

These chaps one cannot trust as they were Pro German or Pro British which ever way the battle seemed to be going in their area. After a battle the losing side seems to always leave in the battle area cameras etc. but these travelling Sheiks always seemed to have things of value for barter, mainly tea and sugar - they did not seem interested in cash. I am afraid we were too lenient with these chaps, for I am certain a few were acting as spies. And talking of spies, we allowed too many supposed soldiers and officers into our camps, Tobruk mainly, without question. Many were enemy spies who just came and went as they pleased, without question.

We were learning fast as how to live in the desert. How to put up with the terrible dust storms, Gamslens, during which, if one went out you were liable to get lost as you lose all sense of direction. The dust lifts and you find you are miles from your Home after wandering for hours. On one occasion during one of these dust storms I asked my man to get some bread. He left my dugout and was found hours later five miles away. My one experience, I remember well, was going out with the Adjutant, Captain Rice, from our tent in the big camp at Sidi Omar during one of these dust storms. We had been invited to go to another Unit for a New Years drink on the 1st January 1942. They were only a matter of a quarter of a mile away. We eventually, asking the direction now and again, arrived for the party at near midnight. Fortunately, the storm had eased up and we were able to find our way back without further trouble.

We eventually left Alemain on the 10th October 1941 for Bagush, another one of those Italian 'Boxes' with a perimeter far too long. Here we had two Companies up on the Escarpment, protecting two aerodromes, one at Matruch, a resort favoured by the Prince of Wales (later Windsor) and also Cleopatra and her boy friend. The other company with our head-quarters was stationed below the escarpment. Here we relieved the 60th Rifles - King Royal Rifles - our affiliated Regiment. These Imperial Units certainly knew how to make themselves comfortable and so here we had a very nice mess.

I should mention that one thing we did learn was to cook in the desert by filling a tin container (cut down paraffin tin) with sand and soaking it with petrol. These fires burnt very well but one had to be careful. On a number of occasions when the fire was burning down the chap tried to pour more petrol on. The result was the chap got badly burnt. We lost several chaps from these burns.

It was while we were at Bagush, as I have mentioned, that we had a very heavy rain and the water poured over the escarpment onto the lower ground towards the sea like the Victoria Falls. Some of the chaps set up little lean-tos in a dry river bed and were washed out. Some of the chaps lost watches and other items but most of these they recovered later when the water had cleared and the river once more dry. Some of the chaps, however, managed to recover items by diving.

We eventually left Bagush on the 14th November to return to Alemain to prepare for the Allied advance. I had gone ahead with the advance party to select an area for our camp and with instructions from Page to build some sort of a dugout in which we could celebrate the Regimental birthday on the 29th November.

My small party arrived at Alemain and found a very suitable area near the sea from where we were able to go bathing every day. The Med. water is very clear and even standing in water up to your neck one could see the little fish nibbling at one's toes.

The night I arrived, the 17th Field Ambulance were celebrating their first Anniversary in a cave. This Unit was under the command of Col. Alexander and one of the officers was Bromilow-Downing who is now a Professor and Medical Superintendent in Cape Town. We had a very jolly evening, more, it was a bad night.