

This I have mentioned too: That the 4th Brigade with each Unit being responsible for about ten miles of the perimeter would mean that each man would be responsible for about 30 or 40 yards of tank ditch to keep open. An impossible task which, without more than a spade to ten men, we could not even attempt. I may seem a bit bitter about all this, but so would you had you spent three years in a P.O.W. camp. There was some bad handling of affairs and the base walls gained. Now stop grousing it is all over and done with.

When Rommel advanced Klopper was told that a line, Tobruk - El Adam - Biri Gobi, would be held and that the Armour which had been badly mauled would withdraw behind this line to regroup. This was a total reversal of the original that the 2nd Div. would, if Tobruk was threatened, fall back on the Helfya defences.

Later it was decided that Tobruk would be held to protect the desert flank and the various strong points would fall back in the surrounding area would fall back on Tobruk. I might mention here that I as C.O. of the Kaffrarian Rifles actually received a top secret document, not to be discussed with any of my officers, detailing the Kaffrarian Rifles to act as the rear-guard in the evacuation of Tobruk. In view of this we were to change positions with the D.L.I. It was decided later not to transfer these two Units and Col. Martin of the D.L.I. told me that he had then received the rear-guard action secret document. So it seems that the powers that be, could not make a definite decision. Instead they kept changing - first evacuate Tobruk, then - No, let us hold the position. This dilly-dallying got us into an unholy mess. However, it is not for me to criticise higher command.

In Tobruk various Units would arrive one day as part of the defence and be gone the next. It seemed that the powers could not make up their minds as to which Units to sacrifice. That is what is amounted to.

Finally it was decided by General Klopper, who had been appointed Fortress commander, probably in consultation with three Brigadiers who had been in Tobruk during the first siege, that the following should be the distribution of troops - The Police Brigade, 1st and 2nd Police would defend the coast (there was the possibility of a sea landing) from the Harbour to the main Gazala road and thence anti-clockwise - Durban Light Infantry - Umvoti Mounted Rifles - Blake Group - Kaffrarian Rifles - Beer Group - Camerons - Maharatas - Gutkhas. (Half the Maharatas were recruits). On the inner circle were the 20 1st Brigade (Worcesters and Coldstreams) 8 batteries of artillery and about 40 odd types of tanks (mostly repaired).

Though Klopper had been appointed Fortress Commander there were as I have mentioned above, three Brigadiers who had been in the Tobruk siege. To me it seems strange that - not in any way to belittle Klopper's ability - one of these who had had more war experience and service should not have been appointed with the acting rank of Major General. Again it is not for us to judge.

Klopper was told to pay special attention to the Western Perimeter the Madawa sector, as it was thought the attack would be made in that sector as had been the case when the Germans attacked the Australians.

This area was therefore very strongly defended as you will note from the disposition of the various Units. There were also guns in strength too, which were never used, as the attack was made against the Maharats who had three hundred recruits.

One unfortunate thing is that we allowed all sorts of people into the Tobruk area without question. This would not happen in the German area. Among them no doubt spies in disguise of our uniforms entered and they got all the information Rommel wanted. I am enclosing an extract from the German Paper Tempo which I got in a P.O.W. camp giving a short version of the German action.