

**“Fair well and Goodbye New Zealand”
Part II
1942
North Africa**

**An Account of Driver Harold William Latimer
Regtl. No 41959
1st Ammunition Company, Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force
From the dates of
07/04/1941 – 05/01/1942**



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Contents

Part I “Cairo”	<i>Page 3</i>
Part II “Desert Camps”	<i>Page 5</i>
Part III “Road to Syria”	<i>Page 9</i>
Part IV “Aleppo”	<i>Page 12</i>
Part V “Back into the fight”	<i>Page 19</i>
Part VI “Build up for the big Battle”	<i>Page 27</i>
Part VII “El Alamein”	<i>Page 35</i>
Part VIII “Chasing Rommel”	<i>Page 40</i>
Maps Egypt 13th May – 16th July 1941	<i>Page 43</i>

Part I "Cairo" February 12th – 16th February

THURSDAY 12th February

left camp at Jalali at nine fifteen am and arrived in Mersa Matruh two o'clock after nearly hundred miles of travel we left in Cairo at 5:30pm the train is crowded with South Africans on leave I had a good time with them we have come about to hundred miles and it is about 2am I have had no sleep yet because it's too crowded to get comfortable enough. Spent most of my time buying presents to send home I spent 14pound in presents.



**Right: Mersa Matruh
(unknown photographer)**

Failure of Malta-bound convoy

FRIDAY 13th February

arrived in Cairo station at 7am had no more than half an hours sleep during the trip we went to see museums of hygiene in afternoon after we had booked in at the clubs then went looking around in Cairo for awhile came back had tea at 5:30pm then went to metro theatre at 6:00 and saw Boom Town went to sleep dog tired at 10:30pm after pictures

**Right:
Original 1940 Movie poster of "Boom Town"**



**Below:
Clarke Gable from movie still "Boom Town"**



SATARDAY 14th February

Arose at 7:30 had grand sleep in a proper bed again went out to Maadi camp at 10am but left out there by an army truck stayed out there for a few hours until about 2pm went to theatre at 9pm saw out of a fog and another good picture at the was skating at the opera rink until 9pm nearly broke my leg.



Left:
Original 1940 movie poster "Out of the Fog"

Below:
Movie still from the movie "Out of the Fog"



SUNDAY 15th February

Slept in to 9am then arose shaved and cleaned up had good breakfast then went into tailors and had my battle dress trousers altered to fit me I went out in the afternoon with south African chaps who came up and in train with us George and Ralph went with to we all went to there hotel for tea. They all got very drunk so I came back to club early by myself and did some reading till I went out to my room

Right:
*Taken outside NZ Club
Cairo on first leave
from the western
desert
(H.W. Latimer)*



MONDAY 16th

February

Arose at 8:30am and had bath shave then went into the musky "native bazaars" and brought a few things then met my cobblers and we all went to the pictures there is not much else to do but the pictures

Part II "Desert Camps"

25th February – 13th March

WEDNESDAY 25th February

Arose at 7:15am break at 8am left Mersa Matruh at 9:45am stopped for lunch at "Fuka" our old camp area for 1/2 hour then moved out at 1:30 arrived at petrol supply point near "Darba" and filled with gas then moved on about quarter of a mile to area where stopping the night arrived here after doing about ninety miles at 3pm

Right:
**"The road between
Fuka and Mersa
Matruh"**
(H.W. Latimer)



THURSDAY 26 February

Arose at 7am breakfast at 8am we left El Darba at 9am I still am driving the same truck we stopped for lunch at 12:15 pm for half hour then carried on again I had engine trouble and got lost from the rest of the convoy but I picked them up again just before they reached Amariya we arrived at Amariya at 5:30 and after refueling at the petrol dump we camped down on the flat in military camp I went to a concert in the YMCA went to bed at 10pm

FRIDAY 27 February

Revelle at 7am breakfast at 8am we packed up and left Amariya t 9:15 our convoy stretches for miles along the road I came over a hundred miles stretch of the most desolate desert country I have ever seen not even a hill or rise to break the monotony of the dead flat we arrived at "Maadi" camp at 4:30pm I got lost again and came in on my own we all got leave till 1am so George Ralph and I went in to Cairo and went in to the pictures paid 2pound

SATURDAY 28 February

We left at Maadi camp at 9:30 and traveled over desert road from Cairo and reached "Kabret" camp at "Genifa" at 3:45 after 120 miles we came pretty un eventful trip I used Ralph's German Lugar pistol and also my rifle and fired at some crows and scavenger birds my truck broke down again but I had it fixed in half an hour and went like hell till I caught up with convoy I am very tired tonight so I'm going to bed now time is now 8pm

SUNDAY 22 February

My first day back in camp again at Talata. We all were pretty busy today on trucks. Jerry Plane came over rail head and dropped some bombs at 11:30am and again at 2pm. I did not see any of our planes up. We got word at 6pm that we leave at 8am in the morning so we had to work until 11pm tonight. I am very tired hope to get a good sleep received 6 letters from home and newspaper today.

Left:
"Myself and a cobbler on our truck at Thalata 1942 Feb"
(H.W. Latimer)

Below:
"Some of the boys taken with Wally Thompson and his breakdown. 1942 Thalatha railhead"
(H.W. Latimer)



Monday February 23rd

Arose at 6am, Breakfast at 6:45am then got tent and other packed into my truck. George Duley hurt his foot badly on motorbike just before we left Talata at 9:30am. We traveled 40 miles over desert until we reached Barrani at 2pm. We are stopping here until tomorrow

morning when we leave at 9am and travel as far as "Mersa Matruh". I am turning in early tonight

Tuesday February 24th Arose at 6:45am. Breakfast at 7:45am. I packed my gear and left Sidi Barkani by myself and came onto Mersa Matruh. I picked up water at 103 kilo peg on way. Arrived at Matruh at 1:30pm Went back to check post and waited two hours for rest of convoy. Had lunch with two Cobbers while I waited. I got good snap of Damaged bomber being towed on trailer we all parked up for night about five miles from Matruh

Right:
Salvaged bomber on road to repair near entrance to Mersa Matruh.
(H.W. Latimer)



Wednesday March 4th

Arose at 5:30 stated work at 6am, knocked off at 7 for breakfast. Rations have been cut down and we are doing longer hours. Jerry bombers came over camp last night and dropped loads of bombs on the Dromes up the road they didn't hit anything of importance. We have got loads of work to do yet. I rigged up flood lights to work tonight; nobody seems to worry about blackout in this area.

Thursday 5th March

Arose at 5:30am. Started work at 6am, breakfast at 7am. Food better today. I received Anniu:cable from Elva today. Work seems to be piling up fast. Dust storm started at 10:30am and made work very unpleasant. We are working short handed on account of the boys on leave; we are all living in big army tents. Here at Genifa. Knocked off work at 8:30pm, very tired.

Friday 6th March

Was awakened by exploding bombs at 4:30am, Jerry was flying over but did not drop many bombs. I got out of bed at 5:30am. Breakfast again at 7am, worked all day on truck then till 8pm. Got paid 1 pound. We are supposed to be leaving in weeks time for Syria about 1000 miles away. We may be taking these tents with us.

Saturday 7th March

Same routine again today the more work we do the more there seems to be done. We may be finished however within a couple of days then we may be able to have a rest. Most of the boys went out tonight and got drunk they came home singing and kicking up a devil of a row about 11pm. I was awakened and I thought it was an invasion.

Sunday 8th March

Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest, but not for us the rest of our section finishes their leave today. They came back to camp here at 11:30pm. Tonight a delayed Xmas dinner is to be held at the National Hotel in Cairo tomorrow night affair had been arranged by our Major Coutts. We are over 100 miles from Cairo so I don't think I will go if I can help it. Not for only 3 hours in Cairo anyway.

Monday 9th March

Arose at 7am, paraded at Coy.HQ. at 8am Major talked about conditions in Syria and Health problems. I got out of going to Cairo for the dinner it would be just like going from Auck to Dargaville to a picture show not worth it. The boys came home again well primed at 12:30am most of them dog tired after the trip. I went to the mobile cinema.



**Left and Below:
Movie stills from "Cup of Kindness"**



Tuesday 10th March 1942

Arose at 5:30am. Started work at 6am. Break at 7:30 saw a picture last night "Cup of Kindness". Went to the doctor at 12:30 this afternoon and had two injections. 1 tab and 1 tet.tox. My arm is very sore now five hours later. I have done no work at all this afternoon. There has been no further enemy bomber raids in this area.

Wednesday 11th March

Awoke at 6:30am arose at 7am I had a hell of a night with the effects of the injections hot and cold shivers. The effects should wear off by tomorrow (I hope) did nothing at all today I am feeling too sick. The lights from the prisoner of war cages not far from us are like town lights, they shine all night long.

Thursday 12th March

Arose at 7am, Breakfast at 8am I am over the effects of needle now although my arm is still very sore. I worked again all day on installing power plant into Ford truck for lights for camp. I finished about 5:15pm most of the other workshop boys were packing in preparation for trip. Wrote a letter after tea then to bed at 8:30pm

Friday 13th March

Arose at 6:30 spent very busy day taking tents down taking surplus gear unto salvage dump. We move at 6am in the morning on the start of the trip to Syria. Heavy showers of rain and strong winds today at intervals. Tents are packed now so have to sleep in the open. Brilliant display of search lights from 7pm to 9pm went to bed at 9:15pm.

Part III "Road to Syria"

14th March – 2nd April

Saturday 14th March 1942

Arose at 5:10am. Packed my bed on truck. We moved out of area at 7:10am. Traveled until 11:30 until we reached Suez Canal where we waited for ships to pass before we could cross canal on pontoon bridge. I took photo of trucks coming over bridge. About 4:30pm we crossed Egyptian border into Palestine we are still in Desert Country. Parked for night at 6:30pm listened to news over radio at 8pm. Then went to bed.

Right:
Above Beirut Syria
(H.W. Latimer)



Sunday 15th March

Arose at 6am, Breakfast at 6:30 we moved off again at 7am. Traveled until 12:30 when we stopped for half an hour for lunch. Road in places is very twisty. Green Patches of grass are becoming more frequent this afternoon



we passed through several native villages. The natives in Palestine seem to be a much better class than the "Wogs" or Egyptians. We stopped for petrol at late Aussie camp at Quastina where we stayed for the night.

Left:
Camp Quastina – from French
photographer

Monday 16th March

Arose at 6am, breakfast at 6:30am we moved out of "Quastina" at 7:45am.

Traveled until 12:30pm when we stopped about 15 miles out of "Halfa" Saw barrage balloons above petrol refineries in Halfa. Palestine is very modern in the housing. We got loads of oranges given to us wherever we stopped. We arrived at British camp at "...." Not far from the border. I went to pictures at camp theatre and saw "Until Tomorrow" with C. Boyer and Irene Dunne went to bed about 9:30pm.

Right:
"Border between Palestine and Syria"
(H.W. Latimer)



Tuesday 17th March

Arose at 6am Breakfast at 6:30am we left "Natanya" at 7:30am. Crossed the border into "Syria" at 8:45am. I took photo just as I crossed the border. We came 90 miles around the Syrian Coast road and entered "Beirut" town at 1:30pm where we refilled with petrol and stayed for lunch resumed trip at 2pm. After Beirut we traveled right up into mountains above the snow line. Road is very steep with big drops in places. We arrived here at destination "Baalbeck" at 9:45

Wednesday 18th March

Arose at 7am, we are camped 4000 feet above sea level in between two great ranges covered in snow. I spent morning getting settled we are so high that we can look down on clouds is raining fairly often today. Climate is very cold we won't get any dust storms here thank goodness we were all warned about the Arab raiding parties that are after ammo. So we have to have our rifles loaded and with us even when we go to mess. Went to bed about 10:30pm.



Left:
*Snow fed river in Syria near our camp
(H.W. Latimer)*

Thursday 19th March

Arose at 7:30am, breakfast at 8am day has been awful it has been raining heavily and a gale of wind is blowing we had to tie our tent ropes to our trucks. The mess tent was blown over we had a hell of a job putting it right again in the wind and rain. There was a light fall of snow during the night trucks have

been getting stuck everywhere and whole place is sea of mud and slush. One of the boys killed a vicious looking snake about three feet long this afternoon.

Friday 20th March

Arose at 7:45 just in time for breakfast, heavy rain has been pouring down all night and today there was hail first then snow fell. It is bitterly cold working on the vehicles in this weather I wear everything I can cram on. I got paid today 10 Syrian Pounds that works out to about 1-2-8 of English currency. A Syrian Piastre is worth only one tenth of Egyptian Piastre. Had good supper of toast made on Primus Stove then went to bed at 9pm.



Luftwaffe launches all-out offensive against Malta

Saturday 21st March

6am I was awakened by water pouring down my neck it was coming through side of tent, very uncomfortable. Arose at 7:30am, break at 7:45 I think that we will be proceeding into Russia very soon to have another smack at the Nazis. Mud and slush everywhere no snow fell last night. Eleven of our workshop boys went to Baalbeck village went to bed at 8:30pm to get warm.

Left:
*"Roman Ruins in Baalbeck"
(H.W. Latimer)*

Sunday 22nd March

Awoke at 7:30 but did not arise until 8am in time to go to work day is awful thunder has been rolling all the time. Rain has been coming down in sheets and also heavy hail storms with snow now and again. It was too cold and wet to work so we knocked off at 2pm. Leave was cancelled to Baalbeck so I stopped in camp and went to bed instead at 8:30pm.
Convoy bound for Malta from Alexandria turns back

Monday 23rd March

Arose at 7:30 had to tramp through snow to breakfast because there was heavy fall last night and snow did not cease falling until 10am. My hands got so cold that I was unable to use my tools to work with. Day is very fine but bitterly cold some of the snow has started to thaw and water s running everywhere. I knocked off at 4pm and went to Baalbeck village at 5:30pm had a rotten time was half frozen and nothing to do home at 10:45pm.

Talbot and Pampas merchantman reach Malta, but are sunk at their moorings

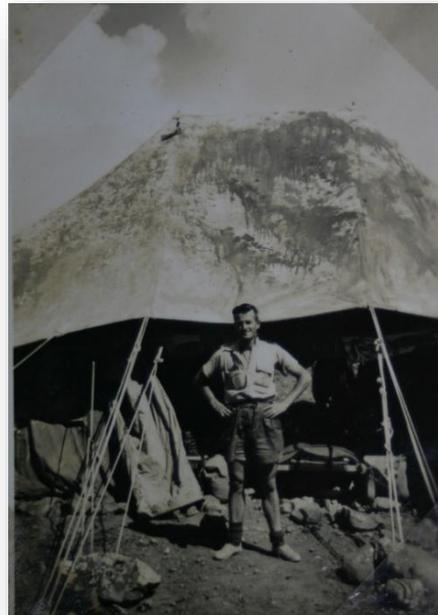
Tuesday 24th March

Arose at 7:30 breakfast at 7:45am day is very warm and fine. Snow around camp has disappeared and just left slush. Received two letters from Elva today the first mail I have had for about three weeks. Got photos in them had a full day working today I got my watch back today but its not going right yet so I sent it into Baalbeck again with one of the chaps going on leave.

Monday 30th March

Arose at 7:30am Breakfast at 7:45am went down to workshops at 8:15am. Worked all day till 5pm had to go on 24 hour guard at 7pm so I shifted my bed down to guard tent went on first spell of duty at 9pm till 11pm. We have been told to fire two shots for alarm came off duty then went to sleep till 3am for next two hours of duty, very monotonous went back to bed and slept.

Right:
Outside my tent in camp Syria
(H.W. Latimer)



Tuesday 31st March

Arose at 7:30am and went up to workshop cookhouse and had my breakfast then went over to my tent and shaved and cleaned my rifle. Went on guard at 9am and finished at 11am went up to my tent again and stayed there till lunch time. Went back to guard tent at 1pm and slept till 3pm, went on guard then. Caught a small tortoise while I was on guard. Finished at 7pm wrote two letters home. Bed at 9:30pm.

Wednesday 1st April

Arose at 7am the beginning of another month nearer the end of this damn war we have plenty of work in still although repairs to vehicles are slowing down. Finished for day at 5pm tea at 5:15pm. Then played first baseball in our A sec newly formed team, had good sport game ended at 7:15pm with a victory for our team, 25-9

Thursday 2nd April

Arose at 7:30am breakfast at 7:45 started work at 8:15am we have started to pack some of our gear (A.sec. W/s) only as we may be going on trip to Aleppo on Saturday. Next I knocked off for day at

12am because it is my afternoon off I did some over due washing then read a book till tea time. Food is very poor at present listened to news at 7pm. Then went to bed at 8:15pm.

Part IV "Aleppo"

3rd April – 19th June

Friday 3rd April

Arose at 5am still dark early breakfast at 5:15am stopped on way at 12:30 for lunch we passed through "Homs" at 11am. Arabs seemed to be everywhere. We passed through many small villages arrived in "Aleppo" at 3:30pm. To 9:30 in town Aleppo is not a bad town for Syria went to Roxy Picture Show. Had supper and returned to barracks at 9:45pm.

Saturday 4th April

Arose at 7am we are quartered on balcony of French barracks, these are nice buildings and have EL and showers much better than anything we have had so far in the army we have 32 vehicles to do so we should be here about a fortnight.

Right:
Aleppo, taken from French Barracks-
photo
(H.W. Latimer)



Left:
Still from movie Girls on Probation
(unknown internet)

Got leave again this afternoon into Aleppo and had a look around the town with my pal George Dudley went to pictures saw Girls on Probation at Rex Cinema

Sunday 5th April

Arose at 7:30am there is no church parade this morning for our section, only work – it is marvelous change up here from that awful camp at "Baalbeck". Finished work at lunchtime then had lunch got cleaned up and went with my cobbler into Aleppo town only a few minutes walk went to pictures in the evening returned to barracks at 10:30pm



Monday 6th April

Arose at 6am just read a book until breakfast time we are doing well on repair of the trucks. We went into after lunch and met some very nice Greek people two of the family could speak a little English and they took us to their home in Handak Street.

Left:
Streets of Aleppo 1941
(Unknown internet)

Tuesday 7th April

Today first anniversary of my leaving Wellington wharf on troop ship for overseas.

Arose at 7:30am went into town after lunch and again met the Greek people they took us home again. They are very curious we must seem strange to them because they keep looking at us as if we were little tin gods or something. It's all very embarrassing to me and George went to pictures again in evening returned to camp at 10:30

Wednesday 15th April

Left the French barracks at Aleppo at 8:30am. It is the finish of our 10 day holiday I was very sorry indeed to leave Aleppo and the friends that's we have made there but maybe I can return there on leave traveled all day had two stops one for lunch and one for morning spell passed through "Hama" and village of "Homo" en route back to camp. Parcel was waiting for me from Elva when we got back to camp at 4:30pm and also papers very happy to get them.

Award of George Cross to Malta

Thursday 16th April

Arose at 7am Breakfast at 7:30am went on work parade (something new to me) at 8am. Then started work our Major Coutts is very unpopular with officers and men alike he is always rubbing in the dirt. I knocked off work at 4:30pm got ready and went on leave into Baalbeck to get my watch which is not yet fixed. I went to pictures saw three mary brothers not a very good show returned to camp in leave truck at 10:30pm.

Friday 17th April

Arose at 7am. Started work after breakfast at 8am not very much to do here in workshops at present. I am fed up with this dam war and every blasted thing connected to it. Pay day today but I still have some money left over from my last pay in "Aleppo" so I did not draw any more. Was doing some more wiring with camp lights this afternoon. I have a few pounds credit now that I am drawing extra 1 pound per day as electrician.

Saturday 18th April



Arose at 7am work at 8am I was very pleased to receive two letters from Elva and one from Mary and Parcel of newspapers from Elva and also some from R.T. Wilkinson. I was just thinking how strange it will be to wear civilian clothes once again had to do a job in officers mess today they certainly have bags of Gin and other liquors there I had to start on 24 hour guard to 6:30pm tonight very cold on first shift.

Sunday 19th April

Arose at 5:45am and started first of today's shift on guard I was on till 8am then had breakfast then went to my tent and cleaned up had rest till 12 noon when I started guard again till 2pm when I finished my 24 hour guard. Missed church parade there seems to be trouble brewing for our hated Mr. Coutts. He stopped all of Divs Amm's Leave because some chaps came home drunk and said something to him he did not like.



Above: Temple of Bacchus,

**Baalbeck Syria
(H.W Latimer)**

Monday 20th April

Arose at 7:30am Breakfast at 7:45pm I feel pretty tired today started work after inspection parade at 8am. 47 Spitfires land on Malta from USS Wasp but are quickly decimated

Friday 24th April

From today new times for starting work have been bought in we have Reveille at 6 breakfast at 6:30am and work parade at 7am. We have to do a little drill in the mornings as practice for a parade before Major General Freyberg at the Wavell barracks at Baalbeck

Saturday 25th April

Arose at 6am, Breakfast at 6:30 started work in workshops at 7am

Sunday 26th April 1942

Had breakfast at 7am and left camp with the boys after about half hours run we arrived in Baalbeck and there paraded General Freyburg came around and inspected us all church service was then held and we came back to camp at 11:15 had rest of the day off – but in camp.

Monday 27th April 1942

Leave started again today but I never bother going into Baalbeck because it's only a waste of time it's a really lovely place.

Tuesday 28th April 1942

The food is becoming so bad lately that all the boys are kicking up a fuss the meal is local stuff that comes from very old goat of maybe ever channel

Wednesday 29th April

I sneak away into the hills as the back of our camp

Thursday 14th May

arose at 6am and started work at 7am all morning there have been heavy blasting going on out in the hills as the English have been blasting gun positions into the mountains of Lebanon there is not much work to do in camp but there is new vehicles coming to division ammunition company soon.



Above:
Looking down inside temple of
Baacus Baalbeck
(H.W. Latimer)



Left:
Sightseeing in Roman Ruins Baalbeck
(H.W. Latimer)

Friday 15th May

my day off today so had breakfast in bed for the first time for many months long lines of French mounted cal very passed along road passed our camp at 7:30am I rose at 7am since 6am there has been the flash and explosions of 25 pounder artillery as they fire from the hills in practice shots getting range of everything in this valley perhaps we may have to fight here who knows.

Below:
A drawing of Baalbe ruins, photo not clear.
(H.W. Latimer)



Below right:
Temple of Baacus
(H.W. Latimer)



Below:
Main courtyard of Roman Ruins Baalbeck.
(H.W. Latimer)



Saturday 16th May

arose at 6am breakfast at 6:30am started work at 7am some of our chaps went to see boxing contests the divisional champs are on tomorrow at the five brigades lines I went up into baron hills behind our camp and did some shooting with my 303 and also a German Lugar pistol had quiet a good time went with two of my cobbers Ralph and George

Sunday 17th May

I am getting a bit worried about the mail I have not received for any for some weeks now arose at 8am just in time for breakfast then got ready then went to

church parade the shooting on our own is strictly forbidden but that doesn't worry us at all we went up again this afternoon and had some proper target shooting just between our selves two Bedovin Arabs came and squatted down and watched us we gave them some shots they are expert marksman had a swim in creak then came home in time for tea

Monday 18th May

Not much to report today everything is getting into a monotonous routine now had a swim in a shallow creek this afternoon

Monday 25th May

Got first letters from home today that I have had for over a month

Tuesday 26th May

Rommel outflanks Gazala line; heavy fighting at Bir Hacheim

Friday 29th May

Fierce battle around 'Knightsbridge' road junction

Saturday 30th May

Rommel withdraws all his armor into defensive positions in the Cauldron

Sunday 31st May

Have put in for leave maybe going in a couple of weeks or maybe even sooner

Tuesday 2nd June

Renewed assault on Bir Hacheim repulsed by Free French

Tuesday 9th June

I go on leave in to Palestine tomorrow am suppose to go to Beirut but am going to Haifa in Palestine unless something happens it's my day off today so am getting everything ready to go I am looking forward to this leave after spending so much time in this isolated hole where there is so many restrictions

Wednesday 10th June

I arose at 5am breakfast at 5:30am we left camp at 6am had a long climb in truck over Lebanon ranges to Beirut where we stopped for petrol at 11am we proceeded right along coast road cross border at 12 noon into Palestine it is a wonderful trip right around the Mediterranean coast from Beirut to Haifa we arrived in Haifa.

**Below:
At the Public Baths Haifa (H.W. Latimer)**





**Left: View of Haifa Port
(H.W. Latimer)**

Thursday 11th June

'Harpoon' convoy from Gibraltar and 'Vigorous' from Alexandria bound for Malta leave; two 'Harpoon' freighters get through, Vigorous turns back

Sunday 14th June

Arose at 9:30am these luxury hours certainly are something that I am

enjoying very much went out to a Jewish collective settlement this afternoon it was very interesting went to pictures with my Aussie friend there was crowds of Tommy soldiers there and a few Aussie's but I was the only NZ soldier there pictures came out at midnight

**Right:
"Jewish Collective settlement" (H.W. Latimer)**



Monday 15th June

We got bus out to the cross roads of Haifa at 12 and caught an Aussie truck going to Beirut we traveled all afternoon till we reached Beirut a distance of 90miles from Haifa at five pm Beirut is over crowded with aussie troops very few NZ troops here the town is horribly dirty after Haifa I wont stay around these street very much went to pictures tonight good show

**Below:
In Beirut (Syria) with Pat O'Gorman and Perce Hoffman. (H.W. Latimer)**



Tuesday 16th June

Heard the rumor today that the NZ division is packing up ready to leave Syria some of the battalions have already been recalled for leave hope we are going back to NZ some seem to be sure that we will go back to the desert where the position is serious I hope to god we don't go back to the western desert we have to go back to Baalbeck tomorrow the finish of our leave

Wednesday 17th June

Left Beirut at 11:30 and got several lifts back to camp we arrived in camp at 4:30pm the boys have got everything packed so there is not much for me to do except pack my own gear we are leaving this camp at Baalbeck on Friday don't know where we are going but we hope its on a boat bound for NZ spent fare part of day painting out the ferns on our vehicles and other marks

Thursday 18th June

Arose at 7:30am got stuck in to a few packing jobs and had most of my work done before lunch we have to leave very early in the morning all night and all day the NZ division has been moving passed our camp guns trucks and supplies we are leaving our tents and everything up just as we fixed them don't know where we are going

Friday 19th June

Arose at 4:30am had breakfast at 4:45am we moved out of camp area at 5:30am we are not passing through any big towns we are not wearing our badges or any other marks to let anyone know we are NZ'ers we do not know where our destination will be there are all sorts of rumors but I do not think we will go to the desert I hope not anyway we arrived at our camping place in Palestine at 7:30pm



*Left:
In camp
Syria with
Tom
Partington
(H.W.
Latimer)*

Part V "Back into the fight"

20th June – 11th August

Saturday 20th June

We arose at 5am breakfast at 5:30 we moved out of the area at 6:15am we traveled all day and during the afternoon we went along by the sea of Gallalei heat today was tough there being allot of mountain roads where the going is very slow with our big lorries and heavy loads the people came out when we passed through the villages and gave us fruit Palestine is the best country in the middle east we arrived in camp for the night at 5:30pm and the desert just passed Arab village of Beersheba,



Right:
Sea of Gallalei
(H.W. Latimer)

German assault on Tobruk, preceded by heavy air attacks, breaks through perimeter; by evening German troops reach the harbor

Sunday 21st June

Left camp and Palestine at 6am after 4:30am breakfast we traveled to 8:30 and then we had a blow out this is the fifth we have had since we left our camp in Syria heat again today is very trying we have been traveling over desert country all day we arrived in Ismailia in the canal none at 4:30pm we were just told tonight that we have to go back into the western desert to fight again

Tobruk garrison surrenders; Germans take 30,000 prisoners and stores ; British troops in disorderly retreat towards Mersa Matruh

Monday 22nd June

Left Ismailia at 6am traveled along Sweet Water canal road into Cairo day is very hot passed through "Mena" at 12:30 and stopped a few miles from there for lunch heat is now terrific we came 190miles over desert wind is like blast furnace and white hot I don't know just how I am going to survive this awful heat arrived in Amariya at 7:30 after worst trip I have ever had but this is only the beginning we have a bout 400miles to do over the western desert

Tuesday 23rd June

We left Amaria at 6:30am after 5am breakfast traveling is cooler today along the coast road to Mersa Matruh passed guns and transport coming from the battle area traffic is tremendous in deed I have never before seen anything to equal it except in the desert last year the Jerries have now got Tobruk and seem to be advancing very fast we arrived Matruh at 8pm jerry planes started to bomb at 9pm

Wednesday 24th June

Well my first night in Matruh this year is something to remember Jerry bombers came over all night in ones and twos ack ack fire just about deafened me at 10 this morning a German plane came over very high ack ack fire drove him off the same thing was repeated twice more the time is now 9pm and as I write this I can hear jerry planes over head they let a load of bombs go just a few minutes ago and I am waiting the next lot will land

Rommel begins pursuit of the Eighth army from Tobruk to Mersa Matruh

Thursday 25th June

Arose at 5:30 breakfast at 6 did not have much sleep last night because of gun fire and bombing we were going on passed Matruh but jerry seems to be coming fast to meet us just before lunch a German plane came in low from the sea and dropped a stick of bombs in our lines he killed a couple of our poor chaps and set fire to two lorries and some benzenes it is now 10pm and I am turning in

Friday 26th June

We did not get much sleep bombing here last night all though I heard some further off. this afternoon heavy explosions started away in the distance and a great fire can be seen playing on the horizon I do not know where there it is gun fire or bombing we can hear. We heard over the radio that jerry is less than 20miles from us now here in Mersa Matruh 5pm a surprise attack by jerry bombers on one of our Dromes here happened

Battle of Mersa Matruh; Eighth Army pulls back to Alamein line

Saturday 27th June

There are not many bombs dropped here during the night we got ready at 8:30am to move out at 10 but did not go until 1pm we moved back to Sidi Anish where a big dog fight between our planes and Jerry ME-109's saw one plane crash in flames we moved into battlefield where we could see big fires and heavy explosions saw another dog fight at 5pm when one of our hurry ups brought down the jerry in 30seconds the plane was still burning when we left we pulled up for night at about 17miles from the coast road

Right:
Me-109E's in North Africa
(US government-internet)



Sunday 28th June

A day of rest but not for us I believe that Jerry has now been stopped the tanks are battling not far from us we had to move 40 miles back for Matruh we stopped for night at Darba we are on short rations was just having tea when a stick of bombs fell amongst us seven chaps were killed out right the jerry bombs seem to fall everywhere and the concussion was awful I was caught above ground myself and I thought I would be killed the raids ceased at 10pm about 40 bombs were dropped

Monday 29th June

Arose at 5:30 I slept in a slit trench in the dirt all night was the worst night that I have spent in a long time the boys will be buried today. some time we left this area at 8:30 and preceded over the desert to another area about 6 miles away as soon as I got there I started to dig my slit trench I'm not taking any chances we are going to stop here for the night went to bed at 9:30 German bombers came over but did not drop any bombs near us but further away

NOTES: Ralph Dudley was killed on June 29th Monday just a day before George (his brother) and I got to his camp. We expected him to come out of his tent when we drove up but they told us that he had been killed.

Tuesday 30th June

The Jerry bombers bombed and machine gunned all around us through out the night but not actually in our area we traveled about 45miles today all together. Today at 3pm we passed through a heavily fortified area manned by NZ Inf artillery and anti tank regiments the dust is something awful today can't see where I am driving hardly arrived at camping place for the night further away from the front line this time I dug slit trench as soon as I arrived.

Beginning of first battle of Alamein; Rommel attacks in centre.

Wednesday 1st July

We left our night area at 7:30am had a quiet night no bombing although heavy artillery fire has been going on for some time now. We only came about 6 miles to this area where we are going to set up for awhile and get our workshops going we may have to get out in a hurry at any time because we are still fairly close to the front Jerry has been advancing up till now but I think we finally have him stopped.

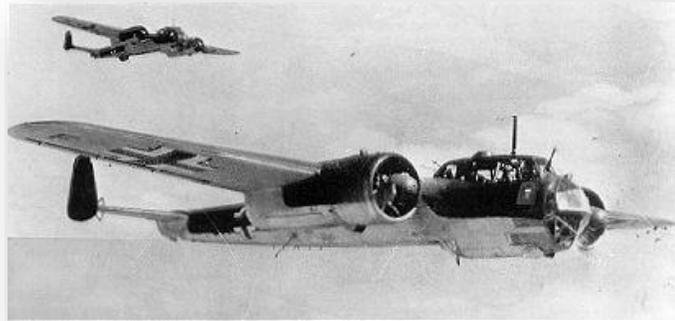
Thursday 2nd July

In this area we are about 30 miles from the coast during last night and also at breakfast time some quiet heavy showers of rain very unusual great squadrons of our bombers escorted by fighters fly over us continually to bomb jerry positions. At 7:30pm saw 18 of our bombers coming back with about 30 fighters when we heard machine gun fire and our fighters engaging some ME's trying to intercept our bombers but they never had a show one of our planes was shot down but pilot bailed out ok.

Friday 3rd July

Arose at 7:30am saw nine German planes flying very high over us. They sure keep well up heavy gunfire has been going on all night and has been going this morning, Jerry seems to be making some headway heard the news this afternoon that we had counter attacked and jerry has retired from the scrap for awhile saw another big dog fight just above us Jerry planes are more frequent but they have no hope at getting at our bombers.

Right:
Dornier Do-17's – these are not
in desert camo
(Internet)



Saturday 4th July

We captured 1,100 prisoners last evening and nice big guns our inventory captured some material and destroyed 40 tanks with sticky bombs during the night mail came in this afternoon I got 4 letters from Elva we have not impact any of our workshop material in case we have to move in a hurry German Dornier bomber dropped some bombs not far away at 6pm but only churned up some desert we packed and left this area at dusk and moved seven miles west

Sunday 5th July

A day of rest the guns thunder just as loud and as many men die as any other day we have had no service out here in the desert because of enemy planes my cobbler and I have made ourselves a

little shelter on the slopes of "Wadi" it should be fairly secure from attacks from the air I caught a cold last night sleeping in the open when it rained intense sand storms have made things unpleasant

Monday 6th July

Arose at 7:30am did not have much sleep last night on account of this cold getting worse went and had a "shoufri" at a crashed German "Stuka" dive bomber that came down near us yesterday afternoon gunner was killed pilot was taken prisoner heat today is intense with heavy sand storms to make things just about un bearable hope to god that we get out of Egypt soon



**Left: Crashed Junkers Ju-87 Stuka
(Unknown internet)**

Tuesday 7th July

Arose at 7:30am nothing much to report today there is no work to do and this hanging around is no work to do and this hanging around just waiting is worse than being in prison. ME-109 flew low past our area this afternoon but seemed to be in an awful hurry probably had been chased our fighters keep the skies behind our lines clear of German planes in the day time Nazi planes can be heard flying over us at night time but now the moon has waned it is difficult for them to find their targets

Australian raid along Ruweisat Ridge

Wednesday 8th July

We left our last area at dusk last evening and came about 7mls east had to go to the R.A.P because my cold is getting worse just before lunch there was dogfight just above us one of our hurricanes was shot down in R.MT area 1 mile from our truck, pilot was killed what an awful sight the body of the pilot named "Wigle" was torn into pieces and spread everywhere but god knows I am getting used to such sights now I am not feeling too good tonight chest is very wheezy

Thursday 9th July

Had to go to the doc this morning I am not feeling too good if I am not better by tomorrow morn he is going to send me to hospital I hope that I improve before then I don't feel like going to the hospital, at 3:30pm while I was getting some dope at R.A.P there was another dogfight but no planes came down scrap only lasted about 5mins I don't feel very well at all tonight went to bed at 6:30

Friday 10th July

Arose at 8am missed breakfast did not feel like any went to doc at 9:30 he said he should send me to hospital said that I would get better just as soon here in the desert so he is going to see how I get on have to go to bed but I did not stay there long too monotonous nothing of importance happened today except that heavy barrage of artillery fire has opened up again this afternoon

Successful Allied counter attack in north

Saturday 11th July

Arose at 7:30am breakfast at 8am went to R.A.P and then to the doc did not have any sleep at all last night so doc gave me some drug pills to help me to sleep tonight temp was 102.4 this morning but went back to normal this afternoon and I now feel much better there have been many planes over today but I did not see any German ones hope I get a good nights rest tonight

Sunday 12th July

Arose at 7:30am breakfast at 8am I did not bother going to the R.A.P today because I feel pretty good now and slept like a log last night even though there were a few Nazi planes over dropping flares wrote home last night and posted letter this morning

Monday 13th July

Arose at 7am breakfast at 8 am very heavy dew early this morning was kept awake for sometime by Wellington bombers flying low over us on way to bombers gunfire ceased at 9am things were uncannily silent until about 3pm when terrific artillery barrages opened up again and continued until about midnight when bombing started in earnest and continued for about a hour German attacks repulsed with heavy losses attacks continue to 16th

Tuesday 14th July

Arose at 7:30am breakfast 8am had some work to do for about an hour about 11:30am heard terrific explosions an hour about 11:30am heard terrific explosions and saw great sheets of flame and smoke going into the air it was about B sec bombed by German planes 8 of our chaps were killed and 12 injured a few trucks carrying explosives were blown up saw another dogfight but no planes shot down we had to dispense further away from our h.d. about 2mls we are staying for the night

Wednesday 15th July

Arose at 7am heavy bombing around us last night could not sleep for hours this morning very high we packed up and moved 7mls n/w from the area our A.sec were due bombed twice again today two chaps killed and some seriously wounded I do not yet know how many got it in second raid we are nearer the front now and the gunfire is still pounding in front of us

Thursday 16th July

Arose at 7am there has been terrific artillery fire going on since very early this morning we moved out from our fairly secure wadi 2pm there was heavy raid on vehicles about 2mls from us by Stuka drive bombers heavy ack ack fire went up from our batteries big dogfight went on just over our heads saw two planes come down could not tell who's they were arrived in this new area 5mls n/e from our last place

Friday 17th July

Arose at 7:30am had fairly had quiet night and good sleep just before lunch a force of Heinkel bombers flew over and bombed an area about ? mile away noise was awful one forced down then our planes arrived on the scene and shot down a Nazi fighter saw the pilot parachuting to earth there was very heavy bombing well away from us on the horizon



**Right: Heinkel He-111 bombers
(Unknown internet)**

Rommel ceases attack and takes up defensive positions

Saturday 18th July

Arose at 7:30am I did not get a great deal of sleep during the night on account of enemy bombing three more of our camp were killed yesterday and 30 NZ Inf boys got bumped too today up till 7:30pm as I write this has been fairly quiet in our sector the moon is starting to get bigger every night when it is full we wont get too much sleep there was intermittent shelling from 7:45 till dusk when everything reigned quiet once more

Sunday 19th July

Arose at 7:30am day has been strangely quiet there has been no shell fire since last night and no bombing and no dogfight at all today big squadron of our Boston dive bombers flew over with the greatest fighter escort I have seen so far in this campaign at 1:30pm A German "shoufti" plane flew over us very high there have been some heavy dust storms and the wind is whistling round our truck now and sand is driving everywhere

Monday 20th July

Arose at 7am another very quiet day today a few bombs were planted during the night things seem too quiet to last just like lull before storm our troops are doing very well for themselves so far and giving the Jerries a hell of a hiding our planes have stated their offensive again on a much larger scale formations of our planes are filling the sky all day long

Tuesday 21st July

Arose at 7am there have been no air raids on our area lately the moon is getting bigger during the night there was great clusters of flares and heavy bombing the day has been very quiet up till about an hour ago when a terrific artillery barrage stated the thunder of the guns is awful my ears are aching I am going to bed now it is 9pm and gunfire has increased one long roll of detonations Auchinleck launches unsuccessful counter attack

Wednesday 22nd July

Arose at 7:30am I got only about an hours sleep last night on account of the artillery fire and bombing I heard this afternoon that Steve Rush was wounded up front about a fortnight ago so far our units have suffered pretty heavily again at 7pm squadrons of our Boston dive bombers have been giving Jerry hell all day

Thursday 23rd July

Arose at 7:30am roar of planes overhead kept me awake for hours last night we have advanced pretty well in most sectors of the front have been working all day painting R.A.F insignias on our trucks so our air force wont have a crack at our own vehicles there was a raid on an area of vehicles 3miles from us but our own planes soon drove the Nazis off there was a big dogfight at 7:30pm no planes were shot down near us

Friday 24th July

Arose at 7am had good sleep last night in French I dug at 9:30am two M.E, fighters came down and machines gunned and set on fire to D.W 86 they had just landed to pick up officers got a postcard from Rex sent cable to wife two planes crashed together and another one came down about 5mins after as result one came down about 5 mins after as result of our battle above our area at 6pm 2 of the planes were German

Saturday 25th July

Arose at 7am Jerry planes did a little bombing around us during the night there was no air fighting that we saw today large squadrons of our fighters have been on patrol over us fighters have been on patrol over us since dawn wrote letter to Rex today had busy day again painting on insignias we may be in this desert for a long time yet I hope we are not I am properly browned off

Sunday 26th July

Arose at 7:30am not much doing today strong wind commenced at about 10am and brought up heavy clouds of sand have not heard any planes at all today but the Wellington liberator mail to bomb Benghazi and Tobruk and Mersa Matruh every night the heat is still terrific and dust storms have made things very unpleasant today

Further Allied attacks beaten back with heavy losses

Friday 31st July

Arose at 6:30am the damn flies woke me up by continually settling on my face a few jerry fighter flew over us at 11am but got mixed up with about twenty of our tomahawks who sent the "Nazis" back a lot faster than they came the trip to Amirra is postponed until tomorrow we leave at am the distance is about 50 miles

have had some difficulty in writing this diary and keeping it up to date on account of us having moved around to much but have succeeded so far



Above:
Some of the boys in the desert (H.W. Latimer)

Saturday 1st August

Arose at 7am our trip to Amirra has been cancelled we are now to remain in this area and dig our trucks in same job too thee of us started to dig a big hole that our truck which is a huge vehicle will fit into we worked for about 5 hours in the cooler periods of the days still no action or here except for artillery fire now and again got seven letters from home tonight

Sunday 2nd August

Did not sleep very well during the night but did not feel any the worse for it Church parade was held at 1pm but our section was notified too late to attend everything is still quiet its getting monotonous hope something happens soon one way or the other one lone enemy "recee" plane flew over us very height this afternoon

Monday 3rd August

Arose at 7am the moon has nearly finished waning now so we will soon be able to sleep with out any bombing to worry about not that there has been very much while the moon has been fill. We completed the dug out for our truck and we have now got it fairly safe from our bombing two German fighters flew over at 11:30am but disappeared quickly. Heavy sandstorms have been blowing most of the day. Audrees birthday today

Tuesday 4th August

Got up at 6:45am nearly late for breakfast got fresh tomatoes for lunch today but we brought them ourselves from section collections this has been the only way that we have been bale to get fresh veg lately got four newspapers today the few days of broken and heavy gun fire is in progress in both sides

Wednesday 5th August

Arose at 5am we have to stand to every morning from 5 to 5:30am and start work at 6. It's good early in the morning when thee is no heat or flies to worry about only it does not last long. Heavy artillery fire is going on again now and also bombing a few miles further up from us bombers start to fly over us soon as dust falls on there way to bomb the jerry positions

Winston Churchill visits El Alamein

Right:
Winston Churchill just before El Alamein
(H.W. Latimer)



Thursday 6th August

A day of terrific heat the flies are increasing rapidly in the swine's of things make life miserable combined with the heat a few of our boys have gone down with dysentery heavy formations of our dive bombers have been going over us on there way to give Jerry some hurry up

Friday 7th August

Another day of heat sweat and fly's I wish to go I could get into some decent country and never see this infernal ever lasting desert again as long as I live. I had some excitement at 10:30am a flock of jerry planes came over and were met by our tomahawks right over our heads but the whole fight moved off till it was out of sight

Montgomery appointed commander of Eighth Army

Saturday 8th August

Arose at 5am half ours stand to day has been fairly quiet three German planes at a great height flew over us at 2pm but did not interfere with us. Fly's are just about driving everyone crazy I keep inside our truck most of the time we've got netting on the front and rear to keep the flies out

Sunday 9th August

Out of bed 5am stand to till five thirty we spend allot of our time listing to the radio programs its pretty awful just waiting day after day for something to happen received parcel from Elva today five Jerry fighters flew over us today heading for there own territory about 2pm

Monday 10th August

Arose at 5 am we maybe shifting a few km's back tomorrow about time too, we packed our gear and loaded our work shop gear on to our trucks we are moving out about 7:30 tomorrow

'Pedestal' convoy leaves Gibraltar for Malta

Tuesday 11th August

Arose at 5am breakfast at 6:30am we just cleaned up our area and left at about 7:45am came three miles east to this area we have to start digging slit trenches and holes for our vehicles rumors have started to the effect we maybe leaving in a few days I don't usually put much stock in rumors they are to miss leading but I hope that something happens soon one way or another HMS aircraft carrier eagle sunk in Mediterranean convoy.

Pedestal' convoy enters Mediterranean HMS Eagle sunk by U73

Part VI "Build up for the big Battle"

12th August – 9th October

Wednesday 12th August

Arose at 5am stand to as usual till 6 breakfast at 6:30 dozens of our planes flew over us during the night on there way to bomb Benghazi Tobruk Mersa Matruh and other Jerry objectives day has been very quiet very little artillery fire there has been great quantities in tanks and war materials moving into forward areas lately

Montgomery arrives in Cairo; both sides start rebuilding their strength and lay enormous minefields

Merchantmen Deucalion, Empire Hope, Clan Ferguson, destroyer Foresight from Pedestal" convoy sunk

Thursday 13th August

Arose at 6:30am just in time for breakfast was awake in early hours of the morning by thunder of big ack ack gun don't know who they fired at I did not hear any planes have been doing more work the last couple of days then for some time .there has been a noticeable lessening of dogfights near us lately all though there are any amount of our fighters in the air maybe that's the reason

Three merchantmen reach Grand Harbor in Malta

Friday 14th August

Arose at 5am stand to till 5:30 the damn flies are getting worse than ever patrols were very active during the early ours of this morning there was a great amount of shelling and even machine gun fire we maybe going into another big battle against Rommel soon all the great quantities are not getting concentrated for nothing day has been very hot last night was hot to

Saturday 15th August

Arose at 9:30 stand to till 6am breakfast at 7:30 some German fighters flew over us at 10:30 was working on truck all after noon fitting fish plates, noise of electric drills drowned out any noise of any planes that may have passed over attended Devine service in our w/s area at 6:45pm first service I have been to since we left Syria

Tanker Ohio limps into Malta from Pedestal" convoy

Sunday 16th August

5:30 arise stand to till 6 I was fairly busy today mostly on small jobs I watched a big dog fight quiet a number of planes were engaged they were about two miles away from us and about 5,000 feet up diving in and out of the light clouds about 11am heavy guns started firing about 4pm and kept up until late in the night

Monday 17th August

Arose at 7:30am a heavy mist arose in early ours of morning and did not disappear until 9am strips some copper tubing and other parts of derelict German Opel blitz truck. during lunch time we all saw two planes shot down one of them was bomber the crews of both planes were killed we saw one leave by parachute found out tea time that both of the planes were ours returning home out of ammo after raids



Left: German Opel Blitz ammo truck (H.W. Latimer)

Tuesday 18th August

Arose at 5:30 stand to till 6:30 we were told at breakfast time that we move at 9:45am destination unknown we left at 10:30am and traveled on diamond track for 20 miles we are not very far from w/p now. We saw a great heard of camels we are camping in this area but I don't think that we will be in the

desert for much longer

Wednesday 19th August

Arose at 5:30 stand to till 6:30 breakfast at 7:30 was fairly busy working on vehicles the climate is cooler now that we are nearer to the coast. A pleasant surprise got two letters from home 8 from Elva and two from Norm and Marge. Desert has been quiet as the grave expect the noise of planes some of our boys have gone on leave to Cairo and Alexander from this area

Thursday 20th August Elva's birthday

Arose as 5:30 heavy work to do most of the day on our trucks some of them were fairly extensively damaged by bombing by Jerry "Stukas" some weeks ago evening I wrote long letter to Elva and read all my letters once more some German bombers flew around us after duck moon is getting bigger every night now

Friday 21st August

Arose at 5 :30 stand to till 6 was fairly busy again working on vehicles and getting horribly fed up with this desert and the awful lonely wastes that surround us the lull has not been broken yet here has only been very little gun fire for some weeks now got paid 1-0-0 pounds today



Left: A group of the boys in the desert Aug 1942 (H.W. Latimer)

Saturday 22nd August

Arose at 5am stand to till 6 spent some time getting parcel packed up for home another big air battle right over our heads this afternoon between German ME-109's and our Spit fires one German was shot

down in the first few seconds. Guns started very heavy pounding just after tea maybe lull has broken and another big battle started?

Sunday 23rd August

Arose at 5am stand to as usual the food is improving a little bit I did some odd jobs till lunch time just after lunch we packed up and moved about 6 miles n/e we arrived after alot of messing about at 4pm the moon is nearly full now and every night the German bombers as well as our own fly low over us

Monday 24th August

Arose at 5am breakfast at 7:30 we moved out of area at 9 we only traveled a scant 6kms we are now about 10miles from the Mediterranean Sea in a direct line. Everyone thinks we will shortly be going into a new battle with Rommel's forces I hope myself we will leave the desert for good very soon

Tuesday 25th August

Arose at 5:30 breakfast at 7:30am the heat here and this valley is awful we have to high ridges either side of our camp that keep the heat in a dust and sand storm started about lunch time and continued till 8pm some of our troops went down to the sea for a swim I am going tomorrow tried to do some washing this after noon but had to give it up on an account of the swelling dust and sand

Wednesday 26th August

Arose at 5:30am stand two as usual every morning and evening went down to sea at about 15miles away at 9am first time I've seen anything besides desert for a many of weeks I enjoyed my swim as only one in the desert for so long can enjoy it got figs of some trees near the beach

Thursday 27th August

Arose at 5am guard duty again I go on from ten till 12 tonight went down swimming again this afternoon I have got a few painful desert sores on my hands most of the boys are suffering from either sores or boils we don't get enough greens with our meals we have been living on tin food for about three and a half months now was an air battle from 6:30pm tonight first I have seen for a few days

Friday 28th August

Arose at 5:30am stand to periods are still in force plenty of bombing, machine gunning around us during the night I watched the flares as I did my guard period some guns started firing up front this afternoon there is some talk about us letting Jerry tanks come into a trap and then destroying them

Saturday 29th August

Something seems to be going up front heavy forciers of armor have been moving up all day and gun fire has been going on most of the day and the scoundrel of our bomber flew over us this afternoon on there way to bomb Jerry

Sunday 30th August

Arose at 6am breakfast at 7:30am there were many planes flying over us during the night and bombs were dropped about three miles away heavy artillery fire also went on till late last night there is increased air activity the spitfire is encountered some German fighters over us this afternoon Jerry has been active behind his lines lately

Monday 31st August

Arose at 5am jerry launched an attack on our central sector early this morning so the monotonous lull has ended all day long heavy formations of our bombers have been bombing jerry and on and off there has been air battles over us. German planes bombed and machine gunned all around us during last night did not get much sleep. I have been making some company Christmas cards lately so that some can get printed from them for the boys to send home

Renewed German attack towards Alam el Halfa

Tuesday 1st September

Becoming over another month another day of heavy air and land activities bombs were dropped near of us by Stukas and Me-109s machine gunned an ack ack post air battles every now and again the jerry's were reported to be 8miles inside our defenses our artillery is giving them hell bombs were dropped again at 6pm on transport not far from our area

Wednesday 2nd September

Arose at 5:30am there was heavy big gunfire during the night but very few enemy planes came over. Jerrie's have been over our lines all day doing high level bombing air fighting has also been going all out. German planes bombed over by the coast but they were too high for accurate bombing two of their bombs fell into the water. Heavy artillery fire is pounding away up front. Our squadrons of bombings have been flying over all day long.

German attack called off

Thursday 3rd September

Anniversary of 3rd year of war I saw over 150 of our bombers go over us this morning up till lunchtime and also scores of our fighters, Jerry must be getting hell. The total number of planes (bombers) was 250 and fighters must have numbered nearly 1000 the roar of them has been colossal all day long heavy artillery fire has been going on continuously for about eight hours now

Friday 4th September

Arose at 8:30am watched a wonderful sight a dogfight many thousands of feet up in the clear sky in the early morning one plane was shot down but we saw the pilot bail out the plane came down from a great height in a slow spin and crashed about 3miles way from us. Large numbers of bombers went over again today to smash the Germans in the trap behind our central sector allot more of our boys were killed and wounded in this battle

Saturday 5th September

Arose at 5:30am did guard last night 2pm till 2am there were a few flights of our bombers flying over us today but air and land activity seems to be slowing down There was heavy artillery fire most of the afternoon.

Sunday 6th September

Arose at 5:30am day has been very quiet and I did now see many planes over today and very little gunfire has been going on.

Monday 7th September

Arose at 5:30am six Nazi planes flew over us just after breakfast at 8am night was fairly quiet only a few planes. Seven jerry planes engaged ours in a dogfight at about 7am. This evening one plane was shot down it was a me the pilot bailed out but his chute did not open and he was killed several bursts of ack ack went up at the other planes

Tuesday 8th September

Arose at 5am some German planes flew over us very high about lunchtime some of our planes were after them within a few minutes the boys played a game of soccer with some Tommy troops tonight, Tommie's won wrote letter home this evening before dark.

Wednesday 9th September

Arose at 7am saw no action at all today. Had fairly busy day today packing up my vehicle we are moving tomorrow at 8:30am to an area 30 miles inland and 28 miles further back towards Amivya. Church parade was held tonight at 6:15pm received b-day cables from Elva and mum.

Thursday 10th September

Arose at 5am we left the area at 9:15am and traveled 27 miles to our coy destination and had lunch and continued out to the coast in back of truck. Whole trip was made in the worst dust storm I have ever been in arrived on coast at 4pm it's wonderful to be here no dust or flies after what we have been through

Friday 11th September

Arose at 6:30am went in for a dip before breakfast my cobber and me are sleeping in little tent on beach I think this is heaven went for long walk along the beach fairly heavy surf is running and parts of a big CANT Italian flying boat were coming ashore there was wreckage everywhere I found an arm and hand from one of the crew.



Left:
Cant Z 506
(Unknown Internet)

Saturday 12th September

Arose at 6:30am got paid 5-0-0 Pounds went into Alexandria for the day bought myself a much needed watch saw a few of the sights then went into picture show. There is some bomb damage in the town and some fair sized ships sunk in the harbor one has broken in two and another has only the masts showing above water. Returned to camp at 7:15pm

Sunday 13th September

Arose at 8pm missed breakfast but its good to sleep in had swim at 9am the only thing that spoils the day is that five of our section has to return to that hell hole in the desert where our trucks are, went over to some fig trees in a grove of date palms got a bag full spent the rest of the day swimming and had a sing song with the boys

Right:
Myself on the beach at Burg El Arab on the
Mediterranean coast in Egypt 1942
(H.W. Latimer)



Monday 14th September

Arose at 6am we got up and packed our tent and gear not in to good of a frame of mind about having to go back we left at 8:30am and just as we were going through Burg El Arab there was an air raid there a stick of bombs fell just behind us scared the daylight out of me arrived back at sword fish area in desert at 10:30am

Tuesday 15th September

Arose at 7am flies are pretty awful in this area but the cool weather is coming now the dust is terrible most of the day we are doing absolutely nothing here at all the day has been fairly dusty but not as bad as usual most of our boys are still away on leave in Cairo. There are only 6 of us work shop boys left as guards of the trucks

Wednesday 16th September

Arose at 6:15am things are monotonous here but there is nothing to do at all I am trying to see if I can go back to the beach tomorrow when the other party comes back

Thursday 17th September

Arose at 7:30am did some drawings this morning went to the beach in truck this morning I tried to get some pay to get some Xmas presents to send home but there wont be any money till 24th so I will try and get leave borrow a pound to go into Alexandra tomorrow



Above:
Some of the boys taken at the beach during rest period Burg El Arab 1942
(H.W. Latimer)

Friday 18th September

Arose at 6:30am went for early dip water is wonderful arrived in Alexander at 9:30 I brought some drawing materials had lunch NZ YMCA went to pictures in afternoon and saw Hedy Hamarr and J Stewart in Come Live with Me came out at 6pm went back to truck and left town at 6:30pm

Saturday 19th September

Arose at 7:30am went in for a dip before breakfast had to pack up this morning we left at 12am after 11:30 lunch we went through Berg El Arab and arrived back in our old area at 3:30 then we had to shift one km a damned nuisance our 8 days holiday is at an end now

Sunday 20th September

Arose at 6:30am the mornings are beginning to get a bit cooler now the damned flies seem just as bad did a drawing of Elva today all the boys got there Xmas cards today they turned out real well my name can be seen very small on everyone

Monday 21st September

Arose at 6:30am I want to go on leave to buy some Xmas presents but send home but leave is booked up for about a month so I have to wait we packed up and moved again, at 1:30 we came about 14 miles towards the half way house the real driving today has been awful several of our trucks was stuck in the soft sand

Tuesday 22nd September

Arose at 6:30am the exercises start in a day or so rumor has it, the moon is getting very big now so we may see some fun and games at night time

Wednesday 23rd September

Arose at 6:30am we were told today that we are moving on 40miles tomorrow at 9am had to go to divisional petrol coy to pick up two motors and cases was away most of the afternoon packed up most of our gear tonight to save rush in the morning our bombers make endless roar all night now that the moon is well up

Rommel flies home to Germany on sick leave; Stumme takes over command

Thursday 24th September

Arose at 7am we moved out of area at 9am and traveled about 14 miles to another area the maneuvers have started maybe it'll leave us to another scrap

Friday 25th September

Arose at 7am we may be

Sunday 27th September my birthday

Am 24 years of age today but this day is like any other day the same monotonous outlook

Thursday 1st October

Arose at 7am breakfast at 7:30 had a fairly busy day doing my washing and some other small jobs

Friday 2nd October

Arose at 7:30am nine German planes flew over us at great height just as we were having break fast got to letters from Elva and one from Marge this morning

Saturday 3rd October

Got letters from mum and Marge and Elva today Arose at 7am day was very sultry until about 3pm when a totally unexpected thunder storm blew up and then great hail stones the size of tennis balls pelted down very where they were really dangerous we had to shelter under our trucks heavy rain fell afterwards the first I have experienced for months.

Sunday 4th October

Arose at 7am had to sleep last night with my blankets slightly wet from yesterday rain was watering shells burst on the morning our tanks are out on practice near us and they fire all day received parcel and newspapers ???? Elva ????????

Monday 5th October

Arose at 6:30am tanks and artillery have been firing all day and kicking up an awful din received two parcels from Elva and also newspapers day is awfully sultry and perspiration just pouring out of me

Tuesday 6th October

Arose at 6:30 am heavy mist this morning dispelled at 10am the maneuvers are still going and we watch the shells bursting all day long now it has been drizzling with rain all day it is a great relief having weather like this saw Gordon Otters name in the casualty list as missing hope he turns up ok soon

Montgomery finalizes outline for second battle of Alamein

Wednesday 7th October

Arose at 7am heavy mist again this morning did not go away till 9:30am there has been no rain today but cold wind is blowing there been doing some cartoons to send into NZEF times Xmas comp we all had our feet inspected this afternoon there is nothing wrong with mine worse luck

Thursday 8th October

Arose at 6:30am no mist this morning but a little light rain fell during the day a big force of bombers flew over us during the night pay day today but I did not draw any I am saving up to buy presents to send home

Saturday 9th October

Arose at 6:30am heavy rain fell during the night received two letters from Elva this afternoon it has been very hot today with heavy clouds overcast all day

Part VII "El Alamein"

23rd October – 14th November

Friday 23rd October

Arose at 6:30am night was made rowdy by the continuous streams of tanks and transport that was going up to the front heads of our aircraft have been giving Jerry hell all day our offensive by land opened up at 9:45 exact to the night with a thunderous artillery barrage that was still going at midnight as I write this diary entry

Second battle of El Alamein begins in North

Saturday 24th October

Arose at 6am we are only a few hundred yards away from the beach. A jerry plane flew over us last night and dropped a couple of bomb great squadrons of planes have been flying over us all day loads of Nazi Italian prisoners have been coming back along the roads already Stumme dies



Right:
**Watching some more
prisoners rounded up
1942
(H.W. Latimer)**

Sunday 25th October

Arose at 7:30am long lines of transports guns and tanks are still pouring along this road to the front line jerry air activity seems to be almost nil while our air power is in evidence everywhere

Rommel returns to Africa; XXX Corps makes good progress against 164th Infantry division but elsewhere Allies attacks contained

Monday 26th October

Arose at 6am a little bit of rain fell during last night there were no bombs or anything dropped during the night even though it is bright moon light

Tuesday 27th October

Was awakened at 5am bright moonlight Jerry plane came down and spattered our lines with machine gun and cannon fire bullets and streaks of tracer seemed to be zipping into the ground everywhere only two of our boys wounded a night fighter shot down an itti <Italian> plane into the sea and the two pilots were washed ashore on our beach

Wednesday 28th October

Arose at 7am there were a few bombs dropped about 2mls away from us during the night heard a night fighter having a crack at an enemy bomber in the early hours this morning

Thursday 29th October

Arose at 7:30am a few bombs were dropped during the night but nothing fell very near to us

Friday 30th October

Arose at 7am night was fairly quiet for a change went off to beach for swim to day it being fairly hot for this time of year

Saturday 31st October

On deck at 7am bombs were dropped again during the night not far from us this time heard them whistling down on some other crowd down the road met some south African boys today they came into our workshops for repairs they were amused at the way we roll our own cigs
<RAF was attacking panzers in Laager>

Monday 2nd November

Arose at 7:30am we are now on two hours notice to move further up towards the front

Beginning of Operation Supercharge

Tuesday 3rd November

Arose at 7am we got all packed up this morning ready to move up we moved out from our coast road camp at 2pm and traveled along main coast road for 20mls then turned off into desert for miles where we are now camped noise of guns are very loud now we are not very far from them now squadron after squadron of our planes move been bashing Jerry continuously all day and every day

Rommel begins withdrawing

Wednesday 4th November

Arose at 7:30am we got ready and packed to move off by 10:30am traveled along bottle and springbok road for 12 miles we are now camped in a very unhealthy spot right by El Alamein station ack ack guns are bristling everywhere spent a couple of hours digging in things are going for us at the front

Thursday 5th November

Arose at 7:30am after having no sleep since 1am this morning when enemy bombers arrived and all hell seemed let loose bombs were dropped and flares made everything light as day uncerous roar of ack ack guns was awful reminded me of time in Tobruk last November Jerry is now on the run in full retreat over planes are bashing hell out of them

Africa Korps pushed back from Fuka

Friday 6th November

Arose at 7am another night of gunfire but I managed to get some sleep we packed up in a hurry just after lunch and moved off to join the rest of our company we passed a number of our tanks and German ones too some of them were still burning inside one of our tanks I saw the dead bodies of the crew burnt beyond recognition we camped for the night hear some Greek troops after doing thirty miles

Right:
Wrecked German Mark II tank in the Libyan desert (H.W. Latimer n/b the tank is actually a German PzIV F2 armed with a long 75mm cannon these were the latest in tanks at this time)



Saturday 7th November

Arose at 7am got packed and had breakfast we moved off at 8am and traveled till lunch time we came across wreckage of fighter planes the body of the pilot was lying close by he was horribly broken and burned so my cobber pall hill and myself buried him close by he was an American pilot there was nothing left identify him by we did 30mls today before darkness

Sunday 8th November

Arose at 7am got packed an moved off after breakfast we have all had a very trying day digging out our vehicles there seems to be a sea of mud everywhere got a photo taken of myself holding part of wrecked plane with the Italian insignia on it (photo) there are numbers of wob camps in the desert they don't seem to give a damn about the war we traveled only about 25mls today on account of the thick mud



Left:
Myself holding part of wrecked Italian fighter plane showing Italian Insignia (H.W. Latimer)

Torch landings in Morocco and Algeria

Monday 9th November

Arose at 6am we left this spot at 7am the going is awful just a sea of thick mud up to the hubs of wheels we came down escarpment onto road at Garara and continues along road all the road is littered with the burning wrecks of German and Italian trucks guns and tanks passed a number of dead enemy coming through Mersa Matruh caught up with our company beyond Mersa at camp for night

Rightt:
Italian tank abandoned in desert (H.W. Latimer)



Tuesday 10th November

Breakfast at 7am we moved out at 7:30 and traveled all day till we passed Sidi Barrani our convoy was machine gunned by three

Me-109's they wounded two of our chaps and set two trucks on fire everywhere on this coast road is the smoke and flame of burning vehicles and tanks have seen great numbers of prisoners this afternoon Tobruk fell in 31/2 hrs today loads of jerry and Italian prisoners everywhere



Left: Wreckage of Italian supply trucks (H.W. Latimer)

French ceasefire, Hitler orders occupation of Vichy France

Wednesday 11th November

Arose at 6am moved out of the area and traveled on the road to Halfaya pass where we had to wait for hours for other units to go over pass trucks are streaming up the long winding road from the sea over Halfaya and one never ending line guns and tanks are on there way up the pass too. We moved up over the pass at dusk and did not stop till 8am in desert for night

Right: Italian truck and light tank abandoned in the desert (H.W. Latimer)



Below: Our convoy on road up through Halfaya pass (H.W. Latimer)



Thursday 12th November

Arose at 6am got moving again at 7 we came through fort Capuzzo or what's left of it at 8am had stop in area near Capuzzo till 1:30pm moved on again for a few miles nearer "Bardia" we were told that we would be stopping in this area for two or three days so we got the truck gear all unpacked and I started on getting the batteries charged up then came the order that we move on again at 9am in morning so have to go get everything packed up again

Montgomery retakes Tobruk; first German troopships arrive in Bizerta

Right:
Me-109 with crashed Boston in background
on side of road between Sidi Barrani and
Mersa Matruh
(H.W. Latimer)



Friday 13th November

Arose at 6am breakfast at 8 after we had done about 4 miles we stopped and this is the area were we stay for a couple of days have gotten all the gear out and am doing battery charging while we have this break in traveling there is an aerodrome near us saw a War Hawk plane make forced landing in desert when his motor cut out he got out quiet safely

Above:
German Airfield at Mersa Matruh
(H.W. Latimer)



Saturday 14th November

Arose at 6:45 had breakfast at 7am we are staying in this area for today at least lots of work coming into workshops now we maybe shifting tomorrow morning again I believe our destination if all goes well is Benghazi

Part VIII "Chasing Rommel"

15th November – 31st December

Sunday 15th November

Arose at 7am breakfast at 7:30am we were told that we would be staying in this area for maybe some time and so we have all got down and settled for a long stay. Captain found a rat bag of a telephone exchange in Bardia and brought it over for me to fix up it is an Old Italian thing

Monday 16th November

Arose at 7:15am breakfast time has been changed from 7:30am to 8am and is much better because mornings are bitterly cold now

Tuesday 17th November

Arose at 7:30am there was very heavy rain during the night but my be kept dry the dusk has made life hell all day hope to god that we get out of Egypt and Libya into some decent country very soon took telephone exchange over to HQ this afternoon to put it in the HQ wagon

Wednesday 18th November

Arose at 8am wished that I could have stayed in bed because the day has been gales of wind and sad storms my eyes are all filled up with dust and are very sore was over at HQ again today working on the telephone

Thursday 19th November

Arose at 7am day has been very cold with rain now and again have been working on our telephone all day went over to HQ truck and brought exchange back over to my truck where I can work on it much better

Saturday 21st November

Arose at 7:30am today have been very pleased about that best weather we have had for over a week I have been working most of the day again on the telephone exchange that I am installing at HQ

Sunday 22nd November

Arose at 7:30am heavy rain and bitterly cold wind blowing

Monday 23rd November

Rommel pushed back from Agedabia to El Aghelia

Wednesday 25th November

Arose at 7:30am only one more month and another Xmas in the desert again I suppose



*Right:
Hard going in the sand near Bir Hacheirm
(H.W. Latimer)*

Thursday 26th November

British capture Medjez el Bab

Friday 27th November

French fleet scuttled in Toulon

Thursday 3rd December

Germans retake Djedeida and Teboura

Saturday 5th December

Arose at 7am breakfast 7:30 we moved out of this area near the railway line where we have been for nearly a month we are on our way to El Agalin where our forward lines have been brought to a stop by the German defense lines we will be making a big assault there very soon

Sunday 6th December

Arose at 5:45am had breakfast in darkness moved out of El Adem at 6:45am I rode a motorbike all day I came off once in the mud there was heavy rain most of the day and the going was awfully rough and mud was going everywhere I did over a 100miles of the worst bike ride that I have ever had in my life don't know how I kept in the saddle crawled into bed at dusk absolutely done up passed through "Bir Hacheirm" at 2pm

Monday 7th December

Arose at 5:30 again breakfast in the dark at 5:45 got on the move again at 6:45 we did over 30mils before a short stop at 10am. Going is better today am driving a truck today too knocked up to ride motor bike. Trip today was very monotonous nothing but desert stretching away into the distance like a never ending ocean. We are getting nearer to the front every our tonight we stopped and are now 60miles away

Tuesday 8th December

Arose at 5:30 breakfast at 6:45 got on the move again and traveled all day till we reached this area where we are supposed to be stopping for four or five days. Saw some planes diving and some machine gunning something on the ground the planes flew over us they were ours thank goodness

Wednesday 9th December

Arose at 7:30am breakfast at 7:45 we had to pack up and move by 2pm this afternoon loads of gear and I had all the batteries on the charging lines we only traveled for about 10mils and we are staying in this area for tonight at least we are now not very many miles behind our front lines

Thursday 10th December

Was awakened at 5am by a Jerry plane dropping bombs by the light of flares a few miles away we were told today that we would be going on another long trip benzene was brought around to each truck enough to do 300miles we will be going through the salt marshes

Friday 11th December

Arose at 7am we had to pack up again and move at 1pm we traveled for 30 miles over very sandy country passed through a German mine field at 3pm stopped for night at 4:30pm looks like the hole NZ division are in on this move the idea seems to be to get behind the German lines at El Aeala and cut them off if so we are for in some hectic times in the next few days

Saturday 12th December

Arose at 7:30am heavy rain fell from midnight last night it has been continuing on and off all day bitterly cold wind blowing so it's been great coats and warm clothing. Had to repair ignition on water transport in rain today rum was issued tonight I gave my share away I cant stand the taste of the stuff artillery has been thundering at times today

Sunday 13th December

Rommel abandons El Agheila line and falls back on Buerat

Tuesday 15th December

Arose at 5:30am left camp at 6:30am drove all day till 8pm then parked in area very near the Germans our guns are being placed in position everywhere is air of expectancy Germans are expected to attack at dawn and try to break out a trap was on guard until midnight saw the flares that the Jerry was putting up and bull dozers were digging our guns in

Wednesday 16th December

Arose at 7am nothing developed much at the night at 2:30 tremendous concussions rocked us as our twenty five pounder and sixty pounder guns opened up on the Germans who were trapped, 9am the first German shells came whining over and burst far and square amongst us miraculously only one chap killed got piece of shell splinter through neck

Thursday 17th December

Was watching German transports through field glasses getting blown to blazes

Friday 18th December

Rose before dawn at 5:30 breakfast at 6am moved out of area at 10:30 (hold up some where) to area called "Nafiufa" where German garrison are holding out against our attacks all afternoon enemy shells were falling in our lines saw tank battle over ridge our guns sending shell after shell screaming into Jerry lines camp for night at 8:30 bright moonlight

Saturday 19th December

Moved out of night camp at 6am travels two miles wet then stayed. We were staying here for a couple of days but order came through tonight to pack up ready to move on again In the morning no lights aloud so either talk or go to bed after tea

Sunday 20th December

Arose at 6:30 moved canceled this morning was working on HQ charging motor all day. Church parade (violently) held at 3:30 pm heard news today that General Wavell made push into burner

Monday 21st December

Arose at 4am went on guard duty then returned to bed till breakfast time till 8:30. Everything seems to be going well for us so far benzenes supplies brought around for another long trip

Wednesday 23rd December

Longstop Hill offensive shelved; Darlan assassinated

Thursday 24th December

Arose at 8am, breakfast at 8:30am, this is not a very good Xmas eve but life is what we make it maybe, was very happy to receive four parcels from home this afternoon a cake from aunty Eva uncle Lenn second one from daisy to the boys are all going mad because there is no beer to celebrate Xmas eve with

Friday 25th December

Arose at 7am breakfast at 7:30 Jerry dropped a few bombs just before dawn by way of a little Xmas present. parade at 10am for informal chat by Col. Crump had great feed of pork and vege with duff to finish off for Xmas dinner best feed I have had for many of day we all have had a day off did no work at all

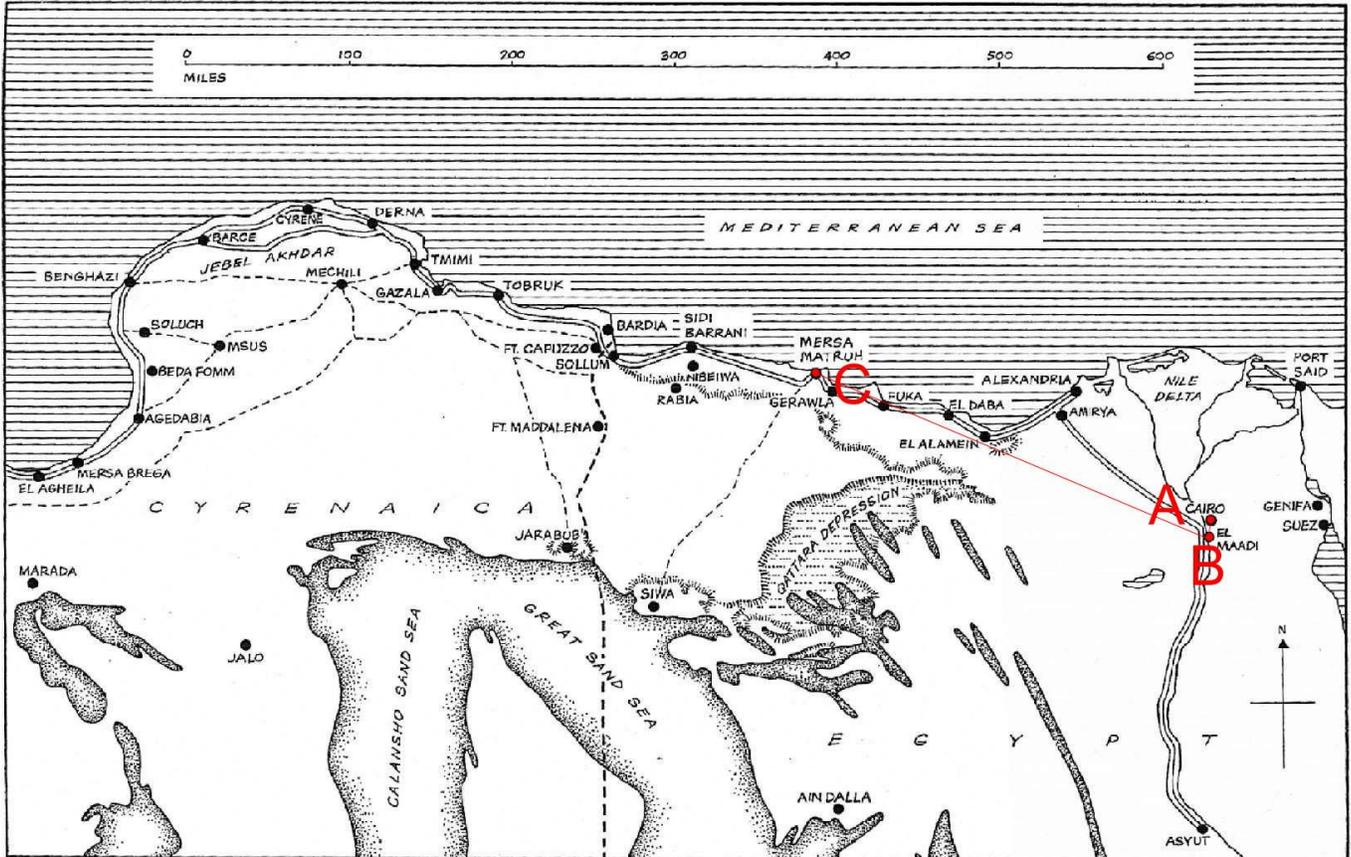
Saturday 26th December

Rained heavily during the night cold wind blowing this morning

Thursday 31st December

Free French under Leclerc begin march from Chad

12th February – 24th February

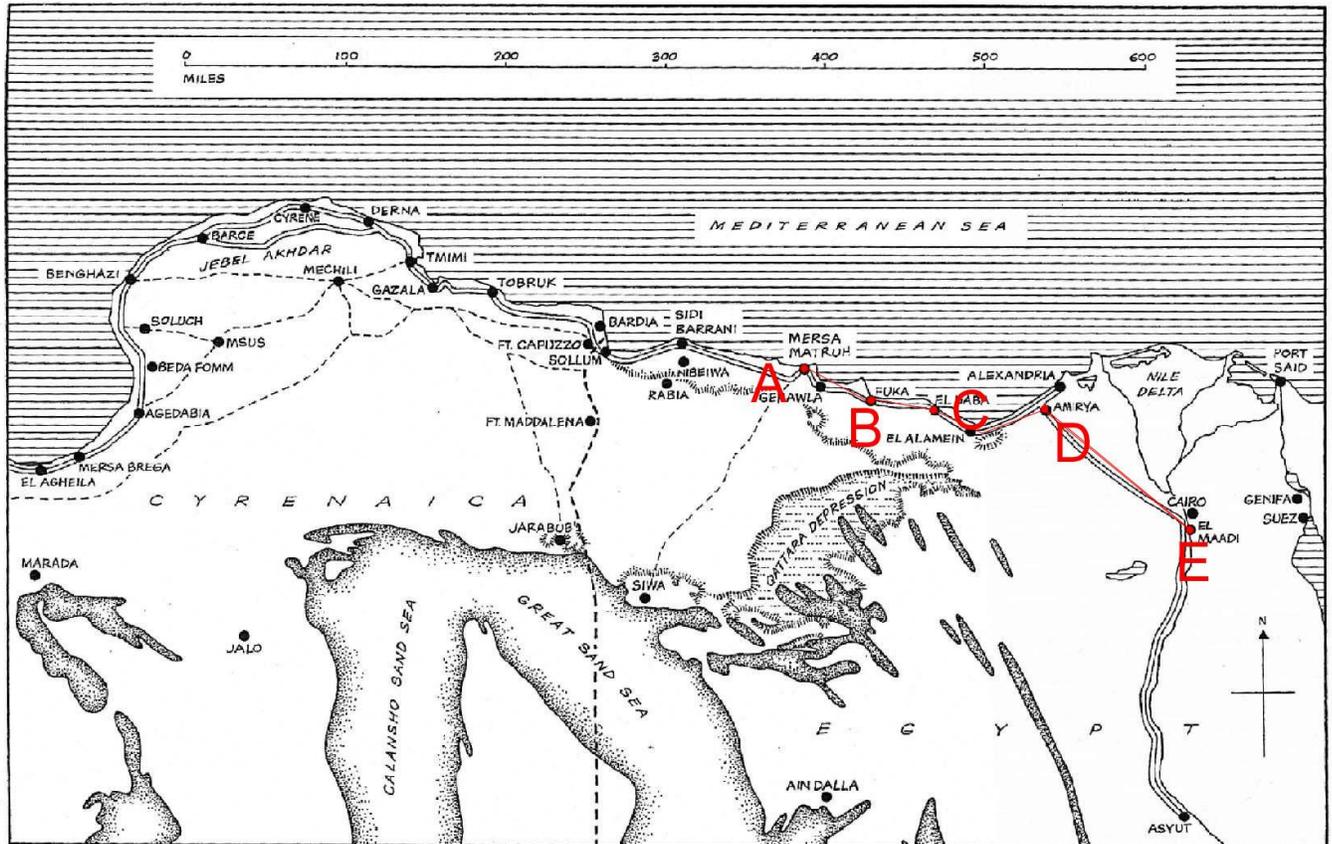


A – 12th February in Cairo

B – 13th February in Maadi Camp

C – 20th February in Mersa Matruh

25th February -





Above:
Map of North Africa showing places such as Mersa Matruh, El Alamein, Tobruk, Halfaya pass etc

Right:
Map of North/East Africa showing the ports of Haifa in Syria



Lingo and other useful terms

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Cobbers | Australian term for a pal |
| Stuka | German Dive bomber – Junkers Ju-87 |
| Jerry/Jerries | Term given to Germans from old Tom and Jerry cartoon. |
| Drome | Aerodrome |
| Lugar | German service pistol |
| Wadi | A shallow usually sharply defined depression in a desert region |
| Afrika Korps | Name of German Army operating in North Africa |