

When all was finished we had to hand in all our papers, as we were told that our plans would prove most useful and perhaps be used if such an invasion was contemplated. A landing, as a matter of fact, did actually take place on that island with great success.

It was on my return to Alemaln (our second visit) that a few Germans were landed from a Sub and managed to place a few mines on the railway. These, however, were soon detected and rendered harmless by our engineers. There was a fine old flap and rumours of an enemy landing further up the coast. A sharp lookout was kept but nothing happened. Three of the Germans were taken along the coast near Bagush.

Harping back on the desert and our first spell in Alemaln, it might be as well to mention that any person to whom the desert conjured up Hollywood film scenes of sweeping sand dunes would be in for a disappointment. He will find less sand than expected, except in a sand storm when it arrived in great choking clouds from nowhere at a velocity which almost blinds you. The ground is hard with rocks and pebbles covered with a layer of sand. In Summer the winds blow hot and stifling but in winter the desert turns cold, and believe me it is cold. When I saw a film of men going into action in the desert in army overcoats I thought how stupid. But I was to learn differently.

An advance of the Allies was now planned and on the 6th December we left Alemaln for Mersa Metruh where we entrained and travelled as far as the rail-head, arriving there on the 9th and then camped a little further in some old Italian fortifications. While here quite a lot of troops passed on their way to the battle area. I remember one column passing quite close to me - a new British Unit which had only been in the country a very short while. As they passed I told them that they would have to turn away to the left as straight ahead they would strike one of those very deep whadls that was impossible for motor vehicles. He said, "Oh we have our navigator and he says this is the right way". He would not be convinced, so I said, "Well you know best. Carry on, but you will soon be back". And they did acknowledge afterwards, as they came past again, that I was right.

The advance of the Allies was going ahead but the enemy had left behind a few pockets of their troops at Bardia just beyond the Solum Pass up on the Escarpment, also at Solum itself and Helfya at the head of the other pass from the main road - the Helfya Pass. The idea being, of course, to close these two passes so as to hold up our supplies and make it necessary for all supplies to be taken by a very wide deviation to get up onto the escarpment. The enemy in Bardia numbered about nine thousand with a thousand each in the other two positions. The first move was to drive the enemy out of Bardia and later Solum and Helfya which would then give us full command of the main road.

Bardia was one of those Italian 'Boxes' having a perimeter of about eight or nine miles, strong points every ten or twenty yards, with its back resting on the Med. From the Med. there was a small inlet, fairly deep as, during the attack, a Sub entered, probably with supplies. It was indeed a very strong 'Box'. The attack on Bardia was to take place early on the 31st December and the attacking force was to consist of the Kaffrarian Rifles, I.L.H., R.L.I. and Police, supported by the usual artillery and tanks. The I.L.H. and R.L.I. were to enter first, the latter on the extreme right. The I.L.H. left flank boundary was to be just west of the main road to the township. The Kaffrarian Rifles were to enter and fan out west of the I.L.H. left flank so as to intercept any attack from that flank. They would then carry on in line with the other two units. Everything seemed to be going according to plan at first but unfortunately the I.L.H. moved too far from the road which left a gap between them and the right flank of the K.Rs.