

The Company commanders had to go out on a recce and in order to get the job done quickly I told the Adjutant Oelofse to take my staff car. Unfortunately on the return to camp they struck a mine a short distance out. Fortunately the only person slightly injured was the Head-Quarters Company commander, Capt Bob Ellender, who had a leg injury. This unfortunately got worse later and he had to be sent back to the Union. It was the engine of the car that was damaged. The four good tyres we were able to collect a few weeks later. Oelofse volunteering to go into this unmarked mine field as no one had dared to go in before. I was fortunate in picking up a nice little German Volkswagen - small but very comfortable.

As without a second in command I was kept on the go, our Brigadier Hayton said I needed a few days in Cairo. As my next senior officer had not shown up very well and was being sent back to the base, Hayton said he would take over the Regiment while I was away. So I got our transport Officer Wylie (he too needing a break) to join me in a week-end in Cairo. After two days at the Balmoral Hotel - no Shepherds for me - we returned to Helfya.

During this stay at Helfya our Doctor, Captain Peters, with the help of a lot of volunteers undertook the job of digging a deep hole - about twenty foot square and ten feet deep with a reinforced roof which was to be his R.A.P. (Regimental Aid Post) for sick and wounded. Of this he was very proud and I must say it was a fine bit of work. Well-fitted out too.

A short while later we were instructed to proceed to Tobruk where we were to relieve an Indian Regiment. The camp we were vacating at Helfya was to be taken over by an Indian Unit with White Officers. Well, their advance party duly arrived and I showed them the fortifications and the R.A.P. Here Clem Peters received them and was most upset when the senior officer said the R.A.P. would make a very fine mess. He did not mince matters and said, "Yes, forget the wounded and sick as long as you officers have a comfortable drinking den". This remark they did not like. I said I could not understand why Imperial Officers first thoughts were for a mess. Live as we did, with the men.

Before moving, I took the Adjutant and Company Commanders to Tobruk and we were shown round the area we would be taking over from the Indian Regiment. These Indian Regiments as I have already mentioned are commanded by Imperial Officers who know how to make themselves comfortable. Before leaving for Helfya I asked to be shown their lav. and was shown a small tent-like structure and inside found the usual seat with the necessary hole. But instead of there being a hole in the ground there was a small potty - to be emptied later by an orderly I suppose - not for me I said, I would rather walk into the veld with a spade. The next day we moved out - I having the previous night issued my movement order. The first night we spent at Sidi Resleg where the 5th South African Brigade under General Armstrong had been badly mauled by the German armour. The next day we moved into Tobruk where each Company Commander knew the area he was to occupy.

Our Company headquarters were in a small wooden structure and our living quarters small dug-outs and miniature caves.

I inspected our area and reported that there were no mines left, all having been taken up for the defences at Gazala ten miles on. The barbed wire fencing was useless and the tank ditch sanded up. And all these troubles could not be rectified as there was not the material to do so. We worked out that to clear the ditches each man would be responsible for about fifty yards and there was about one spade to every twenty men. So what could we do. It was thought of course that the enemy would never return here.

Before this Allied advance there had of course been the siege of Tobruk which we relieved.