did strike. The Mareth battle was in full swing and, as we expected, the bridgehead made by 50 Division was proving difficult to hold and impossible to extend. Heavy fighting was going on in the hills south of the line proper without much progress showing on the situation maps; and we heard that in a preliminary attack our friends of 201 Guards Brigade had suffered very heavy casualties without gaining much success. In fact the news from Mareth was not good, but we remembered that this was the *dog-fight* phase.

New Zealand Corps spent the next four days in clearing

the hills on its flanks and in breasting up to the new enemy position. There was a good deal of shelling by both sides, a certain amount of air activity, and numerous small brushes in the hills. Leclerc's French cleared the hills on our right and pushed on until they were on the last ridge, overlooking the plains and well ahead of 6 Brigade in the gap. I was sent up to report on the prospects of putting in an attack through the French. I spent a lively day with General Leclerc and reported unfavourably: we could get our infantry through that way but no transport or anti-tank guns. There was nothing for it but a frontal attack. The light armour bickered in the hills on the left and made slow progress. In front of 6 Brigade right the Germans held a bold feature, Point 184, in advance of their general line. To carry out the breasting-up programme 6 Brigade tried to seize this hill, but put only a company at it in a night attack without artillery support. This was taking it a little too lightly with Germans in possession, and the effort failed.

Nevertheless, planning and preparations for a serious attack went ahead and on the 23rd I was told that 5 Brigade would attack on the right of the road running through the gap, which gave us a two-battalion objective. Next morning I took the battalion commanders with me to look at our objective from Leclerc's position. We had a stiff scramble but got right to his forward posts and had a perfect view from level with the enemy line on the flat. We could see the infantry posts, the tanks waiting in reserve, the flashes of every battery that fired, and every feature on the map that we wanted to identify on the ground. It was the only reconnaissance I ever made in which I could see everything that I could want to see. The French, or rather the Senegalese, were being heavily shelled and mortared and did not appear to like it. Certainly the explosions sounded most alarming among the steep ravines. We spent some time with a New Zealand gunner, watching him direct fire on to some German transport in a wadi directly below and not more than 1,000 yards away. For a quarter of an hour he landed every shell fairly into the wadi without getting a hit. The trucks moved about uneasily but seemed untouchable. The second attack

on Hill 184 had failed on the previous night and this reconnaissance gave us an idea how to tackle that feature if we had to*

We got orders for the attack at the divisional conference at 7.45 a.m. next morning, 25 March. From Mareth the news was that 50 Division had lost its bridgehead, 1 Armoured Division, which had not been engaged, was making a forced march to join us, and the decisive blow was to be delivered through the Tebaga gap, New Zealand Corps was to smash a breach in a daylight attack so timed that 1 Armoured Division, at the end of its tremendous march, would drive straight through to the Hamma gap without pause. 'Super-charge IP' was the code name for this operation. General Horrocks was sent round to take command.

The attack was to be launched at 4 p.m. on 26 March. From 3.30 p.m. for a period of two hours the R.A.F. was to attack the enemy gun positions, headquarters, and tanks, employing sixteen squadrons of fighter-bombers, one of Hurricane Tank Busters', and one of Spitfires. The artillery bombardment, concentrations by the mediums on enemy batteries and a creeping barrage by the field guns, was to open at 4 p.m. We had about 200 guns in all. The assault would begin at the same time, led by the tanks of the three regiments of the 8 Armoured Brigade whom two battalions of 5 Brigade and one of 6 would follow. The advance was to proceed at the rapid rate of 100 yards per minute for 1,000 yards to the first objective, and then at half that rate for a further 3,000 yards which would carry it clear through the enemy positions. The infantry were to lie up on their start-line all day on the 26th, moving up and digging themselves in during the night. To make this possible 5 Brigade was at once to seize Hill 184 which enfiladed the whole of the lying-up area.

I gave my orders immediately on return to Brigade Headquarters. We were ten miles back and there was a great deal to do. I decided to give 21 Battalion the task of capturing Hill 184 and to make the attack with the Maoris on the right and 23 on the left. I left Ralf to do his own planning for the Twenty-first attack. We had to do a night march of ten miles

and more, take over the Roman Wall line, and do an attack with one battalion; after it had succeeded we should have to move the others forward and dig them in, move Brigade Headquarters, select and light routes, establish signals, get the transport back and everybody hidden, and attend to innumerable other details. No troop movement could be made until after dark and of course no lights could be used except the shaded lamps marking routes and headquarters. All the preparations went well. Ralf did a reconnaissance with his company commanders and told me that he would attack Hill 184 from the flank, moving out into No Man's Land and advancing parallel with the enemy's main line as the Maoris had done in their raid at El Mreir. He calculated that he would be ready to attack at 1 a.m. I approved this and arranged with Steve Weir for concentrations from one medium battery and two field regiments. Everything possible was done during the day and we had time in hand in the afternoon.

At 7 p.m. the whole Brigade moved in its transport to a debussing area behind Hill 201. Brigade Headquarters was established in a wadi on the hill. 21 Battalion moved forward to do its attack, the other battalions and supporting arms rested, and the transport moved back. There was no hitch anywhere. After midnight I went out to the Twenty-first and saw it on the start-line. Two new company commanders were being tried out and Ralf was a bit uncertain of one of them. The companies commanded by experienced officers were in support and reserve.

The attack started punctually when the artillery opened. There was no reply from the enemy guns for twenty minutes and then it came down in the wrong place, the area from which the earlier attacks had been made. It was decidedly heavy, guns, mortars, and automatics, and on the way back I had to go through it. The Twenty-first reported at 2.50 a.m. that after some stiff fighting it had the whole objective, casualties about twenty, twenty-two German prisoners. This was satisfactory, leaving sufficient time for the other battalions. They had a hot meal at once, moved forward to their start-line, dug in, and camouflaged themselves

at well as they could* The tape marking their start-line was taken up before daylight and they remained in their pits with an absolute prohibition against any movement by anyone until zero hour. Signals were all linked up and at daylight the whole area looked empty. The morning and early afternoon passed slowly, very little movement visible anywhere and, except that the Twenty-first on Hill 184 was steadily hammered by mortars, there was very little lire. The infantry forward lay very still and were apparently unobserved. I played chess with Blundell, read, and wrote letters.

Punctually at 3.30 p.m. the fighter-bombers appeared, squadron after squadron: all along the line of the forward infantry little columns of orange smoke appeared indicating their positions, and this smoke steadily grew and spread. The bombers made no mistake and nothing was dropped on us, but for half an hour they turned the enemy position into a pandemonium. Very soon there were several columns of black smoke from burning trucks or tanks. The whole narrow area between the hills looked like a cauldron. I noted with concern that Hill 209, the Maori objective on our right flank, was scarcely being attacked. Otherwise the *blitz' seemed likely to be an effective preparation.

Under cover of the noise and smoke of this bombardment, in clouds of dust, the Sherman tanks of the Notts. Yeomanry and Staffordshire Yeomanry rumbled up, passed on either side of Hill 201 and deployed along the infantry start-line. They were moving into position when the guns opened, firing for twenty-three minutes on the enemy positions, and at 4.15 p.m. the tanks moved majestically forward, followed closely by our little carriers. The infantry climbed out of their pits—where there had been nothing visible there were now hundreds of men, who shook out into long lines and followed on 500 yards behind the tanks. At 4.23 p.m. the barrage lifted a hundred yards—an extraordinarily level line of bursting shells—tanks and infantry closed to it and the assault was on.

From my battle headquarters in a hole on the northern slopes of Hill 201 we had a perfect view. The German

gunners had not been silenced and, from the time our tanks appeared and began to form up, had been raining shells among them. Several tanks were hit and burst into flames, some of the infantry companies were almost hidden by bursts, smoke, and dust, but the advance went steadily and remorselessly on. There was no check in the rapid advance at 100 yards per minute over the 1,000 yards to the first objective. We could quite clearly see the tanks, close against the bunting shells of the barrage, and they were all firing. From then on opposition became more and more severe. The barrage advanced at half the rate; underneath it we could hear the hammering of Spandaus and the eager crackling of our Brens and rifles and through it see the flashes of anti-tank guns. A few little parties of prisoners gathered in close groups and set out towards us—there were not many.

The German defence was determined and soldierly, but we had the weight. Both tanks and infantry meant business and knew their trade. On 5 Brigade left the advance went right through to the final objective, a total depth of 4,000 yards, and despite some sharp fighting casualties were light.

On the Maori front there was trouble. The tanks were unable to climb Hill 209 and sheered off to go round it. An 88 mm., cleverly placed behind the hill, knocked out five in succession and the others drew back. The right of the battalion was pinned down by heavy fire from 209 but CL Company on the left, under Peta Awatere, swung right and attacked in the most spirited fashion. A lower feature of 209, later called Hikurangi, was strongly held and a bitter fight ensued on its steep slopes. The barrage had gone over, the tanks in the vicinity had lost interest or were out of touch, and the Maoris had to fight it out themselves.

I went up in a Bren carrier just before dusk and found that C. Company had at last forced the Germans off the top of Hikurangi on to the reverse slope, but they were unable to stay on the top themselves under the intense fire from 209* Awatere had been wounded and the remnants of the company under one of the platoon commanders, Ngarimu, were clinging to a position just under the lip of the hill. The Germans had closed up to within twenty yards and a furious

grenade and stone-throwing fight was in progress. Some small parties were working their way up to reinforce, a difficult and dangerous trip, for the slope was under heavy mortar fire. I could not find Charlie Bennett but was able to find out and see just about where the Maoris had got to, so went on to the Twenty-third. They were far ahead on their final objective; I failed to find Romans in the growing darkness and so returned to Hill 201 and the end of my telephone lines.

Just before going forward we had seen the awe-inspiring sight of the hundreds of tanks of 1 Armoured Division rolling in masses past the left of 201 and on through the gap made by the attack. 6 Brigade, after some very heavy fighting, was on its objective, and the news from Division indicated that there was a real break-through. Consequently the Germans on 209 would be isolated and stranded if they did not go during the night. I decided that there was nothing to be gained by making a night attack on them and contented myself with arranging with the artillery for constant harassing fire on their position. During the night C. Company was several times viciously attacked, but thanks to Ngarimu's resolution and leadership it held on. The Germans holding 209, 2 Battalion of 433 Regiment, showed no disposition to go—probably they were unaware of the real situation. The supporting arms reached both battalions and the tanks withdrew. All wounded were got away and a hot meal was sent up to the forward troops. About midnight we heard that 1 Armoured Division was through and heading for Hamma. We tidied up our line by getting the three battalions in contact.

We rather expected that except for our own particular opposition on 209, the enemy would have gone by morning. But there seemed to be some hold-up: for there was little sign of movement in the masses of our armour and transport visible in the north, while 5 Brigade area was quite heavily shelled. Soon after daylight I went up to the Twenty-third, arriving a few minutes after two men had been killed by a shell very near Reg's headquarters. He and Angus were in very good form and hoping there would be orders to press

on. They had the bad news that two of the battalion's grand company commanders, Thompson and Robertson, had been killed, but otherwise casualties were moderate. I told Reg to get a company forward on the right so as to bring the reverse slopes of 209 under fire and otherwise to stand fast,

Charlie Bennett was very well forward and I joined him in a slit trench, 200 yards from the foot of Hikurangi. We appeared to be under aimed rifle fire and some bullets passed very close indeed when we put our heads over the edge of the trench. C. Company of the Maoris was where I had seen it the previous night, hanging on just under the lip of Hikurangi. Charlie said that Ngarimu had been killed about daylight and he thought he had earned a V.C.¹ We worked out on the map with great care just where the Germans and Maoris were. I rang Monty and told him to lay on the heaviest possible bombardment of 209 and Hikurangi and left it to Charlie to attack with one or other of his less damaged companies when he felt that resistance was sufficiently shattered.

My Dingo was waiting ten yards away with the driver's head well out of sight. I was just about to make a dash for it when a Maori sergeant arrived in a Bren carrier, got out, and, in the most casual manner, walked across to us and opened a conversation, quite oblivious of the whistling bullets. I told him to take my place but was left with no option but to walk equally casually to my Dingo and clamber deliberately in. It was a relief to get my head inside.

Back at Brigade we worked out more tasks for the artillery and, at intervals during the next few hours, several field regiments fired merciless concentrations. There were signs that opposition was weakening elsewhere and prisoners were being taken. Soon after midday Bennett reported that he was going to attack with Matehaere's D. Company when he had worked it into position. He also reported that a German doctor had come over under a white flag and said that he had more wounded than he could handle and asked the Maoris to take them over. I gave him permission to do so and he said he would try to persuade the Germans to surrender.

¹ The V.C. was awarded.

For a while there was an unofficial truce and many wounded were taken over by the Maoris.

Firing was resumed. We had a company of heavy machine-guns firing incessantly on 209, carriers from both the Twenty-third and the Twenty-eighth working round the flanks; all our mortars were in action and we continued the artillery 'stonks'. Some British armoured cars, moreover, were working round behind the hill. Nevertheless, the Germans kept up a steady fire and when Matehaere's company attacked about 5 p.m. it came at first under severe automatic and mortar fire. All of a sudden resistance collapsed and the remaining Germans surrendered, 231 in all and fifty of them wounded, including the battalion commander.

Meantime our armour had made some progress. I was ordered to form a line parallel to the road astride which the advance was proceeding. I left the Maoris where they were, ordered the Twenty-third to swing up its left flank and brought the Twenty-first round from the right to prolong the left. No movement was permitted until after dark and this was a difficult and complicated little movement, extremely well carried out. By 11 p.m. all battalions were in position and the brigade front was quiet.

Early next morning, the 28th, we were having breakfast round the tail of the cook's truck, when I noticed a group of German officers a few yards away. They had put up a very stout fight, so I sent one of the L.O.s over with my compliments and an invitation to join us. They did so gratefully enough and with heel clickings and stiff bows introduced themselves as Major Mcissner, the battalion commander, his Adjutant, and the M.O. No other officers were left unhurt. While they tackled our porridge and hash very heartily we talked restrainedly. Our own feeling was that as it was a social occasion we should not make the conversation an interrogation; but since Mcissner and the Adjutant both spoke English we had a certain amount of chat.

164 Division, to which they belonged, had been in the Crete garrison after the invasion. When Blundell and I said we had been in Crete, the Adjutant sighed. 'Those were the

good days for us,' he said sadly. Meissner said he was a regular soldier and of course had never been a Nazi. He said it was a great pity that they had arrived too late to occupy Hill 201. I replied that it all depended on the point of view. When I asked why he had surrendered, he looked very hurt, 'We did our best,' he said. This was unquestionably true, so I apologized. Then he asked if he might say good-bye to his men, who were being lined up a hundred yards away, and I agreed.

The Adjutant saluted and hurried off. In a few minutes he had the remnants of the battalion in two rigid lines, Meissner exchanged salutes with me and walked towards them. We thought it was a private affair and felt some sympathy; so we stayed where we were except for a corporal of the Field Security section who understood German and who followed Meissner closely, rather to our annoyance. The Adjutant barked and the battalion came to attention with a resounding crack of heels. He barked again and in unison the men shouted 'Heil !' and extended their arms in the Hitler salute. Meissner said 'Heil!', gave the Hitler salute and then spoke. Our corporal later told us that he thanked them for their brave service, told them to remember their comrades who had died for Germany, and as they had been good soldiers told them to be good and patient prisoners. There were 'Heils!' and salutes again and then Meissner came back, saluted me, with his face working, and took his leave. We were all very impressed.

I went up to Hill 209 with Charlie Bennett and saw a most horrible scene of slaughter. There were dead and mangled Germans everywhere, more than I had seen in a small area since the Somme in 1916. Apparently everyone at the R.A.P. had been killed, there were thirty or forty bodies there. Our 'stonks' on that stony hill had been murderously effective.

Our casualties in this battle had not been unduly high—21 Battalion, twenty; 23 Battalion, thirty-eight; the Maoris, ninety-two. This was satisfactory, but practically all had been in the rifle companies on whom had fallen the heaviest strain in the long campaign since our return from Syria. The

battalistic commamlrrs said that the new Eighth Reinforcement officers and men had gone splendidly. I was glad to hear from Ralf Harding that Taylor, Donaldson, and Upton, the three new young officers I had noticed at Tripoli, had all done well.

Orders came that New Zealand Corps was moving on Hamma, and that 5 Brigade was to move as a separate column as a right-flank guard. The armour was still battling somewhere in the Hamma direction, held up by bad going and 88's. A squadron of the King's Dragoon Guards (armoured cars) under Jerry Chrystal was placed under my command. I organized an advanced guard of a battery from 5 Field Regiment, a troop of seventeen-pounders and another of six-pounders, and a section of carriers, and we moved off at noon.

I travelled with Jerry Chrystal at the head of the advanced guard, with a wireless link back to Monty at Brigade Headquarters, which was leading the main column. Working out the order of march on a road for a brigade group was a favourite problem in pre-war exercises and examinations and I enjoyed doing it for the first time in the field. Snow Walter, commanding 5 Field Regiment, travelled with me, and his guns, less the battery with the advanced guard, were well forward in the column and of course also on a wireless link.

The track was bad and winding and we made slow progress. We by-passed some Germans in the foot-hills on our right and they fired a few shells at us; but they would in due course be picked up by the Free French and we took no notice. At the crossing of one wadi there was some congestion and Monty reported that a 'hit-and-run attack' by fighter-bombers had inflicted twenty-two casualties on the Twenty-third. All afternoon we could hear a brisk tank battle ahead and to the left, and could see occasional shell-bursts and the smoke of burning tanks. By 5 p.m. we had drawn level with the fighting but had not yet struck any opposition. I decided to halt and get into a defensive position astride the road before dark. With the whole 1,200 vehicles on a single track this took hours, and long after dark when we finally settled down the tank battle was still briskly in progress a few miles beyond our left.

Early next morning, 29 March, we were on the move again. We knew by now that the enemy had abandoned the Mareth Line and were falling back along the coastal road, Our main column appeared to be making slow progress against opposition and 5 Brigade was ordered to go straight ahead to Gabes. There was a bare chance that we might intercept the enemy's line of retreat and it seemed certain that we would strike a flank-guard*

We set off gaily, in the same order as on the previous day, and as fast as we could travel. Before long we struck a good road and bowled along at a great pace. I travelled in my staff car with Jerry Chrystal's armoured cars. Several times the leading car stopped when some disturbance of the road surface indicated mines. Each time Jerry was first out and did the most dangerous part of the lifting and disarming himself. Once we were fired on sharply by a couple of tanks limping along the road ahead. We all turned and scuttled back under cover and then stopped to laugh at ourselves. The tanks moved on and we followed, a little more cautiously. They left the road, one broke down and was abandoned by its mate, crew and all. Two of our cars stalked the remaining one and as soon as they opened fire the crew surrendered.

We carried on until we could see the palm-groves round Gabes and in the distance the sea and the road from Mareth. To my disappointment the road was empty. Directly ahead was a long ridge topped by a line of prominent pill-boxes, the defences of Gabes. It was a day for taking risks so I lined up my six-pounders and machine-guns on a parallel ridge 1,000 yards away, just as if it was the battle of Waterloo. Snow Walter got his batteries into action and we opened fire on the pill-boxes with great gusto. I felt very old-fashioned watching proceedings from the gun line. At first we got quite a smart, though ill-directed, return fire, Chrystal's cars waited on the road behind the ridge and I sent my carriers under George Lawrence, who long before had been with me in the Servia pass, to look for a way round to the north. The pill-boxes were easy targets, the six-pounders scoring hits with every shot. The seventeen* pounder gunners wanted to take part but we had not used

the Pheasants yet and had instructions that they were only to be used against tanks and then only if nothing else would do, so I left them to grumble behind the ridge* The crews of two pill-boxes tried to bolt and were at once shot down by the machine-guns, A shell burst a few yards from me and I began to wonder if I was conducting the action too rashly.

We waited five minutes after that, and then I nodded to Jerry and he moved off at high speed, straight through the pill-box line and on into Gabes, I followed, leaving the advanced guard to come on as quickly as possible. We were too late to stop the road bridge from being demolished but caught three German pioneers and then were stopped by the river. Gabes is only a small place, but part of its population is French, and we had perhaps the first experience of any British troops of being liberators. The populace crowded round us in high excitement, French policemen, elderly men, and some astonishingly nicely dressed girls whom we looked on with relish. The stream was quickly flowing, shingly and shallow. I threw a stone in, the crowd caught the idea, and in no time they were carrying stones to form a causeway, chattering like magpies.

General Leese appeared at the head of the pursuit from Mareth, and shortly afterwards a group of war correspondents. Later we were much put out by one of them reporting that Highland Division was first into Gabes. Masses of tanks and * vehicles piled up while civilians and soldiers laboured at the causeway and we searched for a better crossing. Before the causeway was finished, we found a crossing a few chains upstream. Once across we wound by very bad winding tracks through a big palm plantation out on to the main road again. As soon as a few six-pounders had collected on the main road I sent them on under Robertson and went back to the river where the sappers had got the causeway into working order. Somewhere I met the General and got orders to halt when clear of Gabes. The leading vehicles of the Brigade appeared and I led them north and clear of the town till we caught up with Robertson. One of his six-pounders had had a duel at ten yards' range with an Italian armoured car that had delayed its retirement a little too long, and had knocked it out,

lolling the anew. **We stopped on the line he had reached** about noon. As the Twenty-third came up, I put it on an outpost line, the remainder of the Brigade bivouacked among the trees, and the last vehicles got in an hour after midnight.

The squadron of King's Dragoon Guards was recalled to its regiment. Jerry Chrystal came over to say good-bye after our exhilarating day. It was sad to hear of his death in Normandy eighteen months later.

22. Into Tunisia

DURING the next day we closed up against the new enemy positions along the Wadi Akarit. It was a confused, tiring sort of day, and by late afternoon I was so bad tempered that Ross severely reproved me. We crossed from one side of the road to the other, finally crossing again to the coastal side and about 4.30 p.m. were in contact with enemy positions forward of the wadi. I intended to attack these positions with 21 Battalion after dark but while we were preparing to do so Division cancelled the project and we settled down in a defensive position and patrolled forward instead. I had worked myself into a bad temper again and was very nasty to everyone I could see until Joe finally ordered me off to bed.

At daylight on the 31st I was still anxious to tackle the enemy positions temptingly forward of the wadi and ordered the Twenty-third up level with the Twenty-first in readiness. It was not the army policy to fight partial actions, however, and at 8 a.m. we were ordered to take up a line after dark from the coast to the road, and meantime to stay quiet. This we did, getting a little ineffective shelling. We carried out our reconnaissance and moved smoothly into position during the night, though it was nearly dawn when the last units reported in.

By this time I had recovered my good humour and I thoroughly enjoyed going along our new front in the morning. The men were in good spirits and seemed to have no objection to the prospect of another battle close ahead. It was plain that the enemy were standing in strength in the high ground beyond the wadi, and could only be turned out by a set-piece attack. The army plan was to assault with 4 Indian, 50, and 51 Divisions, and to use New Zealand Division to exploit; so that evening we were relieved and moved back to a reserve area near Gabes. Here we spent several days

more or less comfortably in reserve. Brigade Headquarters¹ marquee was erected and the poker school resumed business. There was more enemy air activity than for a long time, several fighter-bombers coming over for quick raids, usually just before or after last light*. One game was interrupted by the instantaneous disappearance of all players under the table.

The country-side filled with troops as the concentrations were completed. There were several conferences at Division, General Montgomery came round and spoke to all officers and N.C.O.s, expressing complete confidence that final triumph in Africa was near. He also issued another of his Special Orders. It fell a little flat with us as we had already received several and felt no need for further exhortation.

Orders came out on 6 April: the other three infantry divisions were to do the attack; 2 New Zealand Division was to exploit; 50 Division to make and mark a gap in the mine-fields and establish a bridgehead. That done, we were to move through in nine columns, with 8 Armoured Brigade leading. There was an interesting order of march:

- (a) 8 Armoured Brigade less B, 2 Echelon.
- (b) 2 New Zealand Divisional Cavalry.
- (c) K.D.G.
- (d) Gun Group (4 Field Regiment).
- (e) 5 New Zealand Infantry Brigade Group.
- (f) Main Headquarters 2 New Zealand Division.
- (g) 2 New Zealand Division Reserve Group.
- (k) 5 New Zealand Field Park.
- (i) 6 New Zealand Infantry Brigade Group.
- (j) 1 New Zealand Ammunition Company.
- (k) B. 2 Echelon Group.
- (f) Rear Headquarters 2 New Zealand Division.
- (m) 2 New Zealand Division Group.

That is, we were leading with the heavy armour, followed by the light, and we had been successful in inducing the Armoured Brigade to be separated from its beloved B. Echelon transport. Usually in our long desert moves this stretched for miles behind the armour, holding everyone else up and causing an immense amount of ill temper. Yet there

were plenty of good reasons for its being close behind its own Brigade and the severance on this occasion was a minor victory for the infantry brigadiers. The guns had to fire their parts in the bombardment and barrage programme and then find their places in the column. The marshalling and traffic control of this huge mass of vehicles was a most complex and difficult task, brilliantly performed by the staffs and provosts.

The barrage opened at 4.15 a.m. on the 6th and sounded terrific. It was a real Eighth Army Montgomery barrage. We stood round the A.C.V. almost awed, and after a while, just before dawn, heard distant and clear the pipes of the assaulting Highland battalions.

When day came the low hills beyond the wadi were still covered in shell-bursts and it soon was plain that the enemy were fighting back hard. During the morning 5 Brigade formed up in its nine columns with 100 yards between the vehicles in each column, waited hours, and then in fits and starts moved slowly forward. All day heavy fighting went on ahead and the thudding of guns never ceased. In the late afternoon we moved smoothly forward for some miles. I rather expected to have to put on a night attack but we were told to halt and go to bed, and we had an undisturbed night.

Early next morning Division told us that enemy withdrawal was imminent and, sure enough, at 8.45 a.m. we started to move through the gap that 50 Division had made, and slowly but without check passed through the hills and out on to the Tunisian plain. On the way we saw numerous dead, including one body completely severed at the waist. There were also four beautiful new Italian heavy anti-aircraft guns, each of which had received a direct hit and had its mangled crew lying round it. When we had passed through the hills, we moved into our familiar desert formation. While I was waiting for this to be completed a German officer approached me* 'Where are you Eighth Army people going?' he said. 'Tunis,*' I replied. 'Where then?*' 'Berlin!*' He shook his head and trudged on, trying to find someone with time and inclination to take him prisoner.

We moved steadily north during the day with the armour

ranging far ahead. At 5 p.m. we were ordered to halt and form a gun line facing east. This we did, 23 Battalion going a farther eight miles to provide cover for the armour during the night. During the day Ross and I had found an Italian quartermaster's stores and had looted several pairs of excellent boots* We quite improperly traded one pair with an Arab for a dozen eggs—a very bad bargain.

The move north continued during the 8th, in fits and starts behind 8 Armoured Brigade, which we thought was very slow. The main enemy retirement was along the coastal road and our intention was to swing right and get across the road somewhere near Sfax; but an enemy flank-guard of tanks and 88's imposed delay as it fell back on the plain ahead of us and the prospects of interception grew steadily smaller. Towards evening the enemy tanks made off and we made a comparatively swift move of eighteen miles in the dark, crossing some very rough country. It had been a long and tiring day but when we halted near midnight I hardened my heart and sent the Twenty-third on to the left of and past the armour in order to get astride a road which ran across our front and which we had hoped to reach during the day. The battalion had an extremely rough journey but was rewarded by collecting eight trucks and ninety prisoners of 10 Panzer Divbion without trouble next morning. One of the trucks was well loaded with cigarettes captured from the Americans.

Friday 9 April was horribly cold and windy. We moved off early and after about twenty miles halted while some sort of armoured battle went on ahead. I went up and watched for some hours and thought that no one seemed in a great hurry. There was talk of our doing a night attack and also of another night move, but both ideas were dropped and we ended the day where we had halted at noon. Fighter-bombers were over occasionally, the only casualty being Alan McPhail who collected a nice wound in the leg. Just before dark we were attacked by Stukas, the first we had seen for six months. There were ten of them, but they were in great haste to get their bombs away and no harm was done.

Divisional conference was held at 6.30 next morning. Intelligence said that 90th light and 15 Panzer were still south of Sfax and we were to move on Sfax to cut them off. But just before we moved, we heard that the nth Hussars were in the town and we had been given the slip again. Accordingly we trundled north-eastwards through immense olive plantations to a wretched hamlet called La Hencha. There was no further opposition and it was plain that there was no more chance of getting across the enemy line of retreat. We took the matter philosophically and got on with the Brigade Headquarters chess tournament in the evening.

For some reason we thought that Sunday 11 April would be a rest day and we did spend a peaceful morning and, being near running water, most of us had a bath. In the afternoon we moved again, however, and halted long after dark. We saw no sign of any enemy but heard of the armour having small brushes ahead.

The move was resumed early on the 12th and we had a long and tiring day. The walls of the great Colosseum at El Djem were visible a few miles away and, while the Brigade was getting on the move, Ross, Joe, and I went over to inspect it. This Colosseum was said to be second only to that at Rome, and it was certainly a most imposing and well-preserved ruin. It made a great impression on the whole Division and the amphitheatre later constructed at Maadi was called El Djem. After an inspection and having discovered and admired the arrangements for accommodating and producing lions and martyrs respectively, we overtook the Brigade and went on ahead of it to Msaken, a considerable town on the coastal road.

Eighth Army was finding that road movement was a very different matter from travel over the desert and there was a frightful congestion. I came on Generals Horrocks and Freyberg having a conference on top of a tank, both looking so tired they could hardly stick on.

We were directed on an objective north of Sousse. I went back to the head of the Brigade and then ahead again with the idea of finding a way of by-passing the town. The L.O.s accompanied me in their jeeps and we spent hours trying to

discover a route through a maze of narrow, deeply rutted lanes among cactus hedges and olive-groves, but it was no use. We nearly got mixed up in a small armoured battle and eventually had to go back, meeting the head of the Brigade just in time to prevent it from plunging into this tangle,

We passed through the outskirts of Sousse and joined the traffic on the main road, where we all streamed slowly along two and three abreast in an apparently inextricable confusion of units and arms.

Various contradictory orders reached us but nothing could be done about them, a position that we accepted the more philosophically because a cancellation or alteration was certain to follow shortly. Towards evening we disentangled the Brigade, with some difficulty, and bivouacked between the road and the sea a few miles north of Sousse. Not knowing what was in front I sent the Maoris on to take up an outpost position near a horrible little village called Sidi bou Ali, and during the night one of their patrols struck a belated German rear party and had a brisk scrap. They killed two Germans and captured two, losing one man killed and two wounded. By midnight everyone was in and we were reorganized.

The Tunisian plain ended a few miles to the north and the enemy were in position from Enfidaville to the imposing massif of Garci fifteen miles inland. It was possible that they had not settled down properly and we went on next morning with a slight hope of gate-crashing into at least part of their position.

The Twenty-first went forward to help 8 Armoured Brigade whose Sherman tanks were having difficulty in working through the olive-groves towards Enfidaville. They complained that their tank commanders and gunners were perched too high to see under the branches. I went forward and found the General beside the road waiting for developments. We climbed on to the roof of a farmhouse but could see little, a few tanks and infantry carriers occasionally visible among the trees, odd shell-bursts among them. After several hours, he suddenly told me to take Garci and swing round on Enfidaville from the west. This was a major operation and I did not think it was on, but I knew that he would not want

me to get committed to anything foolish and there might prove to be an opening*

We moved slowly by dusty cross-tracks, between high cactus hedges and through olive-groves, and emerged on to open ground two miles from the main road. 23 Battalion was leading, with its carriers well forward, the Maoris next, and the guns and other attached units following and occupying at least ten miles of road* Brigade Headquarters was behind the Twenty-third and I was up with the battalion, in the same clumsy White car that I had at Nofilia and with the same plucky driver, Twigden, who in civilian life was a bank cleric.

While the Twenty-third deployed from the track into desert formation, I had a careful look at the hills four miles ahead. Garci looked huge, at least a divisional objective, so I looked for something easier. Enfidaville was not visible, being in low ground, but between the two there was a prominent conical hill topped by a square white building—Takrouna. I decided to go for it. Once we were there Enfidaville would not be tenable for long. Monty had come up with the A.C.V., his head poking alertly through the roof. I told him to send the Maoris on when they arrived and rejoined Reg at the head of the Twenty-third. It was no use waiting for the guns, strung out behind over miles of narrow tracks, and we moved on at once. Reg ran his car alongside mine, I pointed and shouted and he sent an orderly on a motor-cycle with orders to his companies. It struck me that it was not a very scientific way of starting a battle but the alternative was hours of delay waiting for the guns and completely under observation. It might come off if the enemy were completely unready, or if they were Italians only.

We had travelled only a few hundred yards when the first shell burst among the trucks, followed at once by salvoes of four in quick succession. We put on speed, about fifteen miles an hour, the trucks bouncing crazily and the crowded passengers being thrown about like peas in a bottle. The ground sloped gradually down to a tiny rivulet, the Wadi el Boul, and then rose as gradually for a mile to the foot of Takrouna. On the near side of the wadi there was a low,

cactus-covered hill, dotted all over with the hovels of an Arab village. We carried on through the shell-bursts, no trucks being hit, reached the limited cover the hill and village provided, and debussed. The companies collected and moved steadily forward, obviously quite prepared to attack. Reg and I had stopped together on a shoulder of the hill where we had a good view. The little wadi 500 yards ahead was an uncertain obstacle, it would probably be difficult for wheels. A self-propelled gun which had come down the road in front of Takrouna was blazing high velocity shells straight at us and I estimated that at least three troops of 105 mm. were active. We were completely overlooked and there was still a mile to go. I decided that the little gamble had not come off, that we would go no farther, and told Reg to get into position on the hill and get his trucks under cover. While we were talking several shells burst extremely close; he said it was no place for me, and as I moved off one buret within five yards, covering both of us with dust.

The Maoris had become split up in their advance. They halted and took up positions on either side of the Twenty-third. Brigade Headquarters had halted under cover of the last of the cactus where I rejoined them. The guns were unable to find positions not under direct observation from Takrouna, and did not come into action. We reported the situation to the General, who made no remark: so we settled down for the night, very thankful that the Twenty-third had had only thirteen casualties. As at Nofilia we had been saved by the soft ground and, more than in that affair, by the speed of our advance.

Owing to some mistake in notifying code-names, Army got the impression that Enfidaville had been occupied and the B.B.C. announced its capture that night.

23. The End in Africa

IT was now accepted that we were up against an organized position and that a set-piece attack would be required. During the next few days, the Army breasted up to it and made preparations.

21 Battalion came back after an interesting thirty-six hours with the armour and on the night of the 14th I pushed it across the Wadi el Boul to occupy a low ridge as a bridge-head. This was done without casualties and next night the battalion occupied Kintiss, an isolated hill west of Takrouna, having two men wounded and taking six prisoners. Patrols during these two nights brought back a fair amount of information about the enemy F.D.L.s and reports that they were working busily. Two of the brigade dispatch riders disappeared. They had heard the B.B.C. announcement that Enfidaville had been occupied, went up the road, and eventually returned from Germany two years later. The Quartermaster of the Divisional Cavalry, with his truck, disappeared in the same way, and so did two senior British sapper officers who had also heard the broadcast.

Orders for the attack were given at a divisional conference on the 16th: 6 Brigade had come into line on our right and was to take Enfidaville, 5 Brigade to take Takrouna and the Djebel Bin, a low ridge parallel with the Takrouna spur between the two brigades. 4 Indian Division had come in on the left and was to take the Garci massif, its attack being separated from ours by two miles of plain.

We patrolled vigorously, but could not get any prisoners. In fact, prisoners were seldom taken by patrols, though every one sent out was told to collect some. If prisoners are wanted you have to hit hard and go in with some strength. We lost a good young officer of the Twenty-first who was severely wounded and could not be brought out. We were relieved

later to hear of him from Germany. He had lost a leg, but even in their desperate position in Tunisia the Germans thought it worth while to ship a badly wounded prisoner to Italy. On the whole we got little more information from our patrols than we got from air photographs and we lost several good men. I spent a lot of time forward with the battalion commanders, studying the ground and working out a plan for tackling our formidable objective. Ralf and Reg had been with me since Ruweisat, Charlie Bennett since Alamein—but we all felt that our happy partnership was nearing its end.

At the final conference the Corps Commander, General Horrocks, spoke optimistically of deep objectives and exploitation. Long afterwards he reminded me that he had asked me what I thought of my task and that I told him it was just on. This conference ended in the evening of the 18th, brigade conference was held on my return, and Monty got out written orders during the night.

Monday 19 April was a perfectly beautiful day, all the land bright with spring flowers and the air balmy and clear. In the late afternoon I went round the battalions, astir with preparations. The men were all veterans—at this time we were not considering candidates for commissions unless they had taken part in half a dozen actions—and they seemed to me purposeful and serene. I saw most of the company commanders, all cheerful and resolute, and my stout battalion commanders were all in their best form. None of us had any illusions about the difficulty of our task—we had had too many days to look at it—but we were all completely confident that the men would do it and satisfied that our plan was as good as we could devise. After dark Brigade Headquarters moved across the wadi and was established under the shelter of a low ridge, practically on the start-line, and only partially concealed from the top of Takrouna. An American colonel joined us as an observer for the battle*

My plan was to make the attack in two phases. In the first phase the Maoris and the Twenty-first were to advance 3,400 yards on either side of Takrouna, the Maoris being on the right, to a line just beyond a road which ran roughly

parallel with oof front behind the hill. The captttre of Takrouna was the Maoris' responsibility and was to be undertaken from the rear or flank. The Twenty-first was to seek opportunities of assisting. This first objective was to be reached in 68 minutes* In the second phase, the Twenty-third was to move through the Maoris, form up on the road while the barrage stood for 20 minutes, then advance a further 800 yards in 16 minutes to capture the second objective, ugly-looking features called the Gcbel Foukr and the Gcbel Cherachir. I warned the battalion that it might have to fight for its start-line on the road. On our front of 2,500 yards we had 168 guns in support, including a few mediums.

Assaulting strengths were low, Twenty-first 360, Twenty-third 383, and Maoris 319. A squadron of Sherman tanks from the Notts. Yeomanry was under command. I expected success after hard fighting and it was essential that we should succeed—the guns supporting us were all moved forward on to the plain after dark and would be terribly exposed if we failed. We had several times discussed the rate of advance and agreed on a hundred yards in two minutes. As it proved, this was much too fast for the heavy going through the olive-groves and cactus hedges, and accordingly our whole programme was thrown out. We had been thinking in terms of an attack over the open desert, where the barrage rates had usually been too slow for our spirited infantry.

All the preparations went smoothly, not the slightest hitch being reported anywhere. I walked out on to the start-line and had a final word with Charlie and Ralf. In the moon* light the long lines of silent riflemen brought a catch to my heart. I spoke to Murray, one of the Twenty-first company commanders, who was killed a few minutes later, and I then went a few yards back to where the Twenty-third was forming up. All three splendid battalions were in perfect order on their start-lines, precisely on time, an hour before midnight.

There was a flash on the southern horizon, then a ripple of flashes, the whistling of shells passing overhead and then the thudding of hundreds of guns. I watched the Twenty-first go forward as one man and disappear, watched for a moment

the bursts of the barrage, and wait back to the A.C.V., feeling very humble that it was my part to stay behind.

There is nothing whatever that a headquarters can do in the first stages of a set-piece attack. The die is cast and there is nothing to be done but wait. We stood about, watching the flickering gun-flashes and the quick glow of bursts among the olive-groves and high on Takrouna, listening to the incessant screaming and sighing of shells overhead and the thunder and rumble of the bombardment and straining to hear the chatter of automatics. This ominous sound, the signal that the infantry were at grips, came all too soon, as did the nearer crunches of the enemy's defensive fire.

At 11.30 the Twenty-third reported that it was moving off. There was no word yet, or expected, from the forward battalions, but we climbed back into the A.G.V. and settled down. Monty and I sat on opposite sides of a table, each with map on a board and a supply of chinagraph pencils. Also at the table sat one of the intelligence section, keeping a minute-to-minute diary of messages and orders. Two signalmen with earphones on were at their sets. The American colonel sat quietly and observantly on a box in a corner. The L.O.s, runners, some signalmen, and a batman continuously making tea on a primus, sat in a canvas lean-to outside the door. At intervals we would notice that what little space we had left had become jammed with visitors, war correspondents, and the merely curious unemployed, and either Monty or I would sharply clear them out. But after a while the place would fill up again. No one spoke except Monty and me or a signalman reporting. The light was only just good enough and became worse with our smoking.

Except that the A.D.S.¹ reported that walking wounded were streaming in, we got no information until after midnight. Then one of the Twenty-first company commanders, one of whom Ralf had never been too sure, appeared with some of his men and a tale of woe. He was badly rattled: his company, on the right of the battalion, had come under heavy fire, had run on to a minefield and had become so scattered that he could think of nothing better to do than

¹ Advanced Dressing Station.

comeback. I considered sending him and his party forward again, but decided that nothing would be gained, he was obviously too shaken, so told him to go and lie down somewhere handy.

We got Maori headquarters on the air. A Maori signaller said that the colonel, Adjutant, and R.S.M. had all been badly wounded, there was a great deal of fire and many casualties, and he thought the battalion was considerably mixed up, but a lot of fighting was going on*. About the same time the A.D.S. reported that eleven of the Maori officers, including all the company commanders, were already in, wounded, with many other ranks. Some of the Twenty-first and Twenty-third wounded were coming in also.

The time for reaching the first objective arrived and passed without any news. The bombardment slackened a little while the standing barrage was being fired, but the chatter of automatics and crackle of rifle fire never ceased. A message arrived that the Twenty-first was nearing the objective, long behind time. Ralf Harding was wounded but carrying on. The hour and twenty minutes for the halt on the first objective passed without any more news. Then Angus Ross came up on the air: Reg had been badly wounded and he had been driven to cover with his wireless set. And it took a good deal to drive Angus to cover. He said that the Maori casualties appeared to have been very heavy and the battalion was much disorganized. Sandy Thomas had led the Twenty-third through, though long after the time for the second barrage, and he could hear the shouting and firing ahead. The Twenty-first reported that it had been held up, casualties heavy, and a good deal of disorganization, but parts of A. and B. Companies were thought to be near the objective.

A litde after 2 o'clock a runner came in from these two companies. He said that the company commanders were casualties, that Mr. Taylor had sent him back to Battalion Headquarters with a message and that when he had failed to find Battalion he had come on to Brigade. His message was that Taylor had about fifty men of the two companies, was near the objective, and intended to fight his way on to

join the Twenty-third behind Takrouna. This runner was a youngster of the Eighth Reinforcements, a nice-looking boy. I told the signalmen to give him some tea and told him to stay with them till morning. Later the signalmen told me that he had decided to return to his mates.

Other messages arrived, showing that the Twenty-first had been heavily punished and was considerably disorganized. It became clear that it would not be able to reach the objective in any strength.

I had no reserves except the squadron of tanks, which could not be used till morning. It was evident that Takrouna would then still be in enemy hands and the Twenty-first, on open ground, would be hopelessly exposed. Some measure of success had been obtained on the right, where by now there were indications that the Twenty-third had reached the road, and the Maoris could be depended upon to mop up everything behind them. I decided not to try to retrieve failure but to reinforce success and to withdraw what remained of the Twenty-first as a reserve with which to support the fight on the eastern side of Takrouna. This was a hard decision as it would be difficult to get Taylor's gallant party back. I sent two of the L.O.s, moving separately, with orders to Ralf to withdraw.

During their absence a runner came in from Ralf and reported that he was recalling his forward companies and reorganizing in a defensive position in a wadi a few hundred yards short of the road. The early hours passed very slowly and anxiously. Our guns were now silent but small-arms and mortar fire remained continuous. A message came that Sandy had reached the road with thirty-five men and about 4.30 a.m. another that more of the battalion, much diminished in numbers, had joined him. Ralf reported at 5 a.m. that he was withdrawing and soon after daylight the Twenty-first was reorganizing near Brigade Headquarters. Only one platoon of the forward party had received the order to retire and it got back independently. The remainder could still be heard fighting on until long after daylight.

Angus reported that he was still pinned down with his wireless set on its jeep, and that the battalion's supporting

weapons had been unable to get forward owing to die intense fire* Both the Twenty-third and the Twenty-eighth were being very heavily shelled and mortared, the Germans for the first time using their six-barrelled Nebelwerfers. One troop of the Notts* Yeomanry had gone forward with the attack to make gaps in the cactus hedges. In the dust and confusion of the night they had lost touch with the infantry, had run into anti-tank guns, and had wisely withdrawn. At first light I ordered the whole squadron forward, and though troubled by mines it slowly turned the scale in the fierce fire fight still proceeding on Gebel Bin and in the valley between that feature and Takrouna.

Two of the Maori companies had been heavily engaged on Gebel Bin. With the help of a couple of Crusaders they finally cleared the ridge soon after daylight and part of another company crossed the road on the right and came up level with the Twenty-third, actually on the first objective. These successes secured our junction with 6 Brigade.

Normally I should have gone forward at daylight; but the situation was so confused and uncertain that I thought I might be more useful at headquarters for a while. The guns were still out on the plain under direct observation from Takrouna and I started to work out a plan to storm the hill with the reorganized Twenty-first from the area occupied by the Maoris. But there was no need. At 8 a.m. we saw, to our relief and delight, a stream of prisoners coming down from the pinnacle, about 150 of them. After the battle, with much questioning, we discovered what had happened.

10 Platoon of B. Company of the Maoris had been given the task of storming the pinnacle of Takrouna. The platoon commander had been wounded in the early stages of the attack, half the men had been hit, and the remainder held up at the foot of the hill. At daylight the two sergeants, Rogers and Manahi, and seven other ranks were left. They decided *to continue the advance to the platoon objective\ Rogers and Manahi reconnoitred the approaches and made a plan. As their report stated, they divided into 'two forces', one of four men under Rogers climbing the slopes from the south, and the other of three under Manahi advancing from

the south-west. A third force*, namely a Sergeant Smith who had gone astray from the Twenty-third, joined in the assault.

The slopes were steep and half-covered by heavy boulders and they came under intense but ill-aimed fire. At 7.30 a.m., two hours after first light, the two parties had fought their way to the foot of the final pinnacle. On the way they disposed of numerous enemy posts, killing a score or so of the enemy and taking seventy prisoners, who were escorted back by the several men who had been wounded.

The flat top of the pinnacle was about thirty yards square. Nearly all the space was occupied by stone buildings, including an Arab tomb with a round dome. There was a sheer drop of ten to twenty feet all round this little top, and round most of the circumference there was an overhang. Somehow the assaulting party scrambled up one at a time at the only possible point, hurling grenades ahead of them, and in a few minutes' wild scramble cleared the buildings. Only four of the original ten stormers remained, with Manahi in command, the others being killed or wounded. Several Germans, including an artillery O.P. officer, were among the total of 150 prisoners and some forty or fifty had been killed. The prisoners were sent down the hill under escort of walking wounded and a few more Maoris arrived to reinforce the litdc party on the pinnacle. Once the enemy realized that they had lost this vital point they started to shell and mortar it and the slopes of the hill below, and this continued all day without intermission. About 10 o'clock, Arthur Bailey, the intelligence officer of the Twenty-third, came in. He had made a perilous journey back through the valley and wanted to tell us about it and about the events of the night. I checked him sternly and held him to an account of the situation when he left the battalion, which he gave clearly, question and answer. The companies were considerably disorganized and were short of the final objective but were well dug in beyond the road and Sandy had the situation well in hand* The tanks were held up by minefields and shelling, and small-arms fire was too heavy for supporting arms or Angus with his wireless to get through. The position was badly overlooked

by Germans on the Gebd Oierachir who maintained a heavy fire and who were in a good position to counter* attack. We checked the positions on the map very carefully and in a few minutes Monty had the guns putting heavy 'stonks' down on this area, much to the relief of the Twenty-third,

A Uttle later Wikiriwhi, the Maori intelligence officer, came in. He reported that he had reorganized and established Battalion Headquarters, and had communication with the companies. Mopping up of enemy pockets was proceeding, the men were in good spirits, and he thought the position was well in hand. Having reported, he at once returned. I went up to the Maoris and found that though being heavily mortared they were in very good humour and pleased with themselves. I made a few adjustments, sent for a platoon of the Twenty-first to relieve the Maoris on Takrouna, and ordered the supporting arms of the Twenty-third to make another effort to get through.

Shaw's relieving platoon got up about 4 in the afternoon but the supporting arms were again stopped by heavy fire of all kinds. Gradually, in many Uttle fights and with the very effective help of the tanks, the valley, Gebel Bin, and the lower slopes of Takrouna were cleared. The enemy held on stubbornly in the village, a huddle of stone houses on a sort of platform below the pinnacle, and continued the incessant shelling and mortaring. The Twenty-third, for a long time isolated, cleared the ground behind it and checked every attempt at a counter-attack, mainly by calling down 'stonks*' on any movement. The General called and was rather upset by my estimate of 400 casualties. He promised to put a battalion of 6 Brigade under command. Tom Morten, C.O. of the Twenty-fifth, arrived shortly for orders and I told him to relieve the Twenty-third after dark. At about the same time Angus Ross at last got his precious No. 11 set through to the Twenty-third. I began to feel that the crisis was past and went to my caravan for a rest.

It was quickly interrupted. At 6 o'clock Shaw reported that the Italians had got back on the pinnacle and he was hard pressed. I ordered the Twenty-first to send another

platoon up, there was no room for any more, nor was there anything else that we could do. Before it arrived the pinnacle was again reported clear, but nearly all our little garrison were casualties, most of them still on duty with grenade splinter wounds. First, a tough little youngster whom I remembered as a private soldier of the Eighteenth in Greece, arrived on the top with his platoon at 9.30 p.m. All the wounded were got away but, half an hour later, the Italians were again attacking and a bitter, close fight continued all night and on into next morning. The top was lost and regained once more, but nearly all of the little garrison were hit.

The relief of the Twenty-third went off without incident though there was a lot of shelling during the night. The Maoris sent some of their men back to the pinnacle to help the Twenty-first. Brigade Headquarters spent another wakeful night but for all we could do we might as well have been soundly asleep. Enemy shell-fire was extremely heavy during the whole of the morning of the next day, 21 April. There was never a moment that the top of Takrouna was not half hidden by shell-bursts. The buildings gave good protection but there was a steady trickle of casualties. The Italians made another lodgement on the pinnacle in an ancient tomb, a solid stone affair with a big round dome. The artillery O.P. officer, Harding, engaged this target with one gun, working its rounds up the hill, until about midday he scored a direct hit only a few yards from himself and the infantry who at once rushed the tomb. What Italians were unhurt had escaped and it was found that from a trap-door a rope led down the face of the cliff to the village twenty feet below. This explained the enemy's repeated appearance on the top*

During the afternoon I went up but found there was nothing I could do and returned thankfully. The valley was now clear, but the Twenty-fifth was getting a steady shelling. On my return, a little after 5 o'clock, I found that Monty had brought a seventeen-pounder forward and it was firing solid shot at the village. It was most interesting to watch the tracer shells streaking in a slight arc across the valley and ricocheting crazily among the houses. Harding was also

carefully directing a troop of twenty-five-pounders on the **lame** target. It appeared that the time had arrived to put an end to this affair*. Over the phone I told the Twenty-fifth to have a company ready to *move* on to the pinnacle after dark and assault the village from this higher ground. Shaw had been wounded and Hirst was now in command. I told him to reconnoitre routes for their assault. He said that the Italians obviously disliked the seventeen-pounder fire and he thought prospects were good.

An hour later resistance suddenly and unexpectedly collapsed. While Hirst was doing his reconnaissance, he noticed that Manahi and another few Maoris were methodically stalking posts below the village, clearing one after another without trouble. In the village he saw that the Italians were shaken. He stopped the shelling, collected the half-dozen remaining men of his platoon, and sallied down. The enemy had had enough, there was no resistance, and in a few minutes he rang joyfully to say that he had more prisoners than he could handle, about 350 in fact. We rang Division equally joyful. These Italians, who had up to the cracking-point fought really well, were parachutists of Folgore Division and northerners from Trieste and Sardinia, with a good stiffening of Germans from 104 Panzer Grenadiers.

As soon as it was dark I sent Roach with two weak companies of the Twenty-first and a platoon of machine-gunners to occupy the whole Takrouna feature. He organized it efficiently and we were at last firmly in possession of three-fourths of our objective. Monty and I went up together to see Morten, whom we found in an uncomfortable position. We worked out a plan for attacking the Gebel Gherachir before dawn and went back to lay on an artillery programme but later called it off as too uncertain and hurried. It was quite wrong for Monty and me both to be away together, but he was sick and tired of being tied to his desk and was refreshed by getting forward. Still we both felt uneasy and guilty until we got back.

22 April was quite uneventful except that both sides shelled incessantly. The brigade diary reports nothing beyond: 'Probably the heaviest shelling ever experienced by

our forward troops, especially those on Takrouna. Casualties were fairly light/ We were not strong enough to attack again and all day simply lay low and waited for the enemy to get over his ill temper. Bill Gentry called to say good-bye before leaving to take up an appointment in New Zealand. We were sad to part. Ike Parkinson took over 6 Brigade.

After dark Twigden took me up in a Dingo to see Morten, This was an unpleasant trip. The sickly sweet smell of death lay heavily over the valley and there were still many unburied dead. The valley was being constantly shelled and at short intervals there was a burst fairly on the track that the sappers had very gallantly cleared and taped. We reached the road which was frequently raked by machine-gun and anti-tank-gun fire. Twigden stayed with the Dingo in some very insecure-looking cover and I walked forward and found Tom Morten's headquarters in a dry watercourse. His men had had an uneasy day, under constant fire and badly overlooked, and I thought some of them were showing the strain. We talked again of the possibility of improving his position by a night attack. I decided against it and ordered him to with* draw from the useless low ground that he was in and take up fresh positions on the northern slopes of Takrouna and the Gebel Bin.

On the way back we stopped to ask some directions from three soldiers. While we were speaking two high-velocity shells burst very close and Twigden started up suddenly. There was a cry of 'Stop!*' We stopped and I scrambled out to find that one of the three soldiers had been knocked over and had a broken and badly lacerated arm. It was a poor place to stop and apply a field dressing, so we got him into the Dingo where he sat on my knee and we hurried on. We were back at the dressing station in ten minutes but it was a grim lit de journey. I held the lad in my arms and hung on to his arm while he silently fought the pain. We left him at the dressing station, where he thanked me with a pleasing politeness. My clothes were soaked in blood, which caused a small sensation when I got back to the A.C.V.

Next day, the 23rd, was another day of heavy shelling and no movement. It was pleasing that the heaviest concentrations

fell on the area that the Twenty-fifth had given up. Our guns were hard at work and there was all the noise of a real battle. Late in the afternoon George Murray came up to say that 152 Brigade would relieve us that night. We discussed positions and ways and means and he asked whether my headquarters was in a good place and whether we got shelled there. We had not actually been hit though Jerry obviously regarded the area with suspicion and I noticed that our visitors did their business and got away pretty smartly. I said it was a very good place and we did not get shelled. One of the signallers looked up suddenly and George looked at me suspiciously. He said he was pleased to hear my views and we went on to the next question.

The Highlanders came in after dark and the relief went smoothly under the control of the two Brigade Majors. George sat in 'the A.G.V. with us and we chatted intermittently. I said that I had noticed at Akarit that they were still taking their pipes into battle. He said 'Yes' but added gloomily that they would have to stop. I asked why and he explained that those pipers got hit every time and the pipes cost £50 a set. We considered this difficulty in silence for a while, George repeated that it was too expensive, and we went on to another subject. The relief was completed about 3 a.m. and we moved a few miles back to the cactus plantations.

In this difficult operation, 5 Brigade took 732 prisoners of whom 164 were Germans. We also captured ten anti-tank guns, seventy-two heavy machine-guns and uncounted light weapons, mortars, and stores. Including those in the supporting arms and the Twenty-fifth, we had about 500 casualties. The rifle companies who, as usual, bore the brunt, suffered heavily. The Twenty-first lost 159 out of its assaulting strength of 360; the Twenty-third 116 out of 383; and the Maoris, including 12 of their 17 officers, lost 131 out of 319. Considering that this was near the end of ten hard months¹ campaigning and that many of the men had already been wounded once or twice, this was a very good performance. It was a real soldier's battle in which the initiative and determination of the fighting troops won the decision.

Manahi was recommended for a V.C. and got an immediate D.G.M* Sandy Thomas and Wikiriwhi got wdl deserved D.S.O**, Hint an M.G., and there were many other good awards. I do not remember ever being so impressed by the gallantry disclosed in the citations. Many good soldiers fought their last battle. Charlie Bennett was very badly wounded and had years of suffering ahead of him. Porter, who had taken part in fourteen attacks, was among the Maori officers severely hit. Herbie Black, who had been wounded at the Tebaga Gap and just rejoined after wangling his way out of hospital, was killed farthest forward of anybody. He, with Peter Norris, killed at Nofilia, and Teddy Dawson, the first officer killed in Greece, were the last three officers I had commissioned into my Territorial battalion before the war. They were all little and dapper, school friends separated only by their deaths, all flawlessly brave and loyal. Reg Romans had a nasty wound in the loot and had difficulty in avoiding being invalided home. Keiha took command of the Maoris and Dick Connolly, who had given me the photographs at Galatos, took over the Twenty-third.

We rested for a few days and got a small draft of returned wounded and sick as reinforcements. On Sunday I attended rather moving church parades with the battalions separately. I went back to see George Murray and got a warm reception. Far too warm, for his headquarters was shelled quite sharply during my visit and he would not allow me to leave when it started. He said I obviously needed a demonstration of what was and what was not shelling. His Brigade Major was permanently deafened by one of the near misses.

Being insatiable sightseers, like most New Zealanders, we made up a party to visit Kairouan, alleged to be a holy city. It was a hot and dusty day and we thought little of the place but agreed that the mosque, with its hundreds of alabaster and marble pillars looted from £1 Djem, was worth seeing. The inhabitants were unpleasant-looking and very surly. On return I dined at Division and with regret heard talk of a projected attack along the coast. Until the end of the month this was under discussion and I had to screw myself

up a little to work up any enthusiasm about it. Mr. Jones, the New Zealand Minister of Defence, came up and one day I took him to look at Takrouna, with strict injunctions from the General not to run him under fire. We had the luck to see some heavy shelling and a spectacular little attack.

Ike and Monty and I did a reconnaissance up the coast to view the ground for the projected attack. None of us particularly wanted to do it but the proposals were feasible, i Army was now deployed and fighting on a wide front and we hoped that it would get on well and quickly enough to make further attacks by us unnecessary, but still we did not altogether like being relegated to a passive role. Planning went ahead and there were several conferences, with everyone determinedly cheerful and aggressive. I could see no reason why the Axis armies in Tunisia should not put up as stubborn and protracted a resistance as the Germans had at Stalingrad. We would certainly have done so if positions had been reversed. I remarked as much and the General said 'No*: the Germans would crack and crack completely.

We took the Brigade to the sea for a bathe—a real picnic day, with the band playing and hours to bask in the sun. On the 30th I went with a party to look at Sousse and Monastir. We were overtaken by a dispatch rider with an urgent message to return at once and hurried back expecting orders for the attack. I reported complete with map case under my arm, but the General laughed and said 'No attack this time': he was going to 10 Corps and I was to take command of the Division. We talked long that night. It appeared probable that his departure would be permanent and that was a solemn thought. For me it was pleasing to get command of the Division but campaigning without the General seemed unthinkable. I went to Division in the morning, put up stars and crossed swords and acquired an A.D.C. Ralf Harding took over 5 Brigade, Monty went to command the Twenty-first, and Denis became Brigade Major.

My spell in command of the Division was short—fourteen days—and not particularly eventful. The *coup de grace* was to be delivered by First Army, and Eighth Army had only to hold and maintain a certain amount of pressure.

General Horrocks went to First Army to command the Corps making the break-through and 4 Indian Division moved across to carry out the initial assault. All the time we had been engaged round Takrouna the Indians had been fighting hard on Garci but they still had possession of only portions of that huge and complicated feature.

For two days I could find nothing whatever to do except yarn to Paddy Costello, write letters, and sleep. On 3 May orders arrived for the Division to take over a sector on the western side of Garci. Queree and I went over on an insufferably hot and dusty trip and did a lengthy reconnaissance. We found that the line we were to take over was very thinly held by John Currie's 4 Light Armoured Brigade, with a very partially equipped French Corps under General Juin on the left.

Next day 5 Brigade moved across and took over the line after dark with instructions to work forward to close contact with the enemy positions. On the way it was bombed by some American fighter-bombers and had several casualties, including the very nice provost sergeant of the Twenty-first. Steve Weir brought his guns plus three British field regiments. A French officer came over with messages of welcome and a copy of an order of the French Corps which said that *'la Division Nouvelle Zelandaise, une division d'assaut d'un caractere le plus formidable, avec plus de 200 canons'* had come into line and was going to do great things with which the French would conform. The French divisional commander arrived later and I explained that there was a misunderstanding. I had no instructions to carry out any major attack but would certainly conform and cover his flank if he cared to do so. He was a bit dashed and explained that he had a lot of Goums who were very good at attacking and cutting throats but not for holding ground or anything else and he had only about a dozen guns. I offered to cover any attack he made with all our guns and he got very excited and said that he would certainly prepare a plan and make a tremendous attack.

On the morning of the 5th I visited Brigade Headquarters and after looking round and watching some patrols slowly

working forward ordered a 2,000 yards advance during the night. There was some enemy shelling and numerous mines had been discovered. The General came over from Corps and was disappointed that I thought there was no sense in a projected operation to pinch out the Garci massif. During the night our guns fired heavy concentrations on targets that the French had indicated. We understood that they were going to attack and were surprised to find in the morning that they had made no move. The divisional commander came over to say how much they had admired the bombardment.

5 Brigade got forward with little trouble and only a few casualties from mines. I went to see Ralf and then visited John Currie whose Brigade had side-stepped to the right when we came in. We went forward together and, as on Miteiriya Ridge, got into a very exposed position, and waited each for the other to say the word to go. Finally we had to crawl a hundred yards with a Spandau almost stroking our backs. The General was waiting for me at Division and, perhaps because of this incident, found me warmly in favour of the pinching-out proposal. He ordered me to go ahead with it and I told 5 Brigade to take three small features near the village of Saouf in its front during the night. We heard that the First Army offensive had started and was going amazingly well.

5 Brigade's attack went off smoothly. One company was used for each objective and all were taken with nineteen prisoners and only three casualties. I visited the Brigade in the morning and directed further small advances. We were squaring up ready to deliver a heavy blow. We spent much of the day in the intelligence track listening to a flow of reports of astounding successes on the First Army front. In the late afternoon, the thrilling news came in that nth Hussars had entered Tunis. It was clear to the most pessimistic that we were within sight of the end of the war in Africa.

Again the infantry gained a little ground without trouble and we felt that we were up against the enemy's position and would have to put on a set-piece affair. I went up

to talk it over with Ralf but on return found orders for Divisional Headquarters and most of the guns to return to the Enfidaville area. This we did in the afternoon, leaving 5 Brigade in position with only a holding role. All news during the day showed that the enemy defeat was becoming catastrophic.

It was a surprise next morning, 9 May, to hear that 5 Brigade had been sharply counter-attacked during the night. Henare's company of the Maoris had been nearly surrounded and had retired with about twenty casualties. Matehaerc's company re-took the ground in the morning without much trouble, taking seventy-five prisoners of 164 Division and having no casualties. This was a puzzling affair: the Germans had never before attacked at night in our experience, and it was hard to understand their reasons for now doing so.

There was now a proposal to break through the Young Fascists who were holding the coastal sector. A battalion of the newly arrived 56 Division had made a successful attack on the outpost positions during the night. There was a Corps conference and it was decided that 56 Division should make another attack to secure more of the foot-hills on the left and that 6 Brigade should take over a sector. If all went well with this attack we would mount a break-through probably for the next night. As it happened, 56 Division's attack was a rather bad failure so we attempted no break-through. The whole position was now curious. By the 10th 55,000 prisoners were reported, by next evening 100,000, and Tunis and Bizerta were firmly in our hands. Yet the group in front of us held fast to its positions and resisted every advance strongly. It was no comfort to us that their greatly increased artillery activity indicated that they knew it was no use hoarding reserves. With the end of the campaign plainly in sight, there was a certain amount of gun shyness.

A French division was in our old positions about Takrouna. It attacked our original second objectives on the nth and took them after some heavy fighting. I went over to watch and thought the enemy's violent shelling was the heaviest I had seen. We had one battalion, the Twenty-fifth, in line

and all our guns in action, and every additional casualty reported was painful.

12 May was a perfectly crazy day. The enemy guns were obviously firing away their ammunition and spraying the whole country-side. There was no scientific gunnery, with clearly indicated safe and dangerous areas: shells pitched at random in a most disconcerting fashion*. We discovered the location of 90th Light Headquarters and fired a concentration of 144 guns on it. A very gallant English colonel, Hobbs, who had often been with us since early in 1940, was killed during the morning, and so were several men in the Twenty-fifth and some gunners. The shelling gradually died down during the afternoon. Next morning there were a few shots and then silence: it was all over.

The General returned to Division after receiving the surrender of Marshal Messe, and I went back to 5 Brigade. Prisoners poured in by thousands. I went with a brigade party on to Takrouna where we marvelled at the feat our men had accomplished. Ralf Harding and some of his officers found the graves of Taylor, Donaldson, Upton, and eighteen of their men. The others, we long afterwards found out, had nearly all been wounded and were without ammunition when they surrendered. The young runner who had come back to Brigade Headquarters and had returned to rejoin his mates was dead with them. Ralf had expected to find most of them dead: he said they were all old good soldiers who would fight it out to the finish.

We made a trip to inspect Tunis and on the 16th set out on the 2,000 miles trip back to Egypt. It had been decided that 6,000 of those with the longest service were to return to New Zealand on furlough and that the Division would absorb its reinforcements and reorganize at Maadi. Just before leaving, the little rabbit that was the pride and joy of Reg Mariu, the Maori L.O., got under the trunk of an olive-tree and could not be wheedled out. Rather unscrupulously we hitched the A.CLV. on to the tree and pulled it up by the roots. Ross drove me to Tripoli ahead of the Brigade and I flew on to Cairo and in the middle of June returned to New Zealand in charge of the furlough draft. Ross returned with

me and, when he came loyally back to continue our three and a half years' companionship, he could only visit me in hospital. He had never once let me down in any way. When I saw him again in New Zealand, he spoke of the 'good old days'. Joe went home with the next furlough draft, and I got a new batman, Fred Cox, as good and faithful as the others of my military family.

24. Italy: the Sangro

THE Division moved to Italy while I was on leave. I flew back as far as Egypt, having one most tiresome hop of twenty-eight hours in a Catalina from Perth to Ceylon, and then went by ship to Taranto. Two long days motoring on narrow slippery roads took me to the Division, where I reported to the General late on 24 November. There was a good feeling of being home again and a delightfully warm welcome. Next morning I took over 5 Brigade from Keith Stewart and was touched to find all C.O.s and company commanders gathered to greet me. McElroy now had the Twenty-first, Reg Romans had returned to the Twenty-third, and Monty Fairbrother had the Maoris, with Denis Blundell still Brigade Major.

Eighth Army was about to cross the Sangro and New Zealand Division was in the line on the left, close under the mountains. There were high hopes of a quick success, a rapid advance as far as Pescara, and thence a move on Rome through the Apennines. 5 and 6 Brigades were to attack abreast and my first day back was spent very busily reconnoitring and planning, with many interruptions to greet old friends. From Marconi Hill we had a fine view of the river flats, the bluffs beyond, and the spurs running up to Castel-frentano. The Twenty-third was in position here and I was greatly pleased as I went through its lines to hear one sergeant say to another 'Kip's back', and the other reply 'Good show'.

My plan for crossing was simple enough. The river was about 100 feet wide and not often more than 4 feet deep. Several patrols had been across and had discovered that the enemy positions were all on the top of the steep bluffs which rose 300 yards beyond the northern bank. We had a strong picket line on our bank. I decided to cross with the

Twenty-third on the right, Twenty-first on the left; under cover of artillery concentrations on the bluffs, form up on the road which ran along the flats, close up to the bluffs, and assault when the concentrations lifted. The actual crossing would be done by companies in single file, the men hanging on to ropes fastened to posts driven on either bank. Supporting arms would not be able to cross until the Bailey bridge to be thrown across in 6 Brigade's sector was completed, and, as it was highly improbable that the squadron of 19 Regiment's tanks under command would find a way over, there might be a difficult period. Another difficulty was that the bluffs were too steep and slippery to be scaled. It would be necessary to move up the tracks between and on the sides of the spurs and these were certain to be covered by enemy posts. Still something has always to be left to the infantry and we arranged for special concentrations on areas from which these tracks might be commanded. Brigade Orders were out in the afternoon, only a few hours after my return. During the night there was heavy rain and a German long-range gun shelled the road near my billet very unpleasantly.

Divisional conference on the 26th at 745 a.m., the General's favourite time. Once I got him to set it back a quarter of an hour, but he was obviously uneasy and soon reverted to the usual hour. The river was rising and the attack was postponed for twenty-four hours. We spent the day to advantage tidying up details and doing more reconnaissances and I was able to get round all the battalions and see most of the old hands. I had a long talk with Horrocks, one of the Twenty-first company commanders, who in Sam Allen's time, eighteen months before, had done a fine patrol near the El Mreir depression.

On the 27th the river was still high but falling, and at the divisional conference it was decided to go on with the operation on the following night if there was no more rain. I had a final orders conference in the afternoon and then moved Brigade Headquarters to the lee of Marconi. We amused ourselves by battering some houses on the bluffs with armour-piercing shot from two seventeen-pounders. To do this the guns had to be placed out on the flat in very exposed

positions but the enemy evidently thought there was a catch somewhere and did not fire at them. Direct hits were scored on each house without doing any more damage than to make holes. The only result was that two men hurriedly emerged from one house, splashed across the river, and made straight for the guns. They were met and turned out to be an American and an Englishman, escaped prisoners of war. They were not fired on during this last lap of their escape and indeed the German artillery remained very quiet all day. I went down to the proposed site for the bridge, travelling in my Dingo, but was briskly chased back and machine-gunned by an American fighter-bomber which evidently could not read a map.

From my point of view the battle was much like any other. I had a few hours' sleep in the early part of the night, disturbed by the bombardment on the front of our neighbours, 8 Indian Division, who attacked earlier than we did. A little before midnight I had some tea, went out and saw the battalions moving forward, and then took up my post in the A.C.V. All went smoothly enough. Both battalions waded across, some of the companies shoulder deep in the icy water, and formed up unobserved on the road. The Twenty-third had no difficulty, found their objective lightly held, and got established with only ten casualties, including Angus Ross slightly wounded. The Twenty-first had some trouble in getting up the bluffs and at one stage McElroy asked me to order the Twenty-third to send him a company, which I refused to do. But the battalion was well handled and determined and before long it was safely on its objective with only twenty-one casualties, unluckily including Horrocks, killed*. We had eighty prisoners of 65 Division. 6 Brigade were equally successful and took 130 prisoners with light casualties. The Bailey bridge was up and despite accurate shelling supporting arms started to dribble across during the morning. As expected, the tanks were unable to get across and several were left stranded in the river. Generally it was a satisfactory and surprisingly easy affair.

There was one curious little reverse on the Twenty-third's front during the morning. When the battalion dug in, a

section of machine-guns took up a defiladed position well forward, with its front covered by three riflemen on a little rise twenty yards away. These three were tackled by some twenty Germans who came, unobserved, up a narrow wadi and after a stout fight were killed. The Germans then appeared above and on the flank of the machine-gunners who were helplessly taken prisoners and all thirteen marched away. Reg showed me the scene of this incident next day. The three riflemen still lay there and beside them we counted seven, ten, and four empty cartridge cases respectively. Reg pronounced their epitaph: 'They were good men/

During the 29th we made good our ground across the river and despite some accurate shelling the Bailey bridge was completed. It was not likely that enemy tanks would counter-attack down the muddy spurs, but we got enough anti-tank guns over to feel secure. On the right 8 Indian Division appeared to be having trouble. Our right flank was not in touch with it and the enemy shelling on the river valley in their direction and beyond, towards Ortona, was heavy all day.

There was another divisional conference at 7.45 a.m. on the 30th, when orders were given for an attack on the Castelfrentano line that night. I had left the Maoris some ten miles back at Atessa, which was close enough under desert conditions, and now ordered them across the river in readiness to support or exploit. This brought down a blast from the G. 1 who had to provide otherwise-needed transport to get the battalion forward on the one congested road. We were naturally indignant, being quite clearly in the wrong, and Denis and I agreed that the G. 1 was getting tired and should take a holiday. I visited the battalions and ordered them to make ground by fighting patrols and make preparations for a formal attack, but at another conference early in the afternoon the operation was postponed another twenty-four hours.

The usual conference took place at the usual hour next morning: both brigades were to continue working forward with patrols and to attack at 3.30 a.m. on the 2nd. Brigade Headquarters and the Maoris crossed the river and the battalions worked steadily up the long spurs all day, having

numerous little scraps but nowhere meeting stubborn opposition. The night was bitterly cold but dry and after dark the advance was continued by the forward companies so aggressively that a formal attack became unnecessary. Tanner's company of the Twenty-first, extremely well handled, made a fine advance and established itself on the top of the spur west of Castelfrentano, taking seventy prisoners of 145 Regiment with twenty-one casualties. The Twenty-third had little trouble in getting level with it on the right. During the whole three days we had been across the river 6 Brigade had been advancing step by step with us; and Den Fountaine, commanding 26 Battalion on its right, and Harry McElroy, with the Twenty-first, had worked together very skilfully. 6 Brigade got into Castelfrentano and the enemy fell back across the Moro to his 'winter line' Orsogna-Ortona.

The one 8 o'clock conference was held next morning, 2 December: 6 Brigade to push on and try to gate-crash into Orsogna; 4 Brigade, close under the mountains, to continue pressing towards Guadiagrele; guns to cross the Sangro; 5 Brigade to stand fast and prepare to take over the advance and exploit. We were feeling optimistic and visiting L.O.S from General Montgomery's staff spoke airily of Chieti and Pescara. I went into the town, still crowded with wretched-looking civilians, and watched one of Ike's 6 Brigade battalions trudging through, battle-stained and dirty but very soldierly looking. We had been told to nominate an officer to go to England for a staff course and I had selected Angus Ross. I called on Reg and found him and Angus holding an indignation meeting, so told them to think it over and I would decide.

6 Brigade infantry got into Orsogna, but were driven out by tanks and infantry with some losses before they could get settled. 4 Brigade had been trying to get round west of Orsogna in the steep foot-hills about Guadiagrele, but was also definitely checked and it became clear that we would have to prepare a full-scale attack. The task looked formidable. The little Moro stream was just big enough to be an obstacle and it ran at the bottom of a huge cleft. Only one

road ran to Orsogna and it approached the town along a causeway, There was no possible approach through the precipitous country west of the town unless Guadiagrele was taken, and there, with perfect observation, the Germans were very firmly placed. East of Orsogna several parallel spurs ran down to the bottom of the valley. These were the only possible lines of approach, but to get on to one we should have to cut and metal a road down our side of the valley in full view of the enemy, throw a bridge, and then build another road close behind any advance up the spur. There had been much rain, movement of wheels on tracks off the metalled roads was already almost impossible, and snow was to be expected.

25. The Orsogna Battles

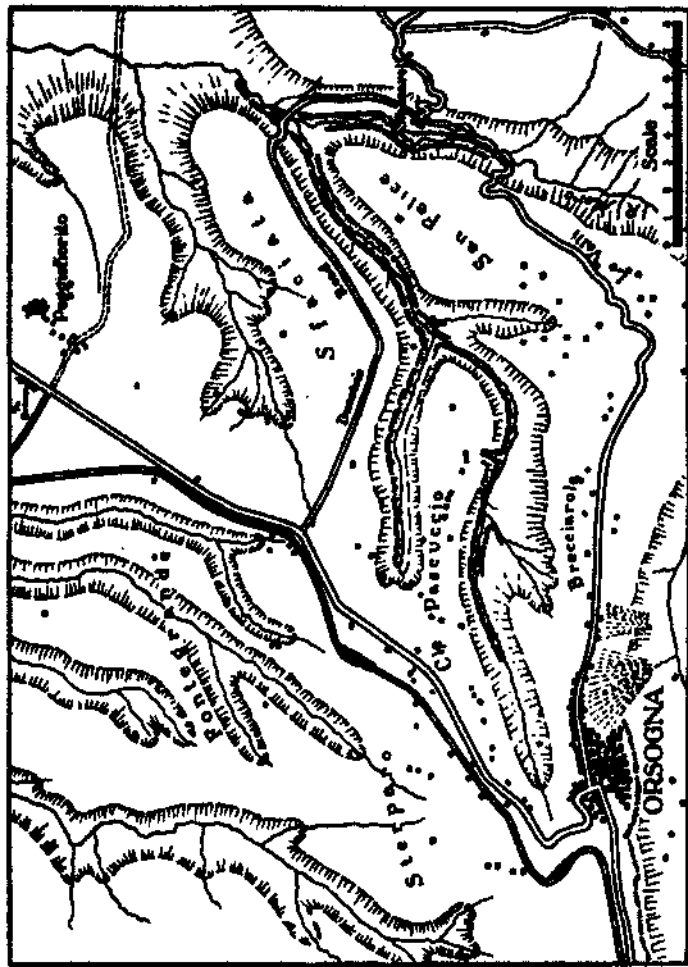
THERE was a pause for a few days while the next move was prepared. Divisional conference was held each morning at the same chilly 7.45 a.m. We sent patrols out, reconnoitred routes, and prepared a plan while the gunners with infinite labour brought forward guns and ammunition. One of my patrols brought in two men of 25 Battalion whom they found in a house near Orsogna. One had been wounded in the stomach and the other was a medical orderly who had stayed to look after him. Someone must have been very much at fault in not getting them in earlier.

Winter was now closing down fast and all who could lived in houses, cheek by jowl with the almost destitute civilians. It was impossible to feel any animosity against these unhappy folk: they seemed to have no food beyond what we gave them and they had practically no possessions. All their cattle, blankets, warm clothing, everything of the slightest value, had been stripped from them and sent to Germany or wantonly destroyed. There were no young men and very few young women and none of them good-looking. Near my headquarters there were eleven new graves. We were told that they were those of local householders who had been forced to work on the positions we had just taken and then had been shot.

Travelling on the roads acquired a new interest. The German gunners used their ammunition sparingly, but skilfully, and every trip near the forward area was something of an adventure. Very soon we had a 'Hellfire Corner*' east of Castelfrentano and a 'Mad Minute*' west of the town. This latter was a stretch of some hundreds of yards running parallel with the front in full view from Orsogna and it was exactly registered by a 170 mm. gun which was particularly active in the early morning before our fighters were about

I had to pass it going to and coming from all divisional conferences—at this time usually held twice daily—and had several very narrow escapes. Three machine-gunners going on leave were killed here, and almost every day there were some casualties. Hellfire Corner was equally unpleasant and Jim, my new jeep driver, and I felt aggrieved that after returning from the conference over the Mad Minute we had to pass through Hellfire Corner on the way to visit the battalions. One day a self-propelled gun sneaked forward and fired eleven shots directly at us at short range when we were crawling back up the road to the Corner. All missed by the smallest margin but we were frightened into abandon*ing the jeep and taking cover above the road. It was some little time before we plucked up enough courage to go back to it and scuttle hastily on. Jim had a very bad stutter which I found rather infectious. It got worse after any incident like this and we would both stutter furiously for some time afterwards.

After three very strenuous days of reconnaissances and conferences, starting before daylight and ending about midnight, we were ready with plans and preparations and had the troops in position. The ground was sodden and the going slow even for infantry and impossible for tanks off the roads. A platoon of the Twenty-first did a very realistic practice attack to test the timings. They advanced seven hundred yards through the olive-groves in thirty-five minutes, dealing with imaginary opposition in houses and fire-pits on the way. The plan was for tanks to break into Orsogna frontally along the causeway while 24 Battalion of 6 Brigade moved along the valley east of the causeway to assault from the east, and the Maoris advancing along the Pascuccio Spur covered 24 Battalion's flank. The Maoris were to establish themselves across the Orsogna-Ortona road and we optimistically planned to get their six-pounders to them through the town when it had been cleared. At the last moment I got permission to make an eccentric attack with the Twenty-third and get established on the lower half of the broad Sfasciata Spur. For various reasons we decided to attack in daylight, at 2.30 in the afternoon after a ninety-minutes⁹ bombardment



MAP 13. ORSOGNA, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1943

and a bombing of the town by Kittybombers, There had been several changes of plan and my final orders to Monty Fairbrother and Romans were given at Monty's headquarters about midday.

The Kittybombers came over and duly dropped their bombs on Orsogna. This was highly spectacular but probably not very effective with the comparatively light bombs, and the same applied to our bombardment: for the Germans, well protected in their cellars and dug in with solid overhead cover on the spurs, were little affected and everywhere fought hard. Both my battalions had to move down a forward slope and then climb steep and muddy spurs before beginning their attacks. They carried out this movement during the ninety-minute bombardment and under cover of smoke, with surprisingly few casualties. Both got up in time to advance behind the slow barrage. The Twenty-third got securely on to the Sfasciata Spur, took all its objectives, and was able to stay, with some forty casualties. The Maoris fought their way up the spur and though they lost the barrage managed to get almost on to their objective and across the Ortona road. The Twenty-fourth got into Orsogna but was unable to stay against a counter-attack by tanks and flame-throwers, horrible to watch in the dusk. As the frontal attack by the tanks along the causeway had gained nothing, and super-human efforts under the Maori 2 i/c, Peta Awatere, had failed to man-handle six-pounders across the Moro and up the Pascuccio Spur, there was now no hope of getting anti-tank weapons up to the Maoris. During the night they beat off several thrusts by enemy infantry and tanks working along the road; but their position was impossible and the ground they had gained useless unless Orsogna was in our hands. So at 2 in the morning, when Monty called me on the air and said that he was overlooked by the enemy positions on the Sfasciata Spur and at daylight would be in an untenable position, I ordered him to withdraw. The General approved of this when I reported my action immediately afterwards. Our only gain remained in the lodgement made by the Twenty-third, but this was important and it directed attention to the only really promising approach* The Maoris

reported fifty-six casualties and had extreme difficulty in evacuating their wounded.

The conference next morning was held at Ike's head* quarters, a house at a cross-roads near Castelfrentano, in full view from Orsogna. I arrived just in time to take cover from a 'hit-and-run' raid by fighter-bombers which killed two men and wounded nine. These conferences, a feature of General Freyberg's method of command, were always a delight. We collected a few minutes early; I do not remember anyone ever being late, Ike, Bill, Steve and Kip, Fred and Laurie and Ian, Lindsay or Keith, and any attached British commanders, and we would talk for a few minutes. It was always good and heartening to feel the comradeship and warmth. The General arrived, accompanied by his P.A., John White, and Paddy Costello, at this time the able and cynical divisional intelligence staff officer, and the conference started. First Paddy would outline the general situation on the army front and give the latest intelligence about the enemy. Then in turn each Brigadier would shortly state what had happened to his command and explain any particular problems or intentions. Then the General would speak and there would be a general and free discussion, so free that visiting officers sometimes marvelled at our Soviet-like methods. When everyone had had his say, always briefly and to the point, the General would decide the policy and the intention, sometimes for a period, sometimes for the next twenty-four hours only. Occasionally, he would have to fight the Brigadiers' Union, but there were few decisions that did not have full approval of everyone concerned, people with their feet very firmly on the ground. Then the tasks of the various arms and formations were broadly worked out and the conference broke up, everyone feeling the better for it. There could have been no better means of ensuring teamwork and understanding, combined with good fellowship.

At this particular conference it was decided to make use of the ground gained on the Sfasciata Spur to get a road on to it across the Moro, gain as much ground as possible by 'peaceful penetration', and then deliver another attack from the spur to get across the Ortona road. The ground was

drying fast with a few rainless days, and if they continued there was a chance of our being able to use tanks. I was very pleased with this decision as I had early formed the opinion that our most promising approach was up this broad spur.

During the next few days the engineers worked hard at the road, bridged the Moro at the foot of the spur out of view from Orsogna, and carried the road almost to the forward infantry. It can only have been shortage of ammunition that made the Germans refrain from shelling the bulldozers and working parties, for on most of the route they were completely exposed. The Twenty-third made more ground up the ridge, sufficient to give us a good start-line for an attack and each night there were sharp patrol clashes.

The Twentieth, now an armoured regiment with Sherman tanks, under McKergow, was put under my command, to my great pleasure. One evening a company of the Twenty-third made a particularly good 'peaceful advance' and I thought there was a chance of putting the Twentieth through, as the road was well forward and the ground was hard enough. Fortunately the General decided against me, for there was heavy rain during the night and the tanks would have been helplessly bogged. Further rain held up operations and preparations. We were worried by the failure of the British Fifth Division on our right to keep level with us. This division had had no fighting except some very easy affairs in Sicily and it appeared to us to be overtrained and far too formal. Its patrolling was apparently bad and it was nowhere in contact with the enemy on its front. One day Denis and I went for a walk as far as Lanciano, but as literally everybody we met or came in sight of saluted correctly, and Denis was the whole time marching at attention while I was incessantly returning salutes, we had to retire, defeated. I never saw anything like it until I visited the Guards Depot at Caterham. Despite its good saluting this division had not then found the fighting form it later produced and we thought it a very unsatisfactory neighbour.

The troops were having a very uncomfortable time. As many as possible lived in houses, even in the forward areas, but the majority had nothing better than their slit trenches

and lived a wretched life, which they put up with very cheerfully. Brigade Headquarters had a fair-sized house, I had a caravan, and we were usually able to have a fire at night, so we had nothing to complain of. We still played chess, and as we had a supply officer with initiative and a staff car, we had enough cognac to have some pleasant evenings.

The weather improved a little and on the 13th it was decided to go ahead with the attack on the morning of the 15th. The object was to get firmly across the Ortona road and then move down the road to seize some high ground behind Orsogna, so isolating the town. 5 Brigade was to do the attack with 18 and 20 Armoured Regiments under command. I decided to use the Twenty-first and Twenty-third with the Eighteenth in support for the first phase, and to exploit with the Maoris and the Twentieth. I had thought of relieving the Twenty-third by the Maoris, but Reg thought the battalion should do another attack. McElroy and Fairbrother went up with me to see Reg and, after looking at the ground, all three came back with me to a brigade orders conference. Shell Alley, the stretch of road running up to Hellfire Corner, was under attention from the self-propelled gun and we had an interesting trip home, running the gauntlet in turn. We attacked behind a heavy barrage, a gun to every 11 yards, at 1 o'clock in the morning of 15 December. Communications worked perfectly and though the Twenty-third, in which Angus was staying for just one more battle, had very hard fighting, all went reasonably well. At daylight each battalion was on its objective, the Twenty-first on the right with about 30 casualties, the Twenty-third with over 100; and the tanks of the Eighteenth, most resolutely led by Clive Pleasants, had got through to the road and as far as the cemetery. Unfortunately Clive was wounded in the hand and after a while had to give up and come out. He was very white and glad of some brandy that I was able to give him when he arrived out after daylight. The heavy casualties in the Twenty-third, about 40 per cent., spoilt the picture and reduced results. We had about 100 prisoners and there were reports of unusually numerous enemy dead. The Twentieth was up on the spur but there had not been room for the

Maoris and it would take some hours to being them up* Still we had dealt a heavy blow, there were signs that the enemy were confused and shaken, and I decided to try for the second phase with the Twentieth alone.

The attempt did not succeed. The enemy shelled heavily all day and Reg Romans was desperately wounded* There was considerable delay in proceedings owing to the mud* When I heard that the leading squadron was at length moving down the road late in the afternoon, I thought that the opportunity had gone and should have stopped it* But we could overhear the squadron commander, John Phillips, talking cheerfully of knocked-out anti-tank guns, so I called for artillery concentrations on either side of the road and let them go on. We saw the leading troop get almost to the back of Orsogna and fire into the town from the rear, but one by one its tanks bunt into flames and after a stubborn effort the squadron withdrew to the cemetery. Five tanks had been knocked out.

The Maoris were already moving forward, an exhausting trudge of two or three miles through mud often knee deep, which took them six or seven hours. Fairbrother went ahead with instructions to meet McKergow at the cemetery and arrange with him the details of a combined attack on the high ground in the rear of Orsogna at daylight, 6.30 a.m. I did not go forward myself as it would have entailed too long an absence from my headquarters and communications were good. We had an excellent signals officer in Pat Brennan. I understand that he was technically weak but he had the knack of getting results and in all sorts of unorthodox ways keeping communications going. It was a stormy night. The Germans shelled and mortared busily all night and from midnight launched a series of counter-attacks, some of them fiercely pressed home. Our guns were firing almost incessantly in response to calls for defensive fire. The Maoris arrived near the cemetery to find the air alight with tracer and a first-class battle going on in all directions. Monty put out a company to guard his rear and moved into position to attack, but he and McKergow did their planning under most uncomfortable conditions.

Angus Ross's company beat off one savage attack, but the main weight of the counter-attacks came against the Twenty-first which held a refused right flank. The enemy were paratroopers, brought across the Apennines that day, and thrown into action by companies or platoons as they arrived* Some of their thrusts got within twenty yards of the infantry posts and one German major was shot at even shorter range. Between attacks they mortared heavily, but fortunately their commanders never had the patience to assemble enough men for any really heavy united blow, which might have succeeded. Denis and I, sitting in our A.C.V. as usual, both went to sleep, and for some hours George Marsden, the young Maori L.O., directed the artillery 'stonks' that were continually called for and which were the only help we could give. One attack was led by a flame-thrower which was promptly knocked out by one of the tanks supporting the Twenty-first.

Firing became heavier than ever as dawn approached. The Twenty-first reported that it was being attacked by tanks and, a few minutes later, that our own tanks of the Eighteenth, well forward in support, had knocked out four Mark IV's. At the same time Monty called to ask whether the Twentieth and Maori attack should go ahead, saying it might be wiser to face about and be prepared in case the Twenty-first line was broken. I had been talking to McElroy and was satisfied that the Twenty-first would hold firm and told Monty and McKergow to go ahead. They did so at once, 6.30 a.m., so we had the uncommon situation of both sides attacking, in the same direction, a few hundred yards from one another. The counter-attacks did not die down until 8.30 a.m. and our line was still intact.

Our attack failed, mainly due to the failure or inability of the tanks and infantry to work together, though the stubborn and skilful resistance of the German infantry and gunners no doubt deserved some success. The operation would have been difficult enough if there had been good co-operation and good inter-communication, but our training and methods were not yet adequate* The tanks were confined to the road by the rain-soaked ground and could only move in single file without any chance of manoeuvre. There were

one or two shallow dips in the road but the ground was otherwise flat and open and the Twentieth officers thought that their best chance was to *move* quickly through to the objective, leaving the infantry, deployed on either side of the road, to follow at their own pace. Both C.O.s said that they did not want a barrage as it would hold the tanks up, and with some misgivings I agreed, though one had been *pre**pared. The final arrangements were made in the cemetery under very difficult conditions. It was about two acres in extent and enclosed by a rectangular stone wall and tall cypress trees. It was being heavily shelled with high explosive and airbursts and methodically raked by a heavy anti-tank gun which was battering gaps in the wall and then drilling tank after tank. In the circumstances some muddled thinking and impatience of delay was excusable.

Tanks and infantry set off punctually and with spirit. The enemy shell-fire redoubled in intensity. From where we watched it looked ominously violent, curling black airbursts and spouting geysers of smoke and earth appearing incessantly about the cemetery and along the road. The enemy guns were sited too far back to be seriously troubled by our counter-battery. In a few minutes, after advancing three or four hundred yards, the infantry were stopped and pinned down. The tanks moved on another half-mile, hotly engaged by anti-tank guns and infantry with bazookas, and after several had been hit and gone up in flames the remainder halted in the partial shelter of a dip in the road. We had not then evolved any reliable method of communication between tanks and infantry in action and this day there was none. The shelling did not abate at all and it soon became clear that we were completely stopped.

I went up and reluctantly decided to accept the situation and consolidate on the ground that we had won. The Maoris relieved the Twenty-third after dark and the Twentieth, leaving a squadron in close support, withdrew down the spur, having lost a dozen tanks. A squadron of the Eighteenth remained in close support of the Twenty-first and both battalions were ordered to get their anti-tank guns up and then release their supporting squadrons*

Although it was finally disappointing we gained a substantial success in this hard-fought action. The enemy had lost unusually heavily and we were securely across the Ortona road on a broad enough front to be able to launch further attacks when we were ready*

During the night the reliefs were completed, with difficulty and under constant shell* and mortar-fire. There were many calls for defensive fire and the guns were hard at it on both sides all night. There was no actual counter-attack but in the morning it was clear that the Germans had brought in fresh and aggressive troops—334 Division and some para-troop battalions. They had relieved the battered 65 Division, pushed close up against us everywhere, and started mortaring and sniping in a most spirited fashion, so that a sharp bickering went on all day and all movement behind our forward positions became highly dangerous—and was for our opponents too.

In this action the evacuation of wounded was expected to be very slow and difficult. I had always given the brigade band some responsibility in action, usually that of guarding prisoners. This time Claude Miller and his bandsmen carried the wounded from the Regimental Aid Posts to an A.D.S. which we established with a blood bank, well up the spur. Often they had to have six men to a stretcher but they worked splendidly, and with the A.D.S. so far forward the wounded got on better than we had feared and several lives were saved by early blood infusions.

But they were unable to save our gallant Reg. I went to see him in the dressing station in Castelfrentano and said good-bye to that brave and loyal soul. A day or two later he died, leaving with many of us an enduring memory.

After leaving Reg I went on to Division, having a particularly exciting trip over the Mad Minute, and found the new Corps Commander, General Dempsey, with General Freyberg. We were now confronted with a series of parallel ridges running east and west from Orsogna and if we could get on to the second one would have practically turned the town and would have space to deploy our guns across the

Moro. The Corps Commander thought that the eaiemy was shaken and that we would be able to get on to the next ridge, Fontegrande, without a formal attack. I thought that with the newly arrived paratroopers against us this was not feasible and said so. I was overruled and ordered to occupy the ridge with patrols on the following night and then to consolidate a position there*

I ordered the Maoris and the Twenty-first each to send patrols that night of an officer and twelve other ranks on to the Fontegrande Spur and to have companies standing by to occupy positions on the spur if there was little opposition. The Maoris sent two patrols, the Twenty-first one, and as expected they found themselves in a hornets* nest; we were lucky to lose no more than an excellent young officer killed, a sergeant wounded and missing, and seven other ranks killed or missing. I was in a black temper at the conference in the morning and afterwards thought that General Dcmpsey, who was again present, was very patient and forbearing with me.

For a few days, in bitterly cold and dull weather, there was no talk of any further attack. The troops were living under very hard conditions and were showing signs of strain. Orsogna was bombed by Kittyhawks four times in one day without any particular result, and on the same day there were two corps artillery concentrations, one of which fell largely on the Twenty-first. It looked as if we were merely demonstrating and, at the conference on the 20th, the General said that the policy was to go slow at present. When I went round the battalions that day I told them to concentrate on getting comfortable for the winter and was a little concerned that they all seemed decidedly pleased.

Next day I was called to Division and told to prepare a plan for an attack to take the next two ridges, 6 Brigade lending us 26 Battalion for the show. I must admit that I was not pleased, nor very optimistic, but I reflected that in a slogging match like this it was a question of who pounded longest and it was probably right to go on. I was put out, too, by the cocky attitude of the Para. Division in against us, and thought that they could do with a lesson* So, though a

little worried as to whether the troops were in their best form, I concealed my doubts and got ahead with the business.

This was a particularly difficult attack to plan and prepare. The centre battalion, the Twenty-sixth, could attack straight ahead with no special complications. The Maoris had to advance on a more westerly axis to gain possession of the ridge junctions near Orsogna so that the tanks could get round on to the Fontegrande Ridge, which meant that they would lose touch with the Twenty-sixth as they advanced. The Twenty-first, still with a refused right flank, had to swing up in line with the Twenty-sixth before attacking, which required an awkward change of direction and complications in the barrage table. 5 Division, moreover, was still lagging behind on this flank and, though it was to do a daylight attack and draw level before we moved, we felt certain that it would not succeed. The division said that its forward companies were reporting themselves up to the Ortona road. McElroy and I walked along the road for several hundred yards in No Man's Land, and could see no sign of them. As the tank and infantry counter-attack a few nights earlier had come up this road, McElroy felt that he would be very much in the air on the objective and to some extent I shared his concern. I told Division of my uneasiness but got a poor reception from the G. 1 and the net result was merely ill temper all round. 5 Division's attack was certainly made and under a very heavy barrage. My intelligence officer, Duthie Hoggans, went to the nearest Brigade to inquire the result. He was told it was a complete success, all objectives taken. He asked how many prisoners. There were none. How many casualties? There were none. And McElroy reported angrily that they were still nowhere near the road.

On the 23rd McKergow was wounded on the Mad Minute while on his way to an orders conference at my headquarters and Purcell took over the Twentieth. No one seemed enthusiastic about doing this attack, not so much from battle weariness, for the G.O.s were all stout and devoted soldiers, as from the feeling that no great results could be expected in the mud, that the men were tired and strengths low, and

because of the uneasiness as to the right flank. I thought the plan reasonably promising, the troops capable of another effort and the danger on the right one that could be coped with, so gave my orders rather grimly and bluntly overruled the few objections*

A few hours later I visited the Twenty-first and found that McElroy and his company commanders were not at all happy. I was put out because they had not told me of several minor difficulties earlier and I spoke to them sharply. They were a splendid set of experienced soldiers, but something was wrong with their mood at this moment, perhaps the constant fretting over their right flank. The real trouble, I think, was that I had decided that McElroy should stay out of this battle and that Roach, his second-in-command, should take his place. McElroy was due for a spell but he was profoundly unhappy at this decision, so wretched that I relented that evening and said he could take the battalion in. His mood changed at once.

Then I went on to the Maoris and the Twentieth and was encouraged to find Monty Fairbrother and Purceil in good form and very confident. Monty was due for furlough so I ordered him out over stubborn protests and put his second-in-command, Russell Young, in command. There was more trouble in the evening when we checked over the barrage tables and found that there had been a misunderstanding between Steve Weir and myself and the barrage would not suit the swing up of the Twenty-first. Steve was furious, as it was a great deal to ask his tired staff to get out and distribute fresh tables in the few hours left, but I had to insist and must have been highly unpopular at artillery head*quarters.

After dark we moved Brigade Headquarters to a filthy little hamlet called Sficiarelli, near the foot of the Sfasciata Spur. Unfortunately it was impossible to place ourselves near the start-line, as in the desert battles. There was only the one muddy road up the spur and it would have been far too long and difficult a trip for visitors, not an unimportant consideration. The Twenty-sixth, going into the line that night, had a desperately difficult approach march and the

men were tired out before they attacked. On the map it looked simple and easy enough to rdteve and move the battalion from its position in front of Orsogna, but the approach march took seven hours. During the afternoon General Dempsey called and asked what I thought of the prospects. I said that we would take the Fontegrande Ridge, the first objective, but that I doubted whether we would get the next ridge* He looked at me consideringly, said: 'You've been a Brigadier for two years and gone from success to success.¹ I replied that we would do our best. He went away without further comment, leaving me a little doubtful as to whether I would not be superseded in the next half-hour.

Generally, things were not right before this action. The Twenty-first was unhappy and anxious about its right flank. The Twenty-sixth was in a strange brigade, on completely strange ground which it had not seen in daylight, and was exhausted before it started. The Maoris were weak in numbers after their previous severe actions, and Russell Young was fighting his first battle as a commander, though this proved of no importance. The Brigadier was in a sour and angry humour, which helped not at all. It was the day before Christmas—which we all remembered. Lastly, the attack which we had been told 5 Division was to do during the afternoon, with Arielli ahead of our right flank as an objective, had not even been attempted, and its forward infantry were still a long and uncertain distance behind the right of the Twenty-first.

The barrage opened at 4 a.m. on 24 December, a cold, raw morning. On the right it was ragged and the Twenty-first at once complained bitterly of shorts falling among the companies on the start-line. The barrage advanced by lifts of a hundred yards every four minutes and the infantry went forward doggedly, but, in the opinion of many officers, with a little less than their usual *elan*. It was a nasty night and a grim hour for tired, wet, and battle-weary men.

The Twenty-first, though it lost the barrage, took its first objective after some sharp fighting and clever manoeuvring and then found itself confronted in many places by a vertical bank, too high to jump down. One weak company, under

Brian Abbott, moved through the Twenty-sixth area and made a precarious lodgement on **the** second ridge. The rest of the battalion dug in and McElroy used his reserve company to guard his long and tender right flank. The Twenty-sixth also took its share of the first objective and some men got across with Abbott's party; but the battalion got no farther. The Maoris gained the all-important neck giving the tanks access to the Fontegrande Ridge but were then held up by most stubborn resistance and lost heavily. The paratroops opposing them maintained a heavy fire while the barrage **was** actually falling on them.

Not long before dawn I asked Fountaine whether he could get the second objective. He said there was considerable disorder and confusion and it was beyond reach. I then asked for a description of the lodgement on the second ridge, how many men were there, were they in a secure position, could they be reached and supplied. He said there were forty or fifty in the party, that they were overlooked by enemy posts and most insecure, and that it would be impossible to reach them in daylight. Actually they were on both sides of a cleft and not on any part of the flat top of the ridge. I thought that the ground they were on was of no value, that they would be an easy mark for a counter* attack, and only an embarrassment if we wanted to fire a barrage for a further attack and told Den to withdraw them to the first ridge at once.

General Freyberg had been sitting beside me in the A.C.V. all night, watching and listening but saying nothing. When he heard me give this order he at once reached for the headphones and very carefully and slowly put Fountaine through a long questionnaire. Then he told him the party was to stay where it was. This was the only time that he ever overruled me in battle or that I completely disagreed with his decision. I said as much but he was adamant and the party stayed where it was perched.

Before daylight a squadron of the Twentieth tanks under John Rolleston got round the neck on to the Fontegrande Ridge and very soon completed the mopping-up. They had a busy day and before it ended had outshot and thoroughly

quietened the Germans on the second ridge, who started off by sniping in a most aggressive fashion. They were handled in a bold and skilful way that provided one of the few bright features in this unsatisfactory affair. The Twenty-first reported thirty-four casualties, the Twenty-sixth thirty-two, and the Maoris about a hundred. We had taken half our objective and had sixty-seven prisoners, nearly all wounded. A most unhappy incident was yet to be disclosed.

No fresh troops were available to continue the attack and it was plain that we had shot our own bolt. 25 Battalion relieved the Twenty-first which had had no break since we crossed the Sangro a month earlier and was now very weary and, when the relief was completed, about 2 o'clock on Christmas morning, 6 Brigade took command of the sector. I met the battalion, trudging slowly out to its billets after daylight, and thought that I had not seen men so exhausted since Flanders. Every man was plastered with wet mud up to his neck and their faces were grey. Nevertheless I got smiles and cheerful words from every officer and every platoon. From all but one.

There was no response whatever from one platoon. The eighteen men passed me silently, their faces utterly expressionless, and none replied when I spoke to them. I was startled. A few hours later the battalion commander came in with a stern set face and gave me the reason. These men were under close arrest because they had refused to go into action. Only the platoon commander and four men had gone in. Such a thing was unheard of in the Division and the C.O. was heartbroken.

It was a sad business. Charges were laid, a court martial convened, and the cases were heard a week or two later. It appeared that during the afternoon before the attack the platoon sergeant warned his officer that the men would not go in. The company commander was informed. He relieved the platoon, which was in fire-pits in a reserve position, and brought it back to a farm-house to be rested. In the evening he spoke to the men in a firm and soldierly fashion and when he left was satisfied that he would see them on the start-line. Zero hour was at 4 a.m., the men were to be awakened at 3

a.m. to have a hot meal at the company cooker, and then to move a few hundred yards to the start-line. At 3 a.m. the platoon commander went to the door of the room in which the men were sleeping, called out "shake a leg*", and went back to complete his own preparations. When he had finished and had his meal, only four men had arrived at the cookhouse, there was no time left and he went into the battle with them only. The others were found by the R.S.M. still wrapped in their blankets after daybreak and were at once put under arrest.

At their trial some maintained that they had not heard any call and had simply overslept. Others, more candid, admitted that they had made up their minds not to go into the attack. They all had good records, the sergeant a particularly good one, and the platoon had behaved well in the previous month's operations and had had eleven casualties. They were all convicted and received sentences of one to two years* imprisonment, the N.C.O.s being in addition reduced to the ranks. There was no sympathy for them in the battalion but I felt, as did the General, that there would have been no trouble with a more understanding platoon commander and confirmed the sentences with reluctance. There was no doubt that these men had been severely tried, but no more than their comrades who went forward to their duty on that black morning. Later the balances of their sentences were suspended and they were posted to different battalions to give them a chance of redeeming their characters by good conduct. Some did so, not all, and the sergeant was a broken man. The officer was held to have failed in his duty to his men and was not again employed with the Division.

At the end of the year General Montgomery gave up the command of Eighth Army, which he had done so much to make famous and to which he owed so much of his own fame, and went to England to command 21 Army Group for the invasion of Normandy. We were glad to hear of his appointment, but it was a little depressing to hear that Army Headquarters staff could talk of nothing else but who was to go with him and who to stay in this Adriatic backwater. We speculated as to whether General Freyberg or Oliver Leese

would succeed him and were disappointed that General Freyberg did not

We had a few days' spell and then relieved 6 Brigade in the same positions on 2 January. With a foot of snow, everyone perforce lived in the houses scattered over the country-side and there was no more question of continuing the offensive. Nevertheless, we were kept alert and lively*. Both sides constantly mortared, shelled, and sniped and patrolled actively. These paratroopers were the first Germans we had met who patrolled really aggressively. They got their issue of snowsuits sooner than we did and sent parties over to visit us every night. Most of the houses had only one door, facing east, and often no window. They were blind on the side from which the enemy approached and until a technique for holding them was worked out we had one or two unpleasant surprises. One night a German patrol got up to one of the Twenty-third's houses unobserved, inflicted four casualties by throwing grenades through the door, and dragged one wounded man away. This annoyed us extremely and we laid on plots to prevent any recurrence and at once had a gratifying success. A party of seven which tried to raid a house in the Maori area was neatly ambushed and all killed. During the following day I was showing a Polish General around the forward area and we visited the platoon concerned and heard the story. General Duck was apparently not at all pro-German, his delight when he understood that all the raiders had been killed, not wounded or captured but killed, was almost alarming.

Occasionally houses received direct hits though we discouraged our gunners from doing too much in that line, as our own men were also all in houses. The 170 mm. wrecked a house in the Twenty-third area, killing or badly wounding two officers and six men. The battalions started to ring up and ask when I would be likely to appear on my morning visit and what my route would be. Guides were then placed at various points to lead me from one company headquarters to another by covered routes. No one wanted to be noticed to be having visitors.

We heard welcome talk of a move. We too had lost interest

in the Adriatic coast, and after all, we had foiled to take Orsogna, our first failure, and wore tired of looking at it all day and every day. On Christmas morning we were startled to hear church bells ringing in that smitten little town. A Brigadier of 4 Indian Division arrived to discuss reliefs, sitting in a jeep and wearing a bowler hat* He said it was bound to come in handy before long. For a few uneventful and boring days I commanded the Division while the General went ahead to see Fifth Army Headquarters and visit the Gassino front where the Americans had been held up. At 4 in the morning of 17 January 1944 we set off for the other side of Italy, all badges and markings removed, in a vain effort to conceal our identity. No one could possibly mistake New Zealand troops, with badges or without.

26. Cassino

DENIS and I stayed the night in the Officers' Club at Avellino, not far from Naples. I remember it because next morning we had champagne for breakfast. I reported to the General and by evening Brigade Headquarters was settled in very comfortably in a farm-house near Alife, an exceptionally filthy little town huddled inside ancient walls.

We were in this area in good quarters and fine weather, until 4 February, and we all enjoyed ourselves. The troops rested, trained in moderation, and got thoroughly tidied up. Ike and Keith and I visited the American Second Corps on the Cassino front, saw for the first time Cassino Abbey and Mount Trocchio and were impressed by the destruction and havoc all the way up Highway Six. We visited the French Corps beyond Venafro, saw General Juin again and were warmly greeted, and were astonished to see the knife-like edges and vast ravines through which it was fighting. The French Chief of Staff told me that they never made anything but daylight attacks and was inclined to be incredulous when I told him that we almost always attacked at night.

We visited Pompeii, not nearly as attractive as Leptis Magna or Sabratha. Brigade Headquarters gave a party and we were guests at a 4 Brigade cocktail party which was also attended by nurses; and at a party at the Casualty Clearing Station, where there were many old friends and more nurses and all were very bright. 21 and 23 Battalions, the latter now commanded by Dick Connolly, put on delightful dinner-parties with the brigade band or its orchestra providing the music. I sent the band to an American Field Hospital near by. Claude said that the Commandant had thanked him very warmly and said that his staff and patients had much appreciated the entertainment, the more welcome because quite unexpected, as V.D. hospitals were seldom so favoured.

We practised a river crossing over the Volturno, with enough success to make me confident that we could do an opposed crossing reasonably well*. The battalions put on ceremonial parades, that of the Twenty-first memorably good. I spoke to each of them about its history and the brave men and deeds of the past 6 Brigade and the artillery had ceremonial parades. We decided to have one also, selected a field, and set about preparations. Of an evening we had a magnificent log fire, there were always guests and callers from the battalions, we played chess or yarned, drank a little or a lot, and were very happy. The men were warm and snug in good quarters, with fires and parcels and clean clothes. Daily I could see their faces losing the strained look. What matter that all the summer campaign lay ahead, for a little while we were very content with life.

On the afternoon of 4 February orders came for us to relieve 141 and 143 United States Regiments holding the line of the Rapido river in front of Mount Trocchio. The Twenty-first carried out the relief on a wild night of wind and rain.

For a few days 5 Brigade Headquarters shared buildings with the headquarters of 141 Regiment, the equivalent of one of our brigades. It was most interesting to be with the Americans. The regimental commander was a very likeable youngish man named Wyatt. He told me that he was an estate agent from San Antonio, Texas, and that he drove eighty miles to work every morning in one and a quarter hours. He had been in the Army three years altogether. His family was very Southern and had disliked his marrying a girl from Ohio. We played chess and proved to be equally bad. He told me that his divisional commander never came forward as far as regimental headquarters, that he never went farther himself than to his battalion headquarters.

In the pamphlet *Notes on High Command* that General Montgomery had distributed down to Brigadiers at Tripoli, he gave the good advice always to think two down. Wyatt said that Division would tell him how to use his battalions, he would tell his battalion commanders how to use their companies and supporting arms. He was astonished when

I told him that Division with us would never do more than tell me what to do, leaving me to decide how, and similarly that I would never tell battalions how to carry out a task, that I might advise and suggest and support in every way possible, but nothing more. He did not understand how that system would work. He said they had nothing comparable to our divisional conferences and discussions. Orders came down from the higher formation and were literally obeyed, and he had never heard of subordinate commanders being consulted beforehand. His regiment had crossed the Rapido a fortnight earlier and had been driven back with heavy loss. He showed me his orders and those received from his division for the operation and I thought that almost everything that should have been done had not been done and few things that should have been done had been attended to. Nothing was right except the courage. After the failure the divisional commander had ordered another attempt the next night, by the same troops, on the same plan, at the same places. Such things were done often enough by British Generals in 1915 and 1916 but I would not believe that such an abysmal ignorance of war was still possible and questioned him closely. It was so; he had gathered his surviving officers in the room we were in and had said good-bye to them. At the last moment the divisional infantry commander had intervened and had persuaded the divisional commander in his Olympian solitude and ignorance that the operation was not feasible. Wyatt thought this was an extraordinarily bold action on his part and doubted whether the divisional infantry commander would ever command a division. Yet the operation had been cancelled. This all revealed a very different system of command.

We looked at the American troops with the keenest interest. One of the regiments stayed in the area we had taken over for a few days. The men looked tired and haggard but their commander thought it was a good thing to rest them with route marches over the muddy tracks, within range of the German guns and occasionally within view of their observers. If the men felt afraid they made no effort to conceal their feelings. Two shells pitched in the midst of a company

shuffling past our house and killed three men. The company instantly dispersed among the olive-trees, the men running like rabbits in all directions. Denis and I, watching from a balcony, laughed heartily and stopped suddenly a moment later when we saw the poor lads spattered against the wall,

I attended with General Freyberg at a Corps conference where we were told that the American 36 Division was to join the American 34th and deliver another attack on Cassino Abbey from the high ground north of the town. I told the General that the American infantry was worn out and quite unfit for battle without a thorough rest. He was disturbed and questioned the American commanders closely as to the condition of their troops and it was very plain that none of them had been forward or was at all in touch with his men.

On the way to this conference I called on the Maori battalion. Running up Highway Six we were nearly put in the ditch by American Negro drivers. An Indian military policeman warned us to waste no time at the San Vittore corner, beyond which we overtook an Algerian battalion with French officers. We passed through an English field regiment's area, several hundred American infantry working on the road, and reached Corps Headquarters immediately behind two Brazilian generals. In the first room I was astounded and mystified to hear that the Japanese had taken the casde. This proved to be incorrect but it was some time before I realized that the Japanese concerned were those of 100 U.S. Infantry Battalion and the casde that at Cassino.

We were observing wireless silence, still had our badges off, and were anxious to conceal from the enemy our arrival on this front. Consequently it was mortifying to have to ring the General early on the morning of the 7th and tell him that the Twenty-first had lost three prisoners. The battalion was on a very wide front in wooded country, Battalion and Company Headquarters in houses, the companies in widely separated section posts often out of sight or support of one another. A raiding party crossed the river during the night and penetrated between posts to Brian Abbott's house. They were seen just in time, the door was slammed and the window shuttered after a scuffle in which two of the Germans were

Wounded* Brian called Battalion Headquarters on the phone, said 'Bunny here', explained the situation, and asked for help. The Germans listened to this and jeered: 'Come on out, Bunny, we know you're there/ Three of our men walked unsuspectingly up to the door and were at once grabbed and hustled away and our arrival on the scene was no longer a secret.

The General was very nice about the incident, but I was not so nice to McElroy. Prince Peter of Greece was staying with us at the time, and when I called on the Twenty-first and told McElroy and his company commanders how I thought they should have held their ground and what was wrong with their dispositions, I quite forgot the prince was with us and listening. This was too much for poor Harry, already deeply mortified, and next day he called and asked to be relieved of his command. I thought myself at fault and so refused his request and we talked the matter out and got on to a good footing again. Prince Peter played quite good chess at a terrific pace, rarely deliberating more than five seconds over a move.

On the 19th New Zealand Corps, consisting of 2 New Zealand and 4 Indian Divisions together with an American Combat Group and over 600 guns, was formed with the specific task of taking Cassino. General Freyberg took command of the Corps with Queree as his B.G.S. I took command of our Division with Thornton as G. 1 and Sid Hartnell succeeded me in 5 Brigade. Corps and Divisional Headquarters were set up close together but with separate messes and establishments. Frank Masscy, from the Twenty-first, came as my A.D.C.

The American attack was to be delivered next day, after one or two postponements, and the first task was to make arrangements to take advantage of any success they gained. This was quickly planned and prepared and we could have attacked with 5 Brigade and the American Combat Group on the night of the nth. There was heavy rain all day, the attack failed as almost everybody expected, and we cancelled our own project. Colonel Wyatt was among those killed, by a direct hit on his headquarters. 4 Indian Division,

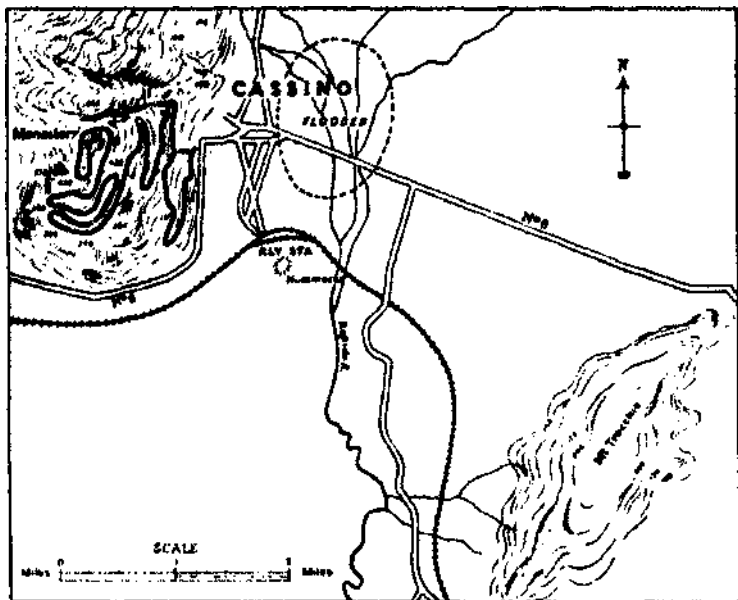
temporarily under Dimoline, took over from the Americans on the high ground and New Zealand Corps took over command on the front. The Americans had battled since January with a stubbornness and gallantry beyond all praise) but they were fought out. Some of the eighteen battalions in the line had lost 80 per cent, of their effectives and they were utterly exhausted. When relieved, fifty men had to be carried out on stretchers. It was our turn.

The Cassino position was as strong as any position could be without being impregnable. The German defences were to be broken at their strongest point. They were held by a good division, 15 Panzer Grenadiers, supported by about 180 guns and numerous Nebelwerfers and 50 or 60 tanks, ample to hold the ground. At the end of February 1 Parachute Division, reputed the best Division in the German Army, took over from the Panzer Grenadiers. From the slopes of Monte Caira, rising to 5,000 feet, and from Cassino Hill and the abbey, the enemy looked straight down Highway Six and had complete command of every approach. The front was covered by the Rapido and Gari rivers, flooded west of Cassino town. Our one real advantage was that we had almost complete air superiority, so that the enemy guns seldom fired except in emergency or on harassing tasks at night. No movement could ever be seen in the enemy area and we moved freely on all roads. Our immense superiority in tanks could be of no use until the battle was won.

The Americans had tried to cross the Rapido in the wide Liri valley south of Cassino and had failed. They had then crossed the Rapido north of the town and by hard and long fighting got on to the high spurs north and north-west of the abbey hill and more or less between it and Monte Caira. Their desperate efforts to storm the abbey from that direction had now failed.

We considered a crossing in the centre of the Liri valley near the village of San Angelo where the crossing was actually made three months later. This was ruled out on the grounds that we did not have enough troops and that any bridgehead made would be untenable unless the abbey hill with its perfect observation was in our hands or at least being

heavily disputed. After many hours of study of maps and air photographs and of the ground from every possible vantage point, and after many discussions, General Freyberg decided on a plan that was in effect a continuation of that of the Americans. The Indians would attack Cassino town



MAP 14. CASSINO, FEBRUARY-MARCH 1944

from the north, we from the west; the two attacks simultaneous and converging.

Unfortunately it was impossible for either Division to deploy its full strength. The Indians had incredible difficulties in carrying out their relief and in supplying their troops and became involved in hard fighting to get any sort of start-line from which to launch their attack. We could not attack Cassino on a broad front because of the floods, while the only approach from the west was along and astride the railway causeway. The causeway itself was known to be heavily mined and it had been breached in half a dozen places, so that no tanks or supporting arms could get up until

the mines had been cleared and the gaps bridged. We could attack only on a front of two companies and the longer and harder one looked and thought, the more difficulties one saw.

I directed 5 Brigade to prepare an attack by one battalion along the railway causeway to capture the railway station and the black hummocks near by. Every possible weapon—self-propelled guns, seventeen-pounders, machine-guns, and mortars—was to be brought forward as close as possible to Cassino, to keep the garrison there under fire and to give at least the illusion of an attack on a broad front. The sappers were to clear the mines and bridge the gaps, and if all went well we would have tanks and supporting arms in the station area before dawn. Unless the Germans cracked more quickly than we could expect, it would be a question of holding on and hammering with our guns all the following day, and the next night the American Combat team, 180 tanks with 21 Battalion under command, would cross the Gari and pour out into the Liri valley. It was to be followed by the New Zealand 4 Brigade with as many tanks and 23 Battalion, which would sweep south and clear the banks of the Rapido. If we could hold the railway station, the operation would go on with a fair prospect of success, whether the Indians succeeded, had partial success, or failed. If we failed to take the station or lost our toe-hold there, then the operation ended and we would not have lost heavily. I felt a little unlucky having to deal with so awkward a problem in my first battle as a divisional commander.

After earnest consideration it was decided to bomb the abbey. It had a certain religious significance, and even after being bombed would undoubtedly remain of value to the enemy. Undamaged, it was of higher value, and although the Germans declared that it was not garrisoned and that it housed only refugees from the Cassino town, we felt certain that it was at least the enemy's main observation post. It was so perfectly situated for the purpose that no Army could have refrained from using it. We felt that our duty to our troops was paramount over all other considerations and I gave my vote for its being bombed. The decision was made on a higher

level, and on the morning of 15 February the abbey **was** bombed by fifteen waves of heavy bombers, 351 tons of bombs being dropped. Considerable damage was done, probably rather more was done to the surrounding posts, and the Indians had twenty-four casualties. Whatever had been the position before, there was no doubt that the enemy was now entitled to garrison the ruins, the breaches in the fifteen-foot thick walls were nowhere complete, and we wondered whether we had gained anything.

This bombardment, whether valuable or not, was not followed by any immediate attack. The Indians were still groping amid extraordinary difficulties for a start-line. During the night of 15 February, one of their British companies got on to Hill 593, which dominated the abbey itself, and nothing else happened. The next day we did nothing but bombard steadily and on the night of the 16th 1 Royal Sussex got on to Hill 593 with a fine effort and was driven off again. Poor Dimoline was having a dreadful time getting his Division into position. I never really appreciated the difficulties until I went over the ground after the war. He got me to make an appointment for us both with General Freyberg, as he thought his task was impossible and his difficulties not fully realized. The General refused to see us together: he told me he was not going to have any soviet or divisional commanders.

In one way or another the Indians got four battalions into the attack on the night of the 17th, with Hills 593 and 445 as objectives. We delivered our attack with the Maoris. It was a bleak winter night. The Maoris met intense mortar and machine-gun fire, wire, and minefields. In a fine effort they stormed the railway station but were unable to take the neighbouring hummocks. Fred Hanson and his sappers were on their heels. They worked heroically throughout the night to clear the causeway and bridge the gaps, regardless of heavy casualties to officers and men. But in vain. At daybreak there was still one gap to bridge, it could not possibly be done in daylight, and neither tanks nor anti-tank guns could be got up to the Maoris at the station. Sid Hartnel asked me for permission to withdraw them. I

refused. It was just possible that the enemy would not counter-attack with tanks or, if they did, that our guns could beat them off and the chance had to be tried.

At daybreak I went up to see the Maoris. Russell Young thought they could hold on, which was the right opinion for a good battalion commander. I had to decide whether to use smoke, which would protect them from observed fire but give the enemy a chance of putting in a counter-attack unobserved by our guns, or whether to leave them unobserved all day and rely on the gunners to beat off any tank counter* attack. Looking at the slopes of the mountain looming above the station, I thought there would be no one alive by the end of the day if they had no concealment, and decided to use smoke. Steve laid it on at once, but said he did not have enough to keep it going all day. I rang Stan Crump and told him the position. His drivers had enough on their hands and there were no smoke shells nearer than Naples, seventy miles away. But he promised that we should have the shells and we never ran short.

The day dragged very slowly, I had never realized that hours were such lengthy periods. If only night would come all would be well. Allen and his formidable Combat Group were waiting behind Trocchio, Fred Hanson had everything ready to bridge the last gap and the Gari in record time, and we would be away. At midday all was still well, though the Maoris said they were being heavily mortared. Still they sounded cheerful, in fact said they were quite happy, and we began to feel hopeful. At 3.45 p.m. 5 Brigade reported that a tank and infantry counter-attack, under cover of our smoke, had driven the Maoris out and that they were retiring as best they could to their original positions. There was nothing to be done except tell Steve to stop his smoke and rest his gunners. The Indians reported that after heavy fighting and high casualties they had only a footing on 593 and could do no more.

So we had failed again. The Maoris had 128 casualties and the Indians lost very heavily. We had lost about thirty of the gallant sappers. It was no use repining. Two editors from New Zealand were at my mess and we had a particularly

gay evening, joined half-way through fay the General and his mess. Soldiers should not worry, you do your best and do not cry over spilt milk. Prince Peter was in the party. He told us that he had climbed Trocchio during the day and had a fine view from there. Someone remarked that there were a good many 'schu' mines on Trocchio.

Cassino was still to be taken. We started at once to prepare another plan and by the 20th had done so and the troops were moving into position. This time we called on the Strategic Air Force to smash Cassino town with its heavy bombers. This time the two divisions would attack side by side from the north and roll up the defences one by one. New Zealand Division was to assault down the Rapido valley, capture the town and castle and a bridgehead opening out into the Liri valley through which the tanks would be poured. After we had gained the castle, the Indians would move on our right flank, clear the hill-side by stages under full view and support of our guns, and then turn uphill to storm the abbey, which meantime would be threatened from the opposite side, the line of the earlier attacks. It was not a bad plan: the subsequent army report said it was the best that could have been produced in the circumstances. One drawback was the fact that again we could attack only on a very narrow front. 6 Brigade, detailed for the assault, had to enter the town down a single road, the ground on either side being flooded and mined, with sections in single file on either side of the road, that is on a front of two men. It could only feed its battalions into the fight instead of going in with a united blow. Another difficulty was that the Indians had only a narrow entry on to the slopes of Cassino hill through the castle itself when we had taken it. A third was the probability that the bombing would create as many obstacles by cratering as it destroyed. That would not matter so much if we had fine weather; the following tanks would then scramble through all right. A fourth disadvantage was that the dependence on an air bombardment to soften the defences made us also dependent on the weather. We had 610 guns and very likely could have produced enough fire without waiting for the air.

I made out a list of 'Blessings' and Troubles* which I quoted to everyone I found doubting our prospects* The 'Blessings' were:

- (i) 1,000 tons of bombs (actually 1,100 tons) must affect morale and make gaps in defences*
- (2) Artillery can to some extent neutralize enemy flanking positions on hill.
- (3) Enemy defensive fire must be uncertain and our counter-battery is powerful.
- (4) Armour can be used.
- (5) We can give flanking fire to an unusual degree, deluging the area with fire.
- (6) No great number of troops or tanks is risked.
- (7) No minefields to cross.

The Troubles' that I foresaw were:

- (1) Possibility of enemy re-occupying northern fringe of town which we had to evacuate before the bombing, when he would command the 6 Brigade approach by its single road. (This did not happen and was, in any case, cared for by a ten-minutes' bombardment by 200 guns on the northern fringe during the approach. A barrage was then formed which advanced at the very slow rate of 100 yards in ten minutes.)
- (2) Approach under observation from abbey and higher slopes. (This observation would be obscured by the smoke of the bombing and to some extent handicapped by the heavy shelling the observation areas would receive.)
- (3) Enemy strongly constructed works on slopes enfilade whole advance and will be little damaged by bombs or sheik. (We could only hope that they would to some extent be neutralized by the artillery.)
- (4) Tank manoeuvrability would be restricted in the bombed town. (This, owing to the rain, proved to be the worst trouble of all.)

There were continual postponements while we waited for the weather authorities to give us a fine day.

My diary reads:

Feb. stand. Mild tunny day. Conference at 0900. Orders out for attack.

Fit. 23rd. Heavy rain all day, so attack for to-morrow postponed.

Feb. 24th. Saw Ike and discussed his plans. Feel optimistic. Corps Conference 1600 hours, the General, Keightley 78 Division, Dimoline and self. The General's son, Paul, missing at Anzio.

Fib. 25th. Dull and wet again. Called on 5th Brigade, 21st and 28th Battalions. Another postponement.

Feb. 26th. Bad wet day and, of course, another postponement.

Fib. 27th. Visited 6th Brigade and 25th Battalion. Jim Burrows took over 5th Brigade from Sid Hartneli. Rain and another postponement.

Feb. 26th. Saw Keith and Jim. Ike worrying a good deal. Everyone on edge with frequent postponements.

Feb. 29th. To 5th Brigade and saw Jim, then to 23rd and Divisional Cavalry who are having a fair number of casualties. Rain and another postponement.

March 1st Cables from New Zealand Government and General Puttick with congratulations on my appointment.

March 2nd. Corps Conference at 1400 hours. Went with Frank Massey up Mount Trocchio afterwards and, coming down, stepped on a mine and had one foot blown off, the other mangled and thumb ripped up. Frank slightly hurt. Picked up by very plucky party of 23rd and amputation done at A.D.S. by Kennedy Elliott. Saw General and Jim Burrows before operation... •

Index

Promotions and changes of command during the period covered for the author's narrative have, in the majority of instances, precluded the indication of military rank in the Index,

- Abbott, Brian (Bunny), 101, 102, 233,
343, 351, 352-
Acre, 124.
Adams, Kon, 143.
Afrika Korpe, 136, 250, 251, 274.
Afrne, 117.
Agar, R. E., 79, 87, 100, 107.
— - 149 -
Agedabia, 249.
Agheila, 114.
— line, 246-59.
— marshes, 246.
Agia Reservoir, 51, 57.
Agio Goannino, 59.
Aitken, J. D., 17.
Ajax, H.M.S., 46.
Aiamcin, 138-55, 221-37.
— line, 136.
Alam Haifa, 205.
— Nayil, 141, 219.
— Ridge, 156, 196, 205, 208,
214.
Aleppo, 116-19, 121, 123.
Alexander, Field-Marshal Viscount,
of Tunis, 267.
Alexandria, 15, 16, 77, 106, 112.
Aliakmon, 18, 20, 22.
Alifc, 348
Alikianou, 51.
Alinda, 205.
Allen, Sam, 113, 127, 129, 157, 139,
142, 144, 146, 150, 153, 164, 171,
172, 176, 357-
Allison, J. S., 96-8.
American 34th Division, 351.
Amiriya, 14, 77, 78, 125, 127, 134,
138.
Andrew, Les, 113.
Andrews, G. R., 65.
Apennines, 322.
Arawa Maori Company, 202, 218.
Arietta, 342.
Arnold, — (Medical Orderly 20 Bn.),
too.
Askipho, 71.
Atessa, 325.
Athens, 42.
Atrica, 43.
Auchinlck, General Sir Claude, 139*
Auchinlck's offensive, 81.
Auckland Battalion, set Eighteenth
New Zealand Battalion.
•August Battery, 138, 156.
Awatere, Pcta, 213, 285, 331.
Ayto, W., 17, 43.
Azizia, 262.
Baalbek, 116, 117, 122, 123*
*Bacon Operation, 160, 163.
Bagush, 6, 15, 79, 106, 107, 159, 241,
242.
— BOX, 14.
Bailey, Arthur, 309.
Bain, J., 17.
Baker, —, 96, 97, 100, 101.
— F., 178, 201-3, 213, 214, 236.
Bardia, 14, 87, 90.
Bassett, Brian, 49, 54, 60, 64, 63, 76,
100, 107, 137, 146,
Battle-axe Operation, 79.
Beale, Harry, 12, 107.
Bedding, G., 21, 23, 48.
Beersheba, 116, 124.
Beirut, 116.
Belhamed, 93-111, 115, 249.
Ben Gardanc, 277.
Benghazi, 108.
Bent Ulid, 261.
Bennett, Charlie, 214, 236, 218, 257,
263, 264, 270, 273, 274, 286, 287,
289, 304, 315-
Bianchi, 265.
Bir Chleta, 00, 91, 121.
Bir Et Zemla, 87.
— Hacheim, 115, 249.
— Khalda, 127, 128, 132.
Bizerta, 310.
Black, Heroic, 152, 315.
— Watch Regiment, 78, 234.
Blackburn, A., 12, 48, 69.
Bliss H. C, 64,

- Bhundell, Denis, 247, 270, 284, 288,
 Bosphoruf, 120.
 Boyte, Paddy, 85, 92, 95, 101, 102,
 104, 106.
 Bramwell, Jack, 195, 233.
 Bruonshirt, L.S., 16.
 Brennan, Pat, 335*
 Britith and American systems of
 command compared, 349-50.
 British Armoured Brigade, 41.
 Brown, G. A., 17.
 Burg ei Arab, 221.
 Btimham, 1.
 Burrows, Brigadier Jim, 2, 15, 16, 17,
 24, 35, 37, 38, 39, 42, 58, 63, 69,
 71, 73, 75, 76, 78, 134, 146, 149,
 157, 170, 174, 210, 360; brings
 battalion to Ryakia, 18; with ad-
 vance party through Olympus Pass,
 20; with orders group at Lava, 26;
 reports to Brigade, 44-5; in com-
 mand of 20 Bn., 46; takes com-
 mand of 19, 20, and 28 (Maori)
 Bns., 74; promoted, 79; memo-
 randum on V.C.s, Bo; with
 reinforcements to Bagush, 107;
 takes over 4 Bde., 131; at Kaponga
 Box, 137; ordered to move back,
 151; false report of death, 172;
 news of escape, 173; writes to K.
 from Maadi, 180; returns to 20 Bn.,
 102.
 Butland, W. C., 226, 233.
 Cairo, 13.
 Cameron, Dave, 15, 17, 25, 37, 39,
 44*
 Campbell, Jock, 106, 195.
 — Tom, 225, 231, 248.
 Canae, 46, 47, 49, 52 69-
 Carnachan, A. G., 167.
 Carson, W., 55, 56, 59, 60, 63, 67, 88,
 19?.
 Caspian Sea, 120.
 Castno, 348-60.
 Castei Benito, 265.
 GasteJfrentano, 322, 325, 326, 329,
 332, 338.
 Castle Gap, 21, 22, 25.
 Catley, Tom, 240.
 Cave, 4.
 Cemetery hill, 51, 56, 58.
 Chamberlain, Kt. Hon. Neville, 1.
 Charing Cross, 242.
 Charrington, S. H., 41.
 Chess, 192-3, 194, 284, 298, 334, 349.
 Cbetterman, Dick, 81, 85, 107, 112,
 117, 121, 124, 146.
 Chrystal, Jerry, 290-3.
 — Drift, 249.
 Churchill, KL Hon. Winston, 266.
 Citadel, to.
 Clark, —, 177.
 Clifton, George, 116, 117, 125, 127,
 149, 173, 174, 178, 183, 184, 188,
 190, 210, 217.
 Colombo, 8.
 Connolly, Dick, 67, 257, 315, 348.
 Coop, Max, 230.
 Cooper, Albert, 149.
 Co-ordination of armour and infantry,
 157» 159» 180-1, 275; and artillery,
 216, 222, 284.
 Copeland, A. D., 96.
 Corbett, Lt.-Gcn. T. W., 139.
 Corinth, 40.
 — Canal, 38.
 Costello, Paddy, 140, 317, 332.
 Cox, Fred, 321.
 Crete, 46-78.
 Crump, Stan, 357.
 'Crusader', Operation, 81.
 Currie, John, 221, 227, 233, 261, 317,
 318.
 Curtis, D., 17.
 Daba, 151.
 Danvers, A. A., 147.
 Daratsos, 65, 69, 70.
 Dasler, —, 148, 170, 171.
 Davis, Frank, 2, 3, 9, to, 73, 76.
 Dawson, Teddy, 12, 17, 24, 28, 35,
 36, 112, 114, 117, 120, 132.
 Deans, A. A., 37.
 Deir Alinda, 152.
 — el Qatani, 150.
 — el Shein Box, 138, 141, 142.
 Den es Zor, 119.
 Dempsey, General Sir Miles C, 267,
 268, 338, 339, 342.
 Denvir, J., 45.
 Desert Air Force, 126.
 Dimolinc, Brigadier H. K., 353,
 360.
 Dittmer, Brigadier George, 69, 102,
 218.
 Divisional Petrol Company, 51, 54,
 55, 57, 59, 61.
 — Signals, 7.
 Domokos, 35.
 Donaldson, R., 269, 290, 320.
 Dornwell, F. E., 2.

- Dugteby, L. W., 121, 149, 209, 211,
- Bmrnm*, T.S., 7-9.
- Durham Light Infantry, a 18*
- Eden, Rt. Hon. Anthony, 9,
- Egypt, plant lor evacuation of, 139f.;
enemy onrush stopped, 160.
- 18 Armoured Regiment, 334, 336,
- Eighteenth New Zealand Battalion,
10,26,187; formerly Auckland Bn.,
5; march from Freraantle 10 Perth,
8; lands in Greece, 16; on Aliakmon
line, 18; south of Servia, 21; with-
drawal to Thermopylae, 26-7; last
days in Greece, 38, 43; losses, 47;
operations in Crete, 01-3, 65, 06,
70; evacuation, 74; in Libya, 8a,
88, 93-5, 97, 98; withdraws into
Tobruk, 108; at Minqar Qaim,
128; at Ruweisat, 168, 172, 174,
178; El Mreir, 183; in the New
Zealand Box, 191.
- 8 Armoured Brigade, 274, 276, 282,
295, 297, 299-
- Eighth Army, 81, 114, 125, 126, 138,
139, 157, 180, 191,274-
- Greek Battalion, 49-51.
- 8 Indian Division, 324, 325.
- El Adem, 114, 249.
- Elassona, 31.
- El Djem, 298.
- Eleusis, 41.
- itth Hussars, 264, 298, 318.
- Elliott, Keith, 175.
- Kennedy, 360.
- El Mreir, 141-3, 178-90, 194, 200.
- Saff, 11, 12.
- Enhdaviile, 299-302, 319.
- Ensor, James, 112, 120.
- Erickson, C. H., 179.
- Escape by K. from enemy hands after
Belhamed, 105 ft
- Euphrates, 122.
- Fairbrother, Monty, 133, 147, 148,
152, 193, 194, 201, 210, 250, 265.
- As Brigade Major, 120-1; at
Baalbek, 123-4; to Matruh, 125;
orders transport to Amiriya, 134;
to Kaponga Box, 136; reports
Gray's death, 146; Ruweisat, 104-6*
168; El Mreir, 184, 186, 187;
Munassib, 211, 214, 215, 219, 220;
Alamein, 230, 235; the pursuit
from Alamem, 238, 239, 243, 244;
Nofilia, 252, 253, 256; Medenine,
270, 273; Marcth, 287, 890;
Tunisia, 300, 303,305, 310-12
316; Italy: the Sangro, 322;
Orsogna, 331, 336, 341.
- Farran, Roy, 67.
- Fen ton, E. J., 179,
- 13 Panzer Division, 170, 174, 184,
222, 250, 298, 353-
- Fifth Division [British], 333,340, 348,
- 5 Indian Brigade, 160, 170, 171, 179,
173, 182, 183.
- 5 New Zealand Held Ambulance,
101, 117,140,253; Company, 117;
Park, 295; Regiment, 49,117, 128,
137, 141,150,253,290,
- 5 New Zealand Infantry Brigade,
112-22, 139, 140, 141, 178, 191.
- In the Olympus Pa*, 18, 20;
Thermopylae line, 36, 37; Crete,
47, 60, 66, 70, 74; Libya, 85, 89,
90; Syria, 116, 121; across the
desert, 124; near Alexandria, 125;
Matron, 126; Minqar Qaint, 128,
131, 132, 134; Kaponga Box, 136,
137; Al a mem line, 145, 148,151-3;
Ruweisat, 157-60, 170, 172-4; El
Mreir, 183, 186, 189; Munassib,
205, 207-9, 217; preparations for
Alamein, 223, 225; the pursuit
from Alamein, 238, 241, 242; at
Menastir, 245; beyond Agheila,
250-2; Wadi Tamet, 260; advance
to Tripoli, 261-2,264; to Medenine,
270; Marcth, 277, 281, 282, 286,
290; to Gabei, 291; Tunisia, 295,
296; Takrouna, 302, 314; Caret,
317; Saouf, 318-20; Italy: the
Sangro, 322; Orsogna, 334; Gas-
sino, 349, 355.
- 50 Division, 125, 138, 294, 295, 297.
- 50 Indian Division, 276, 277, 280,
282.
- 50 Royal Tank Regiment, 208.
- 51 Division, 224, 234, 248, 261, 264,
270, 272, 294.
- 56 Division, 319.
- Findlay, C, 37.
- First Armoured Division, 128, 150,
151, 160, 276, 282, 286,
- Composite Battalion, 49-51, 54-6
50-61, 64, 66.
- i New Zealand Ammunition Com*
pany, *95-
- 1 Parachute Division (German), 353.
- 1 Royal Sussex Regiment, 356.
- First South African Division, 81, 85,
125, 138, 224.
- Fontegrande Spur, 339,340,342,343.

Forrester, Michael, 55, 59, 61

Forty-fourth Division, 905, 206.

43 New Zealand Anri-AircraA Battery, 140*

Foam Tatouine, 277.

Fountaine, Den, 17, 63-5, 79, 87, 88, 95, 100, 104, 107, 326, 341-

433 (German) Regiment, s86.

Fourth Indian Division, 14, 81, 85, 125, 159, 276, 294, 302, 317, 347,

4 Light Armoured Brigade, 238, 240, 241, 261, 317.

Fourth New Zealand Field Ambulance, 7, 82, 101; Regiment, 10, 91, 134, 141, 252, 205.

4 New Zealand Infantry Brigade, 112, 253; Aliakmon line, 18; Olympus Pass, 20; Thermopylae, 26; withdrawal from Greece, 35, 36, 41; Crete, 46, 47, 49, 61, 65, 74, 75; Libya, 79, 82, 85, 90-2, 05; Baalbek valley, 116; return to Libya, 123, 124, 126, 128; MinaarQaun, 131, 132, 137; Alamein line, 141, 142, 145-7, 150, 151, 153; Ruwcisat, 157, 160, 161, 165, 170-2, 174, 175; Italy: the Sangro, 326; Cassino,

Zealand M.G. Company, 140, 163, 185, 209.

Fowler, G., 8, 9, 10.

Fraser, G. M., 76, 78.

Free French Forces, 115, 276, 290.

Fremantle, 8.

Freyberg, Lt.-General Sir Bernard C, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 42-4, 48, 90, 107, 113, 298, 301, 345-6, 348; in command of all forces in Crete, 46; holds parade of 6 N.Z. Bde. in Aleppo, 117; goes to Iraq, 120; to Cairo, 123; selects Minqar Qaim position, 127; wounded, 131; resume* command, 101-2, 105, 196; asks K. to put on a raid at El Mreir, 200; orders N.Z. Div. on leave after Munassib, 218; at Col. Russell's funeral, 219-20; his account of N.Z. Div. training, 221-2; preparations for attack on Mitetria Ridge, 224; at opening of Alamein bombardment, 228; during the battle, 235; reports that enemy is cracking, 237; cables to N.Z. Govt., 238; after the battle, 239, 240, 241; discusses proposal that Div. should return to N.Z., 248; movements before Nofilia, 250, 252, 253; visits

advance on Tripoli, 262-3, 964, 265; entertained in Tripoli, 265-6; comments on demonstration of technique of war, 268; approach to Mareth, 277; decision to attack, 279; the Mareth battle, 280 ff; Gabes, 292; tells K. to take Garci, 299; upset by casualties at Tak*rouna, 310; leaves the N.Z. Div. and goes to 10 Corps, 316; views on Garci operation, 318; returns to Div. after German surrender in N. Africa, 320; approves withdrawal at Orsogna, 331; with Gen. Dempsey, 338; overrules K.*s decision at Fontegrande Ridge, 343; visits Cassino front, 347; at corps conference, 351; takes command of N.Z. Corps, 352; his plan at Cassino, 554; refuses to have any soviet of divisional commanders, 356; sees K. before operation on Tatter's foot, 360.

Fuka, 136, 240, 241.

Fussell, Geoff, 49, 55.

Gabes, 276, 291, 292.

Galatos, 49, 50, 52, 55, 6t, 63, 66, 69, 70.

Gambut, 89, 90, 114.

Garci, 299, 300, 302, 317.

Gan, River, 353, 357.

Gan an, 261, 264.

Garmonsway, P., 175.

Garriock, A. I., 17.

Gazala, 115.

Gebel Bin, 302, 308, 310, 313.

— Cherachir, 304, 310, 312.

— Foukr, 304.

— Nefusa, 261, 262.

'General Idea* (Phase of War), 12.

Gentry, Brigadier Bill, 48, 61, 69, 92, tot, 134, 139, 149, 172, 184, 226, 252, 277, 332; goes to Iraq, 120; returns to Cairo, 123; reports Operation 'Bacon* off, 160; Alam Nayil Ridge, 196; reports 132 Brigade badly knocked at Munassib, 2 to; attends Col. Russell's funeral, 219; in command of 6 Brigade, 221, 250; runs into ambush near Btanchi, 265; congratulated by K. on brilliant action at Tebaga gap, 280; leaves for N.Z., 313.

Gerawla, 111.

German 105 Regiment, 195.

— 164 Division, 227, 276, 279, 288.

- Gezira, 13,
 Gtbb, —, 107.
 Gihmour, W. L., 17, 21, 25, 39, 100,
 108.
 Glasgow, Keith, 157, 254, 270, 273,
 Gloucester, H.R.H. Duke of, 120,
 Good, G. G., 147.
 Gott, General 'Strafer*', 114, 127, 159,
 140, 103, 195.
 Gray, John, 11, 12, 26, 37, 48, 62, 64,
 63, 67, 68, 77, 79, 112, 128, 134,

 Graziani, Marshal Rodolfo, 14, 126.
 Greece, 16-45.
 Greek Sacred Squadron, 376.
 Green, Stan, 17, 89, 31, 68, 70, 99.
 Gregorio, —, 49.
 Greville, A. W., 188.
 Grooby, H. L., 76, 80, 100, 108.
 Guadiagrele, 326, 337.
 Guthrey, G. R., 87.
 Gutzewitz, W. R., 17.

 Halfaya Pass, 243, 244
 Hamilton, — (DI Tcr, 20 Bn. Crete),
 37
 Hamma, 286, 290.
 — Gap, 282.
 Hansen, F., 149.
 Hanson, Fred, 226, 356, 357.
 Hanton, Sid, 163, 160, 167, 172.
 Harding, Lt.-General Sir John, 180.
 —, Half, takes command of 21 Bn.,
 178; K. watches proceedings at £1
 Mreir from his H.Q., 185, 186;
 A real Balaclava charge, 188;
 Alamein, 225, 226, 933; attack on
 Halfaya Pass, 243, 244; Nofthia,
 257; Medenine, 270; Mareth, 282,
 283, 290; attack on Gebel Foulér
 and Gcbl Cherachir, 303, 304,
 307; wounded, 306; takes com-
 mand of 5 Brigade, 316; attack on
 Saouf, 318, 319; Takrouna, 320.
 —, 311-
 Hargest, Brigadier James, 47, 48, 112,
 Harper, R. N., 101, 104.
 Hart, I. A., 236.
 HartneU, Sid, 172, 173, 352, 356, 360.
 Harvey, Mark, 66.
 Heasley, J. G., 17.
 Heenan, M. L., 101, 103, 104.
 Helmieh hospital, n.a.
 Herwan, 15, 78, 79, 106.
 Henare, J. C., 319.
 Henton, W. K., 186.

 Highland Division, 266, 267, 170,

 HiffhlandLight Infantry, 9,
 Hikurangi (see also Point, 209), 287.
 Hill-Rennie, M. C., 88.
 Hills wkkk an numbered , see Point

 Hinton, J. D., 45, 80.
 Hirst, L U , 311, 312, 315.
 Hobbt, P., 320.
 Hoggans, Duthie, 340.
 Horrocks, Bob, 153, 383, 544.
 — Lt.Gen. Sir Brian, 196, 804, 282
 298, 303, 317-
 Hughes, A. T., 211, 313, 314.
 Husain Migalli, 11.
 Hutchens, Dick, 7a.

 Idlib, 117.
 Ingns, Brigadier Lindsay, 6, 107;
 takes over ± Bde., 49; operations in
 Crete, 51, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 74, 73;
 in Libya, 88, 90; orders 18 and 20
 Bns. to seize and hold Beihamed,
 94; sends Qutlter as Adjutant, too;
 speaks of deficiencies of British
 armour, 120; takes over western
 sector with 4 Bde., 126; Minqar
 Qaim, 13a, 134, 136, 241; goes to
 Cairo, 139; Alamein line, 149;
 Ruweisat, 158, 160, 169, 171, 172;
 El Mreir, 187, 189; returns to
 Maadi, 192, 195; Orsogna, 33a.
 Irving, F. C., 179.
 Italian Bologna Division, 195.
 — Folgore Division, 312.
 — Motorized Division (Aricte), 101,
 141, 142, 156, 222.
 — Piitioia Division, 376.
 — Trento Division, 227, 240.
 — Young Fascists, 976, 319.

 Jack, W. H., 8, 9, 10.
 — D. McK., 104.
 Jackson, B. G. S., 104.
 Jacob, Major-General Sir Edward,
 267.
 Jaffa, 116.
 Jefcoate, H. O., 17.
 Jock' column (see also 'Monthly'
 column), 81.
 Jones, F., 316.
 Juin, General Alphonse, 317, 348.
 July' Battery, 138, 156.
 June' Battery, 138, 136.

 Kabrit, 15, 79.
 Katrouan, 315.

Kaponga Box, 136, 137, 141, 142,

Kasr-Ei-Nil barrack*, 13.

Katerini, 18, 20.

KdJia, K. A., 212, 315.

KcUctt, E. O., 274,

Kdly, F. P., 22.

Kdsall, a V. C., 26-35.

Kenrick, H. S., 101.

Khalda, 137,

King, Rex, 67.

King's Dragoon Guards, 276, 277,

291, 293, 295.

Kintiss, 302*

Kirk, Dave, 76, 78.

— Ray, 2.

Kiwi Concert Party, 65, 221.

Knowies, Neville, 25, 100, 115.

Koenig, General Marie-Pierre, »5-

Kotimo Kastelli, 48.

Koaanni, 22.

Kriekoukis, 38, 39, 40.

La Hencha, 298.

Lake Agia, 60.

Lamia, 35, 36.

Lampion, Sir Miles, 9, 12,

Landano, 333.

Landoas, L. R., 11.

Larissa, 28, 34.

Lava, 2i, 25-7.

Lawrence, George, 29, 291.

Lebanon, 116.

Leckie, 'Gunner*, 109.

— D. F., 113, 128.

Lederc, General Pierre E., 276, 277, 281.

Lecse, Lt.-General Sir Oliver, 222, 271, 274, 292, 345.

Leptti Magna, 266.

Levy, Phil, 124.

Lewis, C. D., 67.

— M, R, 49.

Libya, 79 ff.

Lincoln, L. A., 129.

liri valley, 355, 358.

Lochhead, G. L., 108, 109.

Logan, R. F., 257.

Lornas, A. L., 60.

Lovell, A. A., 104, 106.

Lumsden, Major-General O. M.,

⁴ Lustre¹, Operation, 16.

Lynch, Pat, 228.

— Ray, 21, 24, 65, 100, 168, 172.

Lyons, W. J., 28

Lyttkton, 4.

Maadi, 9, 13, 80, 112, 115, 116, 125,

— Club, 10.

McConcnie, P. A., 108, 110.

McDonagh, W. G., 55.

McDonald, C., 110.

MacDuff, Archie, 2, 17, 231.

Macedonia, 18.

McElroy, Harry, 177, 233, 258, 322, 324, 326, 334, 340, 341, 343, 352.

Mackay, J. G., 90, too.

McKergow, J. W., 79, 333, 335, 336.

Macky, N. L., 47.

McLaren, F. fe, 17, 43.

McLaughlan, D. K., 57.

McLean, —, 11.

McLean, G. C., 55-7, 59-

McLemon, C. R., 167.

McPhail, Brigadier Alan, 6, 17, 81, 117, 192; appointed Brigade Intelligence Officer, 112; visit* Taqa plateau, 138; Alamein, 147, 1A8, 152; Ruwejsat, 164, 168-71; El Mreir, 182, 184; Munassib, 2ii, 216; wounded, 297,

McQuillan, J. P., 119.

Maleme, 47, 49., 51, 56, 57, 69, 113.

Maloney, Mike, 146.

Manahi, H., 308, 309, 312, 315.

Manchester, Ken, 8, 79, 87, 100.

Manson, C. M., 66.

Maori Battalion: Crete, 69, 74; Western Desert, 112; Minqar Qaim, 134; Ruweisat, 157, 173, 174; El Mreir, 178, 200-4; Munassib, 205, 209, 212, 213, 218; Alamein, 225, 234; Nofiiia, 254, 257-8; Tripoli, 263; Medenine, 271, 273; Mareth, 282, 285, 287-9; Tunisia, 299-301; Takrouna, 303, 304, 307-9, 311, 314, Italy: the Sangro, 325; Orsogna, 329, 331, 334-6, 339-4, 343, 344; Cassino,

Maps, List of, xi.

Marble Arch, 250.

Marconi Hill, 322, 324.

Marcth, 276-93.

— line, 270, 276, 291.

Marett, Fred, 207, 332.

Mariu, Reg, 320.

Markham, P. G., 17, 73, 75.

Markopoufan, 43, 44.

Marnham, G., 41.

Marsden, George, 336.

Mason, Charlie, 158, 160, 18a

Massey, Frank, 352, 360,

Matchacrc, J., 287, 288, 319.

- Mathewson, B. J., 2.
 Matmata mountains, 270, 272, 276*
 Matratin, 250.
 Matruh, 13, 81, 125-7.
 Maxwell, P. V. H., 17, 81, 101, 107, 172.
 Medenine, 270, 272, 274.
 Megara, 41.
 Menasur, 87, 245.
 Metamaur, 273.
 Miles, Brigadier R., 12, 41.
 Milesia, 12.
 Miller, Claude, 338, 348.
 Mills, G., 101, 107.
 Minogue, Joe, 113, 116, 119, 124, 125, 135, 146, 147, 243, 248, 262, 264, 294, 298, 321.
 Minqar Qaim, 121-37, 141, 242.
 — Sidi Hamza, 128.
 Mitchell, H., 79, 87, 88, 94, 95, 99-101, 107, 113, 203.
 Miteiriya Ridge, 191, 222, 224, 227, 230.
 Mobile Surgical Unit, 101.
 Monte Caira, 353.
 Montgomery of Alamein, General (later Field-Marshal) Viscount, 157, 196, 223, 246, 260, 267, 268, 275, 276, 295, 326, 345.
 — Battle, 151.
 'Monthly' Column (*see also* Jock Column*), 138, 154.
 Moro, River, 326, 331-3, 339*
 Morten, Tom, 310, 312, 313.
 Msaken, 298.
 Muhafid, 205, 208, 209, 214, 215.
 Munassib, 205-20.
 Murphy, R. K., 216.
 Murray, G. A., 17.
 — Brigadier George, 234, 314, 315.
 — I. A., 304.
 Naghamish Wadi, 13, 159.
tfapur, H.M.A.S., 76.
 N.A.A.F.I., 11, 13.
 Neilson, A. R., 17.
 NeuhorT, K., 56, 57.
 New Zealand Box, 191, 196, 200, 205.
 — Club at Cairo, 124*
 — Divisional Cavalry, 49-51, 56, 295-
 Ngapitihi Maori Company, 202, 218.
 Ngarimu, M. N., 285, 287.
 Ngati Porou Maori Company, 218.
 Nineteenth Australian Brigade, 38.
 Nineteenth New Zealand Battalion (Wellington), 5, 10; Aliakmon line, 18; Servia, 21. 22; withdrawal from Greece, 26, 27, 38, 41, 43; Crete, 47, 48, 55, 57, 58, 70, 74; Libya 1941, 82, 88; Ataman, 141; Ruweisat, 172; withdrawn to re-organize, 173.
 90th light (German Division), 250, 252, 276, 208, 320.
 9 Armoured Brigade, 221, 222, 228, 236, 238.
 9 Australian Division, 120, 126, 150*
 Nofilia, 246-59.
 Norris, Peter, 145, 171, 177, 255, 257, 258.
 Notts. Yeomanry, 284, 304, 308.
 Oakes's Force, 47, 49.
 O'Callaghan, M. G., 17, 63, 64, 65.
 Ollivier, Mick, 167, 168, 175.
 Olympus, Mt., 16, 18, 30, 47.
 — Pass, 21.
 Omars, 85.
 151 Brigade, 236.
 152 Brigade, 234, 314.
 132 Brigade, 205, 207, 210, 211, 212, 213, 215, 216, 217.
 104 ranker Grenadiers, 312.
 100 United States Infantry Battalion, 351.
 141 United States Regiment, 349.
 143 United States Regiment, 349.
 Operations, *sa under* Code Names.
 Orion, H.M.S., 78.
 O'Rourke, F., 17.
 Orr, Bob, 2, 17, 71, 108.
 Ortona, 325, 332, 334, 338.
 Osogna, 326-47.
 Page, Rusty, 54, 101, 105, 107.
 Paget, Gen. Sir Bernard, 267.
 Panzer Grenadiers, 273.
 Parachute landing by Germans in Crete, 52 ff.
 Parkinson, Brigadier G. B. 'Ike', 10, 280, 513. 316, 326, 332, 348, 360.
 Pascuccio Spur, 329, 331.
 Paterson, Derek, 149.
 — Ralph, 2, 17, 21, 27.
 Patton, Major-General J. George Smith, 267.
 Pa via Division, 144, 145.
 Peart, Jan, 94, 95, 98, 99, 185, 187, 217.
 Peloponnesus, 39,
 Pene, M. R., 202, 203, 263, 264.
 Pepper, Cyril, 101, 104.
 Perth, 8.

- forth, *H.M.S.*, 78.
 Pescara, 322, 326.
 Petrol Company, see Divisional Petrol Company.
 Phillips, J. F., 176,
 ~ John, 3*5.
 — (23Bo. Ruweisat), 107.
 Phoebe, T.S., 78.
 Pienaar, Dan, 138*
 Pike, Peter, 172.
 Piraeus, 16.
 Platanlas, 69.
 Pleasants, dhve, 21, 57, 334-
 Point 593 (Cassino), 356.
 — 184 (Mareth)! 281-4.
 — 175 (Belharned), 101, 102.
 — 172 0iby» 1040, 90, 91.
 — 64 (Ruweisat), 170, 171.
 — 60 (Ruweisat), 174.
 — 66 (Ruweisat), 103, 166, 168, 170,
 — 63 (Ruweisat), 160, 160.
 — 209 (Mmreth) (*SH also Hikurangi*),
 284-7, 289-
 — 201 (Mmreth), 279, 283, 284, 286,
 289.
 — 212 (Libya 1941), 89, 90.
 Poole, V. C., 17.
 Porter, Ben, 202, 203, 214, 315.
 Porto Rafti, 41.
 Powrie, R. L. D., 17.
 Prison valley, 47, 50, 52.
 Prosyion, 24.
 Purcell, H. A., 340, 341.
 Puttagonia, 12.
 Puttie*, Lt-General Sir Edward, t i,
 12, 26, 41, 46, 56, 61, 73, 79, 360.
 Qattara, 138.
 Queen's Regiment, 55.
 Qteree, Ray, 224, 247, 268, 277, 317,
 QuitCT, Johnny, 93, 100, 107.
 Ragil, 205.
 Rapido, River, 349, 350, 333, 355.
 358*
 Rhind, P. K., 17.
 Rhodes, E., 17, 89, 92, 94, 96-100,
 101, 106.
 Rhododendron valley, 74.
 Rice, M. C., 17, 21, 27, 70.
 Ritchie, Lt-General Sir Neil M., 114.
 Roach, W. G. J., 244, 312, 341,
 Roberts, C. CX D., 96, 98, 99, tot,
 104.
 Robertson, G. McG., 287.
 Robertson, W. L., 292.
 Robinson, — (Driver, N.Z.A.S.CX),
 105, 105.
 Roddick, Brigadier M. C., 239, 243,
 244-
 Rogers, J., 308.
 RoBeston, John, 17, 44, 75, 343.
 Roman Wall line, 283.
 Romans, Reg: Minqar Qaim, 128,
 136; Ruweisat, 171, 172, 177; El
 Mreir, 186; plays cheat with K.,
 192; Alamein, 225, 228, 230, 234;
 Nofllia, 254, 256, 257; celebrates
 his lather's 100th birthday in
 Tripoli, 266; Medenine, 270, 274;
 Mareth, 286, 287; Tunisia, 300,
 301; Takrouna, 303; wounded,
 306, 315; returns to the Twenty-
 third, 322; Italy: the Sangro, 325,
 326; Orsogna, 331, 334; mortally
 wounded, 235, 338.
 Rommel, Field-Marshal Erwin, 114.
 Ross, Angus, Ruweisat, 158, 167;
 Alamein, 230, 231, 234; Mareth,
 286; Takrouna, 306, 307, 309, 310;
 Italy: Sangro, 326; wounded 324;
 Orsogna, 336.
 — Fred, 194, 243, 251, 294, 320;
 Greece: makes tea, 28; the with-
 drawal, 29-31, 42; Beihamed, 100;
 Western Desert, 113; Syria, 116,
 up; the new Chevrolet, 124, 125;
 Minqar Qaim, 135; Alamein, 1J5,
 146; Ruweisat, 168; El Mreir, 185,
 186; Tripoli, 26a, 264; Tunisia,
 297, 298.
 Rowe, Harold, 55, 68.
 R.A.F. Regiment, 270.
 Royal Warwickshire Yeomanry, 223.
 — Wiltshire Yeomanry, 223, 227, 231.
 Rudd, L. F., 107.
 Ruin hill, 61.
 Russell, John, 50, 60, 124; C.CXN.Z.
 Divisional Cavalry, 40; Crete, 56,
 58, 61, 63, 6i, 66, 08, 76; C.O.
 22 Bn., 113; Minqar Qaim, 137;
 Alamein, 142, 143, 145, 150;
 departs to hospital, 163; resumes
 command of 22 Bn., 205; Munassib,
 2f 1, 213, 215; killed by mine, 219.
 Ruweisat, 156-77.
 — Ridge, 140, 156, 160, 169, 172,
 174, 178, 182, 189, 206, 208, 209.
 Ryakia, 18.
 Salonika, 18, 36.
 San Angelo, 353.
 — Vittore, 351.

Sanders, Guy, 37, 48, 101.
Sangro, the, 320-7,
Stout 318.

Scoltock, H.J., 17, 70.
Soots Greys, 248, 251, 252, 262, 267.
— Guards, 13.
2nd Australian Field Regiment, 22,

Zealand Divisional Cavalry,
m New Zealand Divisional Cavalry.
— General Hospital at Gerawla, too;
Reserve Group, 295.

Servia, 21, 23, 30.
Seventh Armoured Division, 14, 81,
85, 261, 267, 270
7 New Zealand Field Company, 140,
253.

Sfaciarelli, 341.
Sfatiata Spur, 329, 331, 332.

Sfax, 207, 298.

Shaw, R. A., 310.

Shirley, John, 210-12.

Sidi Axeiz, 85.

— Barrani, 14, 81, 114, 127, 242, 243.

— Bou Ali, 299.

— Omars, 81.

— Rezegh, 85, 90, 93, 94, 96, 97,
102, 240.

Signal hill, 51.

Sinai Desert, 124.

Sirte, Gulf of, 1 12, 113, 246, 260.

6 Australian Division, 36.

Sixth Greek Battalion, 49, 51, 32.

6 New Zealand Field Regiment, 18,
20, 2i, 101, 134, 140, 141, 150, 163.

— Infantry Brigade: Aliakmon line,
18, 20; Iliermopylae, 36; Pclo-
ponncsus, 38-9; Libya, 85; Sidi
Rezegh, 00, 94, 96, 102; on the
Turkish frontier, 116; parade in
Aleppo, 117; Minqar Qaim, 126;
returns to Amiriya, 127; Kaponga
Box, 141; Ruwcisat, 173; El Mreir,
178, 182, 183, 185, 186, 180, 191;
Munassib, 205, 207; training for
Alamcin, 221; the attack, 234; the
pursuit from Alamein, 240, 250-2;
Tripoli, 262, 265; advance on
Mareth, 277; the attack, 279-82,
286; Tunisia, 293; Enfidaville, 302;
Takrouna, 308, 310; final opera-
tions in N. Africa, 319; Italy; the
Sangro, 322-4; Castelffentano, 326;
Orsogna, 329, 339, 344, 346; holds
ceremonial parade, 349.

65 German Division, 338*

Skinner, Jerry, 231.

Smith, — (Medical Co. 20 Bn.), 100.
— Lt-General Waiter Bedell, 267.
— N. S., 244.

Smuggler's Gave, 125, 126.

Solium, 13, 79, 85, 90, 116, 126, 243,

Soussc, 298, 299.

'Spetghts' (Operation Password), 163.

Speirs, Peter, s.

Spence, G. A. D., 17, 94, 107.

Sphalria, 71, 75.

Staffordshire Yeomanry, 984.

Steele, Bert, a.

Stewart, Brigadier Keith, i, 96, 37,
74. 322, 332, 348, 360-

Stirling, W. F., 119.

Strutt, A., 42.

Stuka valley, 168, 178.

Suani Ben Adem, 264, 265.

Suda Bay, 46, 48-51, 71.

Suez, Gulf of, 113.

Sullivan, Johnny, 57, 65, 69.

'Supercharge I I', Operation, 282,

Sykes, Peter, 227, 231.

Syria, 114, 116-19.

Tactical exercises without troops
(T.E.W.T.), 121f., 223, 275.

Tai Tapu, 4.

Takrouna, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304,
305, 307, 306, 310, 311, 312, 313,
316, 317, 319.

Tanner, Joe, 195, 326.

Taoa, 138, 139, 153, 154, 205.

Tarnuna, 261.

Taylor, G. M., 269, 290, 306, 320.

Teoaca Gap, 276, 279, 282.

Tel Aviv, 116.

Tel el Eisa, 182.

Tel el Kebir, 9.

10 Armoured Division, 227.

— Brigade, 49, 60, 61.

— Corp, 224.

— Indian Division, 125.

— Panzer Division, 270, 373, 275,
297-

Tennent, Alan, 101.

Thebes, 37, 39-

Thermopylae, 26, 36.

Thessaly, 21, 35*

3rd Australian Field Regiment, 22,
43-

Third Hussars, 57, 66, 233.

— Parachute Regiment (German), 56.

— Rifle Battalion (*m also* Twentieth
Battalion), 3.

- 13 Corps, 114, 127, 139,**
 36 American Division, 551.
 33 New Zealand Anti-unit Battery,
 140, 209.
 Thomas, Sandy, 67, 306, 307, 309,
 315.
 Thomason, H. H., 68, 69.
 Thompson, Edward, 387.
 Thornton, F. W., 352.
 361 German Infantry Regiment, 92.
 324 German Division, 338.
 Tobruk, 79, 81, 82, 89, 95, 108, 114,
 115, 125, 127.
 Trigh Capuzzo, 89.
 Tripoli, 260-9.
 Trocchio, Mount, 349, 357, 360.
 Trousdale, A. C., 48.
 Tui Love, 158.
 Tunii, 318, 319, 320.
 Tunisia, 294-321.
 Turkish Fort, 51.
 'Twelvebore' (Code word), 206.
 20 Armoured Regiment, 334.
 Twentieth New Zealand Battalion
 (*see also* Third Rifle Battalion), *,
 to; tails from N.Z. to Egypt, 8;
 Aliakrnon line, 18; withdrawal
 from Greece, 20, 21, 26, 35, 36, 43;
 Crete, 47, 49, 52, 65, 66, 68-70,
 75; evacuated to Alexandria, 77;
 Libya, 79, 81, 82; at Gambut, 90;
 Bir Chlcta, 91; Belhamed, 94, 95,
 98, 99, 102, 103, 106, 187; return
 to Bagush, 107, 112; casualties at
 Belhamed, in; Syria, 116; Minqar
 Daim, 124; Kaponga Box, 137;
 Alam Nayil, 141, 142; Ruweisat,
 172, 173; Burrows returns, 192;
 Italy: Orsogna, 533, 336, 337, 341;
 Fontegrande Ridge, 343.
 Twentieth Regimental Aid Post, 100.
 Twenty-eighth New Zealand Bat-
 talion (*m* Maori Battalion).
 Twenty-fifth New Zealand Battalion,
 93, 188, 234, 310-12, 314, 319, 344.
 Twenty-first New Zealand Battalion:
 cut up near Mt. Olympus, 47;
 Crete, 48, 73; Western Desert, 112,
 113; at Aleppo, 117; Bir Khaldia,
 127, 15a, 153; in 5 Bde. group, 140;
 Alamein line, 142-4, 152, 155;
 strength of, 149; Ruweisat, 161,
 164-7, 172, 175, 177; El Mreir, 178,
 184-7, 189, 193, 105, 204; Alam
 Nayil Ridge, 205; Munassib, 209,
 212, 213, 215-17; Alamein, 225,
 226, 228, 231, 233; Sidi Barrani,
 242-3; Agbcila fine, 251; Nofiita,
 253, 254* 257^9; Medesitne, 27a,
 274; Hill 184, 282, 283; Mareth,
 288, 280; Wadi Akarit, 904;
 EjfidavilJe, 299; Kinds*, 302;
 Taarouna, 303-7, 310, 312, 314;
 Italy: the Sangro, 323, 324, 326;
 Orsogna, 329, 336, 337, 339-42,
 344; Cassino, 348, 351; practice
 crossing of the Volturno, 349.
 21 Pair Division, 222, 250, 262,
 263, 264.
 'Twenty-four Hour* hill, 39.
 Twenty-fourth New Zealand Bat-
 talion, 93, 188, 191, 329.
 Twenty-second New Zealand Bat-
 talion: Libya, 89; Western Desert,
 112; its good record, 113; Airine,
 117; Minqar Qairn, 131, 133; in
 5 Bde. group, 140; Alamein line,
 142-4, 147, 149, 150, 152, 153;
 Ruweisat, 158, 161, 161-7, 171-5,
 175, 177; returns to Maadi, 178;
 N.Z. Box, 205; Munassib, 209, 210,
 213-17; Alamein, 225, 226, 228,
 230, 231.
 Twenty-sixth New Zealand Bat-
 talion, withdrawal from Greece,
 22, 24, 34; Minqar Qaim, 126;
 El Mreir, 185, 187; Munassib, 216;
 Alamein, 234; Italy: Orsogna, 339,
 340.
 23 Armoured Brigade, 183, 188.
 Twenty-third New Zealand Battalion:
 Crete, 65, 66, 68; Western Desert,
 112; 'a grand solid unit*, 113;
 Idlib, 117; commanded by Romans,
 128, 178; in 5 Bde. group, 140;
 Alamein line, 142-4, 147, 149-52;
 Ruweisat, 157, 161, 165-7, 171,
 176-7; El Mreir, 185, 201; Alam
 Nayil Ridge, 205; Munassib, 209,
 217, 219; Alamein, 225, 228-30,
 234; the pursuit from Alamein, 239,
 244; Nonlia, 253-9; a veteran unit,
 205; Mareth, 286, 288-90, 293;
 Tunisia, 294, 297, 300, 301;
 Takrouna, 304-6, 308, 310, 314;
 Italy: the Sangro, 322-4, 32ft;
 Orsogna, 229, 331, 334, 346;
 Cassino, 348, 355.
 Twigg, John, 102.
 Twigden, — (*Gen. Kippenberger's*
 jeep driver), 185, 193, 300, 313,
 201 Guards Brigade, 270, 272, 274,
 280.
 Uadden, Hotel 268.

- Upharo, Charlie, 6, 17, 22, 70, 75, 79,
 81, 107, 172, 175-
 Upton, J. T., 269, 800, 320,

 Vaaey's Australian Brigade, 70.
 Vcttch, J., 59.
 Venafro, 348.
 Vincent, W., 76, 78, 81.
 Voltumo, River, 349.
 Vyilta, 39-

 Wadi Akarit, 304.
 — el Boul, 300, 302.
 — Tamet, 260.
 — Zcm Zem, 261.
 Walter, Snow, 290, 291.
 Walter, C. U, 143, 150.
 Washboursa, Gordon, 3, 17, 21, 27, 28,
 37, 66, 73, 75, 87, 107, 172.
 Watson, Carl, 2, 65, 143, 167, 171,
 172.
 Watt, Km, 149.
 WaveU, General Earl, 9, 11, 12, 14.
 Weir, Mac, 265.
 — Steve, 21, 117, 142, 149, 172, 239,
 283, 317, 332, 341, 357.

 Welch, Pat, 71.
 — Regiment! 70, 71.
 Wellington Battalion, *see* Nineteenth
 New Zealand Battalion,
 Western Desert, 112 *ff*.
 Wheat hill, 51, 59, 61, 64,
 White, John, 332.
 Wikiriwht, M, 310, 315,
 Wilson, Cliff, 17, 21, 22, 27, 49, 50,

 — Hugh, 15, 77, 107.
 — Stan, 101, 104,
 Wimberley, Major-General D. N.,
 264, 265.
 Winter (1941) Battle, 81.
 Wood, S. L., 17.
 Wyatt, — (Co. 143 U.S. Rrgt.), 349,
 352.

 Yates, —, 17.
 Y.M.C.A., 9.
 Young, Russell, 190, 341, 342, 357.
 Yugoslavia, 18, 22.

 Zahlc, 120.

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHARLS BATEY
PRINTER
TO THE

