

After being there for some little while doing the usual patrol work etc. our Divisional Commander General I.P. de Villiers was returning to the Union and a farewell gathering was to be held at Divisional Headquarters on the coast. Brigadier Klopper his I.G. was to take over command of the Division and I was invited with other Commanding Officers to bid de Villiers cheerio.

I.P. told us that he was returning to the Union and that Klopper would assume command of the 2nd Division and he hoped that we would give him our full support. He was to be promoted to the rank of Major General. Klopper then disappeared behind a canvas screen and returned with the cross swords replacing the three stars of a Brigadier. The quickest promotion I have ever experienced.

De Villiers left next day and Klopper made an official visit on all the Units in Tobruk and that was the only time I ever saw him on the perimeter. Klopper has been G.I., that is senior operations officer, in the Division and so a successor had to be appointed. In the meantime Major George Bestford acted right up to within a few days of the last days of our time in Tobruk. From the Union a Colonel Krieg was sent up as G.I., an officer who knew nothing of the North African conditions, of warfare, the defences of Tobruk or the Units in the area. He during the few days he was there, was never on the perimeter and I don't think he knew much of the defences of Tobruk. Had they appointed George Bestford it would have been far better. However, that was the policy of Pretoria. I will mention Krieg again also the C.R.A. (the officer in charge of Artillery) later. Brigadier Cooper, in his book, also criticises the new G.I. and the C.R.A. He was O.C. Police Brigade.

Nothing seemed to be happening and all Units, including the enemy, had become static. Both sides planning the next move.

Rommel got in first.

I guessed that an advance was being planned as we were advised that we were to take over the position held by the 1st Division (South African) in the Gazala line.

So with my Company Commanders, 2 I.C. Major Harvey (who had now been appointed to the Kaff Rifles) and the Adjutant went to Gazala, 20 miles ahead, to reconnoitre the position.

No I am wrong it was Major Harvey as my 2 I.C. and the Adjutant that I took to Gazala. The next day Major Harvey took the Company Commanders and Transport Officer to reconnoitre their positions.

The necessity for this move was, however, cancelled, for Rommel had also been planning his next move. He got in first and after some heavy fighting, he broke through the Gazala defences and all the troops, under very difficult positions and hard fighting, had to withdraw from the Gazala Line.

Things move fast in the desert and when it was realised that Rommel's plans were far more advanced than ours, our move to Gazala was cancelled. Rommel was on the move with superior armour and the Gazala line had to be evacuated.

The outer defences of Tobruk were not suitable for present day tank warfare. The dugouts of concrete along the 28 mile perimeter were deep and only suitable for sleeping. They were probably of use against the local tribes and desert arabs but not against present armour. Troops had to be above ground in trenches from which they could operate their machine guns etc. This I have already mentioned but no harm in stressing the fact that Tobruk defences had been denuded of suitable material and that the anti-tank ditch along the perimeter had long become almost useless, being half-filled with sand and that there was no manpower to clear them. A few bulldozers would have proved most useful but they were not available for front line work. The base wallers wanted them for their protection. Troops that had moved up to Gazala had denuded Tobruk of mines, barbed wire and anything that might prove of use in a defensive position.