

The tanks could not cross the Whadi Schemers and eventually, after many casualties the troops had to be withdrawn back through the wire. There were a number of tanks destroyed too. A sand storm developed and this made things more difficult.

As this had proved a failure on the 31st December, plans were then organised for a night attack on the 1st, by the Police on the left flank, then the Kaff. Rifles, and the I.L.H. on the right. This attack proved a success and in the early hours the enemy surrendered on the 2nd January.

There were very heavy casualties. The I.L.H. were the heaviest I think. They had 75 killed, the R.L.I. about twenty and the K.Rs ten, including one Officer. There were quite a few K.Rs wounded, including Colonel Page who was evacuated to Alex. I then took over command of the Regiment.

Here we captured about 9,000 Germans and Italians.

From Bardia we returned to Sidi Omar where, on account of our casualties, we were to reorganise. The Adjutant and two company commanders had to be sent back to hospital. They could not take the fighting and I think had cold feet. We never saw them again thank goodness.

The first thing was to get a good Adjutant and in this I was very fortunate in getting Captain Oelofse from Divisional Staff. He proved one of the finest Adjutants we had. This took a lot off my shoulders as he was most efficient at Administration work. Then I reorganised by transferring officers Inter-Company to replace those who had gone 'SICK' at one time, known as cold feet. Oelofse was accepted by all the officers and men and proved a most popular Officer. I was now without a second in Command which gave me a lot more work to attend to. I was on the look-out for a very good chap. In fact, I had a friend of mine in mind, Captain Norman Harvey of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. He was a man who saw service with the South African Troops in France in the 1914/18 war in which he was wounded at least five times. Well, Col. Le Strange of the Umvoti agreed to his transfer and he joined the Kaff. Rifles as 2 I.C. as a Major and proved one of our most popular officers. I think I have already mentioned that myself, Lieut Wylie and Sgt Leighton were the only three who had seen active service. Neither Col Page nor any of the others had been under enemy fire on a large scale before. This action at Bardia was their first experience of being under enemy fire and, with a few exceptions, they behaved like seasoned warriors.

One rather amusing incident I saw was when a German Officer, when ordered by one of our chaps to hand over his revolver, refused and said as an officer he was privileged. He looked a nasty bit of work. Anyway, one of the men, a Jew by the name of Private Strellits, walked up to him taking off his coat and threatening the German, said 'Ek is 'n Jood', or words to that effect and the German dropped his revolver like a hot brick, scared, I think, of the Jew.

When it was known that I was on the look-out for a second in command it was wonderful the number of callers I had, all hoping. However, Harvey I had known for some time and he was a fighter and very popular with the chaps. Well, soon afterwards the garrison at Solum and later the Helfya crowd gave in. The latter had to surrender as they were starving and had no water and they surrendered without a fight. We sent up ambulances to deal with the sick and sent up water and food. The Italians scrambled like beasts for the food and on the other hand the Germans were paraded and behaved very well while waiting for their food and water.

After the surrender of these Garrisons we had to take up a position at the top of Helfya pass and prepare defensive positions in case the enemy did counterattack. Well, the Company Officers were allotted their positions after I had reconnoitred the area and told to get on with the job of constructing strong points.