

3 FIELD SQUADRON, SAEC (Part 2)

In 1884 when Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal became a member of the French Academy, he was welcomed by Ernest Renan. In his speech Renan remarked that not only had two inland seas been connected, but the site of a future battlefield had been marked. During the Second World War his prediction came true when control of the Middle East became of utmost importance for the continuation of the Allied war effort: the economic blockade of Europe and the defence of Allied oil supplies depended on the Allies retaining Egypt and control of the Suez Canal.

The Italian offensive near the end of 1940, was easily warded off but after the arrival of a German contingent (the Afrika Korps) and supplies, a successful offensive under Genl Rommel was launched in April 1941. During this offensive Rommel's advanced troops managed to reach the Egyptian frontier where they occupied positions in the area round Sollum and threatened the Egyptian frontier. Genl Wavell (Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces in North and East Africa) replied by launching operations 'Brevity' (May 1941) and 'Battleaxe' (June 1941) to dislodge them but failed on both occasions. After his last desert offensive it was thought appropriate to appoint a new commander, Genl Auchinleck, former Commander-in-Chief of India, in his place.

When Auchinleck assumed command in July, Hitler's troops were deeply involved in Russia and Mr Churchill urged Auchinleck to resume the offensive. Auchinleck realized that his troops needed to be re-organised, trained and refitted first before an offensive could be launched to drive the Axis out of Libya. He realized that one of the main reasons for Wavell's failures was that Wavell had been obliged to fight with incomplete forces and his 'repeated milking of units and formations to fit out one expedition after another', disorganised the Allied forces in the end. Furthermore a continuous stream of reinforcements had reached the Middle East since the beginning of 1941, which was too large to absorb easily. To restore coherence

and to make proper training possible, Auchinleck realized that he needed a pause of about three months to reorganise his troops. Hence the Western Desert Force was reconstituted as the Eighth Army under Genl Sir Alan Cunningham (who had left East Africa at the end of August 1941). The new Army had two Corps under command: the 13 Corps under Lt Genl A. R. Godwin-Austen (Commander of 12 African Division in East Africa) and the 30 Corps under Lt-Genl V. V. Pope² to control the armoured forces. Fortified areas were prepared along those already existing at Tobruk, Mersa Matruth and Bagush to meet a possible Axis thrust from the North while these preparations were being implemented.

When 3 Fd Coy arrived in Egypt in August 1941, 1 SA Div was concentrated at Mersa Matruh. The unit established camp at Amiriya (near Alexandria) where most of its first month was spent completing an ordnance Field Park Depot of 1 SA Div HQ and training for desert warfare. On 1 September Sgt Tomlinson and a party left for Mersa Matruh, where 1 SA Div was garrisoned, in order to occupy billets set aside for the unit. On 7 September Lt Swart's section followed, acting as an advance party while the rest of the unit followed on the 9th.

On reaching Mersa Matruh the unit was not brigaded until 6 October when the Company was attached to 2 SA Inf Bde, though official confirmation was not received until the 13th. In any event the Company still remained under the operational command of the CRE.

Meanwhile work at Matruh started almost immediately with the construction of several bomb shelters and other works taken over from the Australians. The shelters were completed on 14 September and the next day Lt Thomson's section left the unit to assist in the construction of Matruh's defences.

Mersa Matruh was to play an important role in Auchinleck's defence-offence policy. It was to be strengthened to resist an Axis thrust into Egypt — then the Allied advance troops

could be withdrawn to give battle in the region of Mersa Matruh and simultaneously act as a jumping-off base for a later advance to Tunisia. The port of Matruh was also of strategic importance for the safety of Allied convoys in the Mediterranean.

When 1 SA Div arrived at Matruh, the division found that despite the fact that the defences 'had been tinkered with at intervals since before the war',³ they had been left to decay, which entailed much digging, wiring and laying of mines when the division was ordered to construct defenses for two positions south of the inner post line.

The Matruh Box — as these fortified areas became known — was to be based on the Tobruk system of defence: section posts were prepared which consisted of five weapon pits with an all-round field of fire and insulated sleeping, supply and ammunition recesses — all connected by trenches, camouflaged and wired in. 3 Fd Coy did some of the wiring jobs and also laid anti-tank mines in front of these posts.

Digging was one of the Company's most difficult problems. One could hardly make any impression on the hard limestone encountered at about 2 feet from the surface and previous notions of 'the sandy nature of the Western Desert vanished. Anywhere a pick struck, the ground gave out a metallic ring. The whole area was rock.'⁴ On one occasion Lt Swart's section had to return from the minefields because his section had suffered considerably from foot trouble due to the amount of walking over rough stony ground. They were later relieved by Lt Smuts' section which armed, set and camouflaged no less than 2 200 mines in two days.

The Matruh fortification included a coastal defense section to ward off any attacks made from the sea and the Company was called on to build magazines, concrete fire-control posts, search light chambers for the coastal defence battery as well as 6-pounder gun positions. On one occasion the unit had to blast a submerged rocky ledge from the harbour mouth. Before the job was undertaken Maj Palmer (OC 3 Fd Coy) and Capt Archibald (DCRE) undertook an inspection tour of the site. During their excursion their boat became stranded on a submerged rock and they were forced to remain there

for over an hour before they could be brought back in another boat.

On 11 October orders were received for the removal of 8 000 mines from a minefield near Charing Cross Railway Station. The assignment was entrusted to Nos 1, 3 and 5 Fd Coys and Lt Thomson was to be in charge of 3 Fd Coy's detachment. Towards the end of the month 1 SA Div received instructions to evacuate Matruh and to undergo intensive desert training prior to the launching of 'Operation Crusader' scheduled for November. 2 SA Inf Bde was to remain behind at Matruh to guard the defences and serve as reinforcement for the other two brigades. Orders were also received for 3 Fd Coy (attached to 2 SA Inf Bde) to take over all the work being done by the other two Coys (including the removal of the mines) as they were to leave for desert manoeuvres.

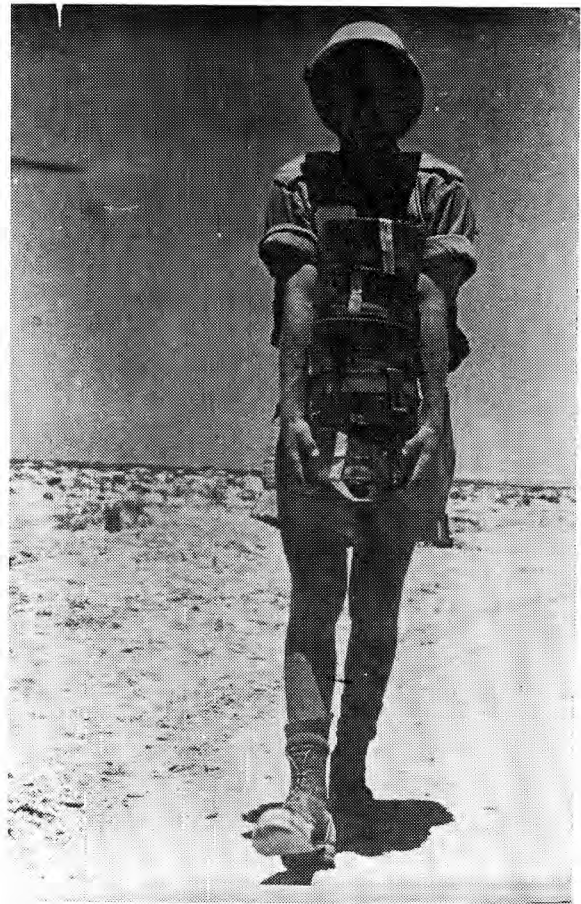
Towards the end of October preparations for the forthcoming offensive were well on the way and intensive desert training commenced to accustom the attacking forces to living and working under desert conditions. All these preparations kept the Sappers occupied so that only small parties were released for training. On 19 October a subsection of No 2 section 3 Fd Coy, SAEC left for training with 1/2 FFB while a subsection of Section No 1 left to begin training with the Natal Mounted Rifles (NMR) the next day. These desert manoeuvres which were carried out in the vast areas south and south-east of Matruh were mostly based on navigation (using the sun or a prismatic compass), flag-signalling, desert formation and camouflaging. The subsections returned on the 23rd and 24th respectively but it was not until 17 November that ten men could again be spared for desert manoeuvres with the NMR.

The Advance into Cyrenaica

On the night of 17/18 November 'Operation Crusader' began with the aim of recapturing the whole of Cyrenaica and relieving the siege of Tobruk. The Axis forces managed to resist the onslaught but in the process their petrol and ammunition supplies dropped dangerously and Rommel decided to retreat to the Gazala line, a previously prepared line of defence. His whole force was to retreat



Mine-laying.



Sappers strengthening the coastal defences.

except for the frontier garrisons which had to remain behind to block the coastal road thus keeping more than a division of Allied troops pinned down in that sector. To this end it was decided that the garrisons would be organised in two separate sectors, the Bardia Sector and the Halfaya Sector, comprising the localities of Halfaya Pass, 'Faltenbacher' 'Cirener' and Lower Sollum.

This move soon paid off and Auchinleck realized the necessity of cleaning the Egyptian frontier if he wanted to maintain his advance into Western Cyrenaica. He could then extend his railhead at Misheifa so that supplies could be sent forward at a quicker pace. He therefore ordered Genl Norrie, OC XXX Corps (comprising the two South African Divisions) to clear the frontier. At this stage 5 SA Bde had ceased to exist as a fighting entity due to encounters with the enemy on the 24th and was ordered to return to Matruh to re-fit. The result was that 2 SA Bde had to be brought forward. On 24 November 2 SA Bde was ordered to relieve the 11 Indian Bde. Frantic preparations were made and Lt Pryde (3 Fd Coy) and four details left for Halfaya, acting as an advance reconnaissance party. The rest of the Company was to follow the next day. The movement was cancelled before the advance troops got further than Sidi Barrani and they returned to Matruh. The delay was short and on the 28th the Brigade left Matruh to relieve 11 Indian Bde south and east of Halfaya Pass. The unit reached Sidi Barrani the same day where they were to remain until further instructions were issued. The next day 3 Fd Coy moved to Wadi Suleiman but No 2 Section set out for Rakait to site a small minefield at the top of Bangalore Pass.

When 2 SA Bde moved forward it came under the command of Braforce (under Brig Medley who was later succeeded by Brig Poole) which was in turn part of 2 SA Div. Braforce, composed of 2 and 3 SA Bdes and a composite body called Lancol under Maj Lanham, was to hold a line stretching from the coast (about 12 miles west of Buq Buq) southwards through Minqar el Thareu, Sofafi and Adem el Rabia. 2 SA Inf Bde covered the 16 mile sector stretching from the sea to Rakait Pass with the NMR on the right flank, the CTH in the centre and 1/2 FFB on the left facing the enemy lodged on the Halfaya escarpment. The Brigade was to assume a

holding role to prevent these frontier garrisons from breaking out to the south and endangering the Army's main supply line following behind the Brigade's southern flank. Interruption of this supply line would have resulted in disaster for the advance into Cyrenaica and the Brigade was ordered to hold the line at all costs. The mopping-up of the frontier garrisons was given to 2 SA Div under Genl de Villiers who sent 3 SA Bde forward to attack Bardia on 16 December. Once the attack started it became clear that to take Bardia was beyond the power of a single brigade, and operations were broken off after two days fighting to prepare a much heavier attack, which began on 31 December.

While Bardia was attacked 3 Fd Coy continued laying mines. On 2 December the unit took over the brigade's water point at Buq Buq as well. The water at Buq Buq was a bit brackish and the sappers organised a supply of 'sweet water' from the well at Sidu Musa, which served NMR and CTH. A road was also built over the salt marsh west of Buq Buq.

Throughout the attack on the frontier garrisons the weather was bitterly cold. Rain and dust storms alternated with hail. The dust storms were fiercer than any previously met and reduced visibility during daytime to 50 yards or less and the fierce north wind, blowing in from the Mediterranean, brought strange wreckage onto the beaches. On one occasion a RN tank-carrying lighter was found on a sandy beach between the Buq Buq water point and the rear of the NMR. Maj Palmer and Capt Smuts inspected it but were unable to ascertain how it had got there. The anti-aircraft guns and ammunition aboard it were salvaged by 3 Fd Coy but when the unit tried to salvage the lighter itself by pumping it dry, their efforts failed when it sank too deep in the sand to be moved.

By the end of December 1941 the unit was in charge of the water points at Buq Buq, Sofafi (where a detachment had laid a minefield) and the deep well pumps of Rakait which had been taken over on the completion of the minefield there. The Rakait water point was under Lt J. F. M. Luyt the new OC of Section no 3 who succeeded Lt Smuts when the latter was promoted to acting 2 i/c on the departure of Capt Morley

for the Union. Lt Luyt's section was later attached to 1/2 FFB and moved to the new forward lines on 24 December. Section no 1 was attached to the NMR.

After the surrender of Bardia on 2 January 1942 the Allied forces turned to the Halfaya Sector. It was of the utmost importance that Halfaya Pass should be taken to shorten the Allied supply line. The Axis High Command was fully aware of Halfaya Pass's strategical value and it was strengthened accordingly. The remaining troops were concentrated mainly at Halfaya Pass (including its outlying posts) and Sollum, Abar Abu Talaq — better known as 'Faltenbacher' to the enemy¹¹ and Point 207 or 'Cirener'. Still it was only a matter of time before their resistance would be overcome as they had been deprived of their main supply source at Bardia. Despite this drawback they continued defending these sectors hoping that the Allies would launch a general attack which would enable them to inflict heavy casualties before throwing in their hand.

Allied pressure increased when an unceasing artillery and air bombardment developed. Preparations were also made to destroy the enemy forces from Halfaya to Point 207. 3 Fd Coy, SAEC was to mark and fence the minefields at Minqar Rakait, Wadi el Maqta, Halfway House, Alam Barghut and the coastal plain. Orders were also issued for the lifting of mines to clear a track up Halfway House and where necessary to support the operations of 2 SA Inf Bde moving up the escarpment. Section No 2 was instructed to move to the base of the Pass to lift the minefield there. At this stage all the spare men were employed in lifting mines and doing salvage work.

On 1 January the unit had its first mine accident when Sgt Buret drove over a mine during a dust storm and was badly injured. On the 3rd the next accident occurred when four sappers were slightly injured by an Italian booby-trap in the NMR lines, and Lt Thomson's truck was damaged in a minefield on the 5th. Four men were killed at Rakait while re-lifting recently laid mines. The next day (10 January) another two men were killed and six injured while clearing Halfaya House Pass for later usage. (Lt Cousins, the new OC of No 2 Section, was among those injured). The accident occurred

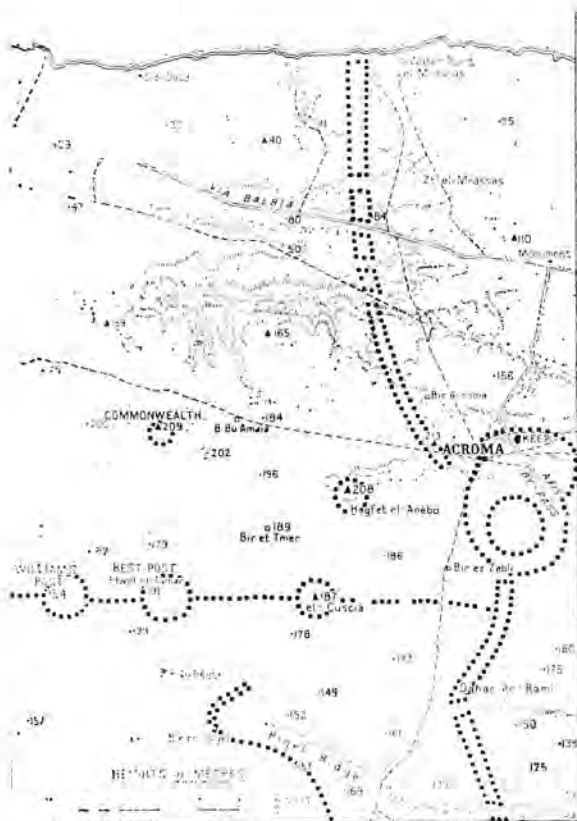
when the party ran into enemy booby traps during the worst dust storm yet experienced by the unit. Owing to the bad weather the wounded men could only reach the advance dressing station the next day and the delay caused the death of one of the wounded sappers.

When Maj Palmer, Lt Pryde and Col Clifton (CRE, 30 Corps) investigated the site of the accident later on, they found fragments of an exploded booby trap along with several complete traps as well as primer cord from igniter traps leading to a series of cotton charges. All these articles discovered were British and the investigators concluded that this was an uncharted minefield which had probably been laid by the Indian Engineers. The unit started to lift the mines but work was abandoned due to uncertainty about the positions of the traps. The work was later continued with the help of a member of 4 Fd Sqdn, who had helped to lay them.

On 14 December the unit was ordered to withdraw all subsections from battalions and to concentrate on the clearance of the minefield. This meant that the unit was operating as a whole again except for a small section under Capt Smuts which was sent to Derna to improve the harbour facilities. Work continued in this fashion until the 18th when instructions were received to hand over the remaining work to 1 Fd Coy because 2 SA Bde was to be relieved by the Free French Bde. On the 20th the whole Company, less the section at Derna, returned to Mersa Matruh. On reaching Matruh the Brigade learnt of the enemy's unconditional surrender at Halfaya.

The Gazala Line

Meanwhile Rommel had retreated beyond Gazala to El Agheila so that by the end of January 1942 the Allied troops had succeeded in clearing Cyrenaica from the enemy. 'Operation Crusader' can therefore be regarded as a British victory but in executing the operation, the Allies exhausted themselves to such an extent 'that by the time they reached Cyrenaica their blow had been spent.'¹² By now Auchinleck was beginning to feel the strain of the long supply route which had confronted Rommel at the beginning of 'Crusader'. This meant a reversal of



Boxes established to protect the rear of the Gaza Line.

roles as Rommel's supply line was much shorter and he could therefore refit his forces at a quicker pace. He remained a threat as he could advance into Cyrenaica as soon as his supplies and reinforcements permitted such a move. On 21 January 1942 he demonstrated this advantage when he moved against the weak British advance positions, forcing them to withdraw to Gazala. The Allied withdrawal meant the loss of the port of Benghazi through which the Allies had hoped to supply their forces.

The Allied troops withdrew to a new line which later became known as the Gazala line, stretching from Gazala to Bir Hakeim, to stem the Axis Advance. To this effect the Gazala — Bir Hakeim — Tobruk triangle was developed and a series of strong positions or 'boxes' were constructed. In front of this 40 mile front, mines were laid to give the positions depth and 'the once formidable Tobruk defences'¹⁸ were stripped to provide mines for the minefields and the boxes. At that stage the Commanders-in-Chief did not envisage that Tobruk should be held in isolation or that it should have to withstand a

siege, but it was to be used as a supply base for Auchinleck's new offensive in Libya. (Hence the lifting of the mines to make troop movements within the Tobruk perimeter safe). If however Genl Ritchie should be compelled to withdraw, Tobruk would be evacuated.

On 19 January 1942, 1 SA Div received advance warning of a move to the Gazala line and on the 25th 1 SA Bde was sent to the El Adem area where they came under the command of XXX Corps under Genl Norrie. At that stage XXX Corps was responsible for dealing 'with the enemy penetrating the defensive line or out flanking movements round the southern end'¹⁹ while XIII Corps under Genl Gott was in charge of the static defences, including Tobruk. 2 SA Bde was to remain at Matruh to refit, while simultaneously maintaining a state of readiness in anticipation of being ordered into action again or having to assist in the Fortress's defence. The Brigade formed a mobile column, Strangecol under Maj Stranger, 2 i/c of 1/2 FFB, to cope with assaults made on Matruh. A detachment of 3 Fd Coy formed part of the column.

On 31 January it was 2 SA Bde's turn to move to Gazala. Officers on leave were hastily recalled. The Brigade left for Gazala on 2 February. At that stage Section No 2 of 3 Fd Coy, SAEC was still at Derna but the rest of the unit crossed the Libyan border with the Brigade. It was the worst convoy the unit had so far encountered. The next day a dust storm raged making matters worse. Finally the camp at Sidi Abd el Salam, 12 miles ahead of the Railhead was reached and here the men had their first hot meal in two days. The unit also set up camp as it was believed that they would stay for about two weeks.

The next day (4 February) Lt P. Trevorrow left with a detachment of 3 Fd Coy, SAEC for Giarabub after collecting 1 000 mines at the Railhead. The detachment was to be attached to the column known as Dencol under Lt Col J. B. Bester (1/2 FFB). Dencol's main task was to deny Giarabub to the enemy. The column left on the 5th and on arriving at the oasis, Lt Col Bester reconnoitred the area and ordered A Coy (1/2 FFB) to occupy defensive positions covering the north-west pass to the oasis while B Coy,

1/2 FFB, covered the western pass. Patrols were also sent out.

On the same day (4 February) Lt Pryde's section returned from Derna where it had been constructing an improvised landing stage for deep water berthing. Good progress was made until orders were received to carry out demolitions at Derna because the Allied troops had withdrawn to Gazala. The section's project had to be demolished as well as eighteen Italian guns, ammunition and equipment. The old road to the escarpment of Derna as well as the road leaving Derna were to be demolished. The sappers worked throughout the night on the old road to drive a 5' x 4' x 15' deep gallery into the overhanging cliff which was filled with 900 lbs of Romite. Another shaft was driven into the retaining wall and charged with 900 lbs of Romite. The road leaving Derna was demolished at a hairpin bend.

The unit had expected to remain at Railhead for about two weeks but it was sent to a camp near Conference Cairn only to be sent back to Talata again. On arriving at Talata the unit (except the detachment at Giarabub) was instructed to move up to the front via Sidi Barrani and Tobruk, and it reached Acroma by the 9th. While staging near Acroma the unit's transport repairs were dealt with but because some necessary equipment was unobtainable, not all the problems could be rectified.

When 1 SA Div was brought up to the Gazala front, the defence system was reorganised on a two-division basis. The South Africans were placed on the northern sector of the front while the southern end was held by 4 Indian Div which was later replaced by 50 British Div. The northern sector, a line of 9½ miles, was held by 1 SA Bde on the right and the Independent Polish Bde on the left. When 2 SA Bde left Acroma on 16 February, the Brigade 'took over the coastal strip east of the inlet and for a depth of about five miles up to the rugged 400-ft. escarpment between Gazala and Acroma, to guard against seaborne or parachute attacks'¹⁰ Even before the Brigade took up position on the front, a battalion of NMR was ordered to organise a defensive box on the high ground of Acroma. This box was to prevent the enemy from establishing positions in the rear of the Allied

troops if they succeeded in breaking through the defence line.

The NMR together with 4 Fd Bty, a detachment from 3 Lt AA Bty and a supply detachment from 3 Fd Coy SAEC began establishing the box west of the Axis By-pass on 12 February. The sappers worked on the Acroma defences through the balance of the month and even when the Brigade moved to the coastal area on the 15th.

The ground was stony and this made the building of defensive positions rather difficult. Progress was slow and the Sappers often had to work night and day with their compressors. The positions had to be fenced in with a mine-field as well. Dummy positions were also constructed.

Life at Acroma wasn't very comfortable. The troops were housed in shallow slit trenches without shelter from sun and wind. Matters were worsened by continual strafing and bombing attacks. On the 14th 17 enemy aircraft were shot down in this locality and the next day 5 ME 109 F's bombed the camp. Ten bombs landed in the camp area but despite these drawbacks, work progressed.

On 6 March the Battalion was relieved by 6 SA Bde to take up a position formerly held by the 2 Battalion of the Independent Polish Brigade at the Polish Box. The main force of 2 SA Bde had already taken over the defences of the coastal sector of the Gazala Front, eastwards from the Gazala peninsular. This sector of the coast area formed a narrow valley enclosed on the sides by low hills which ran parallel to the rugged escarpment, which was about five miles from the coast. At the foot of the valley the coastal hills flattened out and the valley was only 1 000 yards wide. Here the Italians had earlier constructed a tank trap from the sea to the escarpment. This became the Brigade's main defence line. On the Brigade's right flank was the Mediterranean and the 400-ft escarpment on its left. The only two passes ascending the escarpment were Agheila and Gazala, both were narrow and steep. The Brigade dug in and started to strengthen these positions. At this stage CTH held the peninsular and the floor of the valley. The Battalion was also responsible for patrolling the area and guarding the vital water position of Agheila while NMR held the Acroma Box to deal with any successful Axis penetrations of the

Gazala line which was very thinly held and lightly fortified at this stage. C Coy of 1/2 FFB held Point 181 — a small box — to cover the Divisional HQ. The rest of this Battalion, Dencol, was at Giarabub.

On 16 February 3 Fd Coy moved to the Brigade's new sector. Camp was established and camouflaged and Section no 3 moved up to the CTH lines on the same day. Three days later the Section commenced work on the tank traps and the waterpoint at Agheila. The section was also responsible for laying shrapnel mines in the anti-tank ditch and for laying mines in the coastal sector. By the 25th 2 589 mines had been laid. While working on the mine-field at the anti-tank trench with EP II mines, Sgt E. E. Mace was killed on the 23rd and Sappers R. E. Wiid and T. P. Kannemeyer were injured.

Meanwhile Section No 1 started working on the roads in the Gazala area. This Section was also responsible for the demolition of enemy equipment and ammunition. More than three tons of 6" shells were destroyed along with two Italian 6" guns.

The raid on Tmimi

During March 1942 6 SA Bde (2 SA Div) moved up to the Gazala Front from the Solum area to relieve 2 SA Bde which was to move forward into the lines previously held by the Polish Carpathian Independent Brigade. For the first time since the Ethiopian Campaign, 2 SA Bde was in front-line contact with enemy troops. The northern sector of the Gazala line was held by 6 SA Bde on the right, 1 SA Bde in the centre and 2 SA Bde on the left.

At that stage the Axis forward troops were holding a line stretching from Eluet el Bgheua to Wadi Gsebiat and Eluet el Agara. It appeared as if they were extremely anxious to avoid any interference with their aerodromes at Tmimi and Martuba. High Command therefore decided to launch a large scale raid into Axis territory to gain information and to damage these two aerodromes.

It was decided that 1 SA Div would harass the enemy along the whole of its Divisional sector to force him out of his strongpoints at Eluet el Bgheua, Wadi Gsebiat to Point 112, while 50 Div would send strong columns out to attack and sabotage Tmimi and Mar-

tuba. The two divisions would work in co-operation and each division would detach three columns for the raid, codenamed 'Full-size.'

50 Div's columns were under command of Brig Nichols. On the first day Column A was to move forward to Point 156 and at first light on the second day operate against Tmimi. Column B was to move forward during the night to El Ezzeiat to operate against the aerodrome at Martuba the following day. Column C was to form the mobile reserve and had to secure the ridge at Eluet el Agara to cover the withdrawal of the other two columns. 1 Armoured Division was to co-operate with 50 Div to protect its vulnerable left flank.

While 50 Div's troops were advancing on these aerodromes 1 SA Div would harass the Axis troops along its frontier. Two columns, known as Quincol and Jockcol, would be sent forward to operate against Axis strongpoints stretching from Point 112 to Eluet el Daba and Eluet el Bgheua respectively. The third column, Harecol, would occupy Bir Temrad to cover the withdrawal of 50 Div.

Brig Poole was to be in command of the South African columns. 2 SA Bde was to provide infantry for Harecol and Quincol, while Jockcol was made up of 1 Transvaal Scottish Battalion. 3 Fd Coy, would detach Engineers to come under Quincol and Jockcol.

The raid was planned for 20-21 March but before it was launched a small party was sent out with an armoured car patrol. The Suicide Squad as the party was called, was made up of unmarried volunteers. It comprised Lt Krause of 1 Fd Coy, accompanied by two Sappers from his section and Lt Thomson and two Sappers from 3 Fd Coy. The rest of the Squad was made up of four infantrymen from the various battalions. The Squad underwent intensive training which included experiments on sabotaging aircraft. On the 14th Lts Krause and Thomson set out with the patrol to the vicinity of Tmimi. They were shelled and machine-gunned on the way which indicated that the assignment was even more difficult than previously anticipated.

The final attempt was made on 21 March. Harecol occupied Bir Temrad but when Jock-



Sweeping for mines in the battle area. As soon as a mine is detected, it is dug up and rendered harmless.



Sappers marking out blasting positions.

col went forward it came under fire which made an advance difficult and the column was withdrawn that evening. Quincol occupied Wadi Gsebiat without making contact with the enemy. The same afternoon, however, whilst advancing on Wadi ed Daba, the forward platoon of the CTH was shelled and forced to return to Wadi Gsebiat whence the whole column was withdrawn. The British columns too failed to achieve their targets.

Although the raiding force did not succeed in sabotaging the aerodromes at Tmimi and Martuba, the effort kept the enemy forces tied up. The attention of the Luftwaffe and Regia Aeronautica was also distracted which enabled an important convoy to Malta to cross the dangerous area between Crete and Cyrenaica. This was the main reason for the attempt, although it was not known at the time.

The Polish Box

Prior to this raid 2 SA Bde had moved into the lines previously occupied by the Polish Carpathian Independent Brigade. This move, carried out during the nights of 15-18 March 1942, placed 1 SA Bde on 2 SA Bde's right flank instead of its left. The Brigade's new positions ran along a ridge about 60 feet high and more or less parallel to the main escarpment. The eastern extremity of the Brigade's positions was about five miles south of the foot of the Gazala Bay or Inlet and north of the ridge, where long and deep wadis broke up the escarpment ahead of the Brigade.

When 2 SA Bde took over, Brig Poole re-planned the position so that it was held on a two-battalion front: CTH was placed on the left flank i.e. the entire top of the ridge while NMR held the right flank with B Coy holding the edge of the ridge, and C Coy a small box along the floor of the valley. A Coy held another box on the extreme right flank. The latter was previously occupied by 1/2 FFB, which was at this stage kept in reserve and was holding defensive positions to the rear.

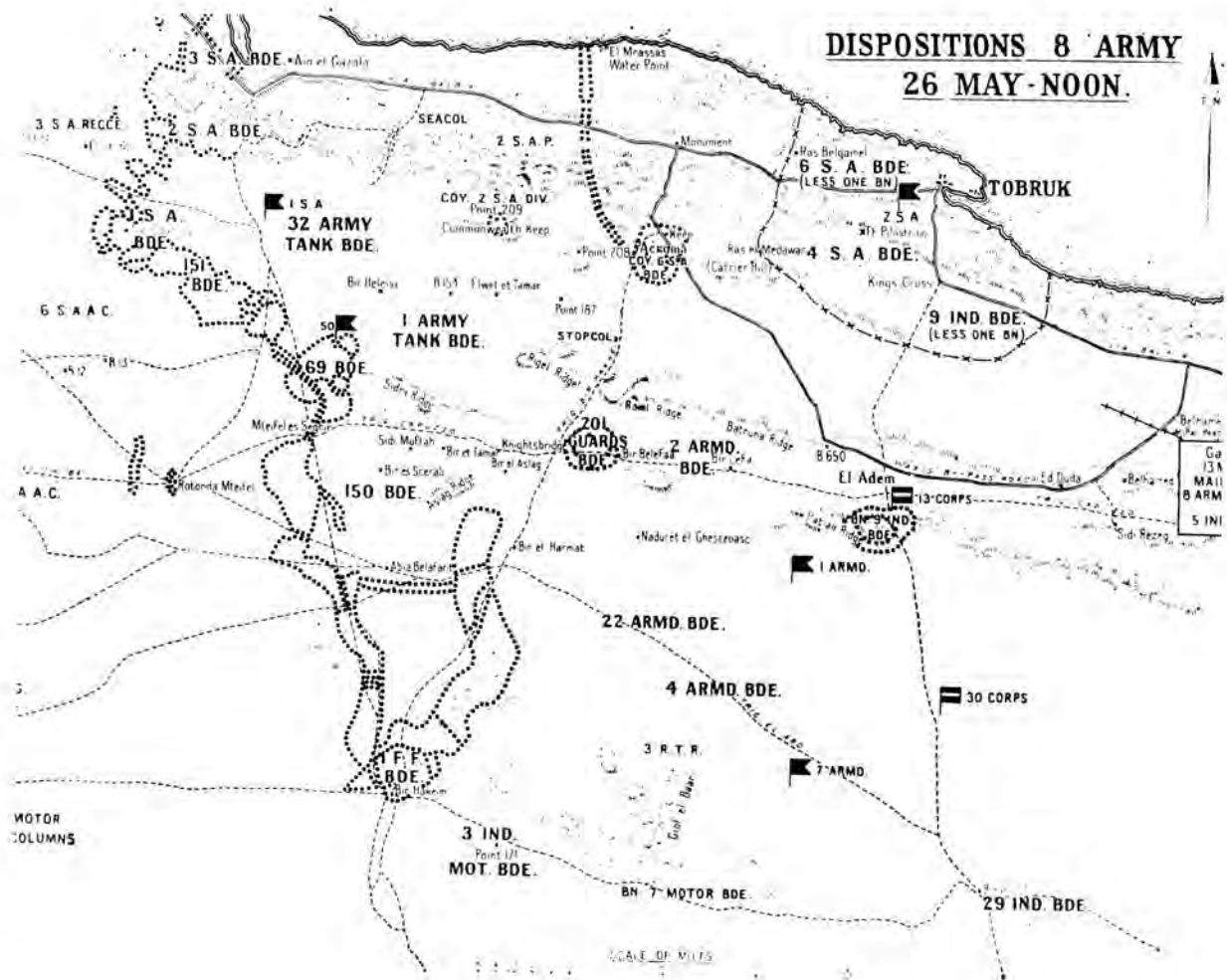
Work on this new sector commenced on 23 March. A series of strong defensive positions were developed and the minefields in front of the Brigade's positions were doubled and in some places trebled. Anti-personnel mines as well as anti-tank mines were thickly sown.

On 28 March Genl Gott, XIII Corps Commander, inspected the Brigade's sector and proposed an extension of the minefield. The extension was completed by 11 April and the minefield adjoining 150 Bde's position was completed on the 18th. Owing to the shortage of mines, and the number of defects in the EP II mines — approximately 12% in every batch were 'duds' — it was decided to repair about 1 000 of these mines. S/M Cunningham, 3 Fd Coy, perfected a new anti-personnel mine which was made in (empty) American beer tins. Demonstrations before the CRE were very successful and the mines were widely employed along the Brigade's sector.

Each battalion was responsible for close patrolling of its front. Once strongpoints had been established ahead of the Brigade the battalions, CTH and 1/2 FFB, patrol areas were extended to include the area in front of these points as well. Guarded gaps were prepared in the minefields through which to check patrols in and out. 3 Fd Coy, was entrusted to prepare holes for mines in these gaps which were then temporarily filled with sandbags. The Sappers had to retain these lifted mines in readiness along the sides of the gaps.

At first 1/2 FFB patrolled Bir Temrad daily but on 29 March 2 SA Bde established an outpost there. A patrol, Rosecol under Capt W. G. Sheppard CTH, was stationed there to operate daily from Bir Temrad in any direction according to the patrol commander's discretion. At night the patrol was to return to Temrad to take up all-round defensive positions which were protected by a belt of mines laid by 3 Fd Coy.

The primary object of the patrol was to reconnoitre the area and to engage any 'soft stuff' with which it was capable of dealing. If a superior force threatened the patrol, it was to withdraw — even to the Gazala line if necessary. In any event the patrols were to continue until further orders were received. On 6 April, however, strong enemy columns advanced and took up position only a few miles ahead of these outposts. On the same day the enemy troops launched a raid on Bir Temrad forcing the patrol to withdraw before their tanks, giving the enemy troops the opportunity to establish a series of strongpoints four or five miles west of the Brigade's



The Gazala line.

positions which restricted the range of the patrols. Patrols were now sent out at night and they often crawled up to the enemy lines to gain information or to lift specimen mines. Engineers often accompanied them to lay mines in vehicle tracks or in their trenches. In fact this became the normal practice of these patrols.

During this period the rest of 3 Fd Coy was instructed to supply engineering requirements to the Brigade in order of priority as indicated from time to time. Towards the end of April the laying of blast aprons in front of all automatic weapon emplacements became a priority task. On the 30th the Company was called on to work on a new minefield in front of the NMR lines.

Rommel pre-emptive stroke

2 SA Bde received the first warning of an impending German offensive on 14 May. Both

sides had been preparing to launch an offensive though by May it was clear that Rommel had won the race to forestall the Allied offensive, 'Sausage Roll', by about a week.

The offensive assumed more or less the same form as Operation Crusader. On 26 May Group Crüwell, comprising Italian and German infantry, was to attack in the direction of Got el Mehato-Ain el Gazala in the hope of drawing the Allied armour to the north while the motorised formations moved into position to move round the Allies' southern flank at Bir Hacheim. Once rounding the southern flank the force would then swing to the north to take the line from the rear. Both forces would then co-operate to annihilate 1 SA Div and 50 Div with pincer movements.

Rommel was overoptimistic in his preparations. He underestimated the fighting quality of the British troops and over-estimated his own attacking force as he thought the ar-

moured forces sweeping past Bir Hacheim would only need 24 hours to be in position in the rear of the Gazala line. Consequently despite his initial successful encounters, he suffered a few reverses and was seriously checked by 22 Armoured Brigade some five miles south of Naduret el Ghesceuasc. The British forces even managed to penetrate into the rear of the assaulting columns while the forces on the Gazala line repulsed Group Crüwell's attempts. Rommel was forced to take up position in the 'Cauldron' to recover and to re-establish his communications.

During this short pause, work on the Gazala defences was pushed ahead as fast as possible in anticipation of further assaults. 3 Fd Coy, completed 1 SA Div's Battle positions in the 27th while artillery and anti-tank positions were prepared with the help of compressors. The Brigade's defence area was developed to resist an attack from the rear. Sappers were sent out on patrols with the three battalions, 2 SA Bde, and on 30 May Section No 1 reported that during its patrol with the NMR, large quantities of mortars, machine-guns and ammunition were destroyed in enemy lines.

On 2 June a new minefield was started, linking point 181, a ruined village, with the big wadi at 1 SA Div HQ. The minefield was completed on the 7th but the next day work on it again resumed when instructions were received to extend it.

On 6 June the Eighth Army resumed the offensive to 'crush Rommel in the Cauldron'.¹¹ The attempt failed with heavy losses and 1 SA Div was called-upon to launch a full-scale raid behind the Axis positions at Gazala — Alem Hanza and to raid the enemy concentration between Temrad and the coast that same evening. However Genl Pienaar, who took command of 1 SA Div when Genl Brink left to recover from a back injury, could only launch the attack the next day. He instructed the South African Brigades to move forward to establish a 15 mile line at a distance two to six miles ahead of his positions. A special raiding force would then move forward to raid the enemy's lines of communication. 2 SA Bde sent NMR and CTH forward accompanied by Sappers from 2 Sections of 3 Fd Coy. The NMR managed to take its objective before being pinned down but the CTH was forced to fall back on the NMR be-

fore both battalions were withdrawn. Thus the attempt of Eighth Army to take the offensive ended in complete failure. Rommel continued to hold a secure lodgement in the middle of the Allied lines from where he threatened to move on the coast isolating 1 SA Div and 50 Div from the rest of the Army.

On 11 June Bir Hacheim fell to the enemy but even before it had been occupied Eighth Army had already prepared a new line of defence to the south protecting the rear of the Gazala line. The boxes at Knightsbridge and El Adem formed the key-point of the new defensive front with a second series of strong-points, running almost parallel to the southern front but about nine miles further to the north. The second line stretched eastward at right angles to the box held by the 69 British Bde, which was part of the main Gazala Line, then through Bir Heleisi, point B154, Eluet et Tamar, and Point 187 to the minefield south of Acroma. Rigel Ridge, held by 201 Scots Guards Bde, linked this line with Knightsbridge.

1 SA Div was called on to detach a garrison to occupy point B154 later known as William's Post. The composite force comprising infantry from the four regiments, a machine-gun battalion and Engineers from 1, 2 and 3 Fd Coys, SAEC was under the command of Lt-Col W. P. Minnaar of RPS. The force started working in full view of the enemy observation posts on 8 June. A minefield of about 5 000 mines was laid round the box and another 5 000 were used to link it with the other strongpoints on its flanks. Rapid progress was made despite sporadic attacks on the post, and by the 12th work on the post was completed. Sapper W. Stevens of 3 Fd Coy, received an immediate award of the Military Medal for the exemplary manner in which he carried out his duties at William's Post.

In the meantime the situation in the Cauldron continued to deteriorate and 2 SA Bde was instructed to provide for the defence of Eluet et Tamar, situated barely 1½ miles east of William's Post to prevent yet another attempt at isolating the Allied forces on the Gazala Line. Lt Col J. Bester was sent with a column, Bestcol, together with 26 engineers under Lt Trevorrow (3 Fd Coy) and medical personnel. On the evening of 12 June Best-

col took up position at Eluet et Tamar to relieve 9 Rifle Bde. The force hurriedly dug in and laid an incomplete minefield round its positions.

After the fall of Bir Hacheim the armoured forces moved on to Knightsbridge and El Adem where a furious tank battle ensued to isolate Knightsbridge. Once Knightsbridge fell to the Axis the tenuous line presented by William's Post, Best Post and Point 187, would not have been able to resist Rommel's advance to the coast. On the afternoon of the 13th his forces attacked Rigel Ridge and some of the armoured fighting vehicles came into contact with William's Post. The South Africans opened fire whereupon the force swung to the right to Best Post. Work on Best Post's defences was at that stage still proceeding, but the column managed to repel the attack.

The Gazala Line was now in serious danger and Ritchie decided that 1 SA Div and 50 Div had to be evacuated while there was still time. Though the decision was not taken till the morning of 14 June Genl Pienaar had already made the necessary preparations for such an event the previous day. He placed 1 SA Div on half an hour's notice to move to a point near Capuzzo and 3 Fd Coy's detached sections were brought in as fast as possible.

On the 14th 1 SA Div and 50 Div began to evacuate their positions. During the course of the day the positions were thinned out and only the fighting troops remained to move with the main body that evening. The rearguard covering 1 SA Div was comprised of a composite body from each brigade, together with artillery and anti-tank support, and engineers. 2 SA Bde's group was commanded by Maj T. Plater of CTH while Brig du Toit who had relieved Brig Poole as Officer Commanding 2 SA Bde, undertook the task of commanding the rearguard of the whole division. Lt Col P. M. G. le Roux DSO (OC of NMR) temporarily took over command of 2 SA Bde.

As soon as the order to abandon Gazala came through, the thinning-out commenced. The coast roads became congested with traffic betraying the impending abandonment of the Gazala defensive positions to Rommel. Consequently on the morning of the 14th

while the two Divisions were making preparations to abandon their positions, Rommel urged the armoured divisions to thrust north with the utmost haste in order to cut off the Allied retreat. Bestcol was heavily attacked but the column withstood the onslaught despite the fact that a section of the minefield opposite the main enemy tank force had not been completed and only a single strand of wire saved the column from destruction.

Meanwhile evacuation of the Gazala Line continued. At 1100 hours a convoy of 10 vehicles containing technical stores and materials belonging to 3 Fd Coy left the Gazala front. The balance of the unit left in 21 vehicles at about 1530 hours leaving only a rear party of about 12 men under Lt Thomson behind to carry out demolitions.

The withdrawal was the most difficult ever experienced by the unit as the column was dive bombed and strafed at will and at one stage it was impossible to continue owing to the continued staving attacks of about 40 fighter aircraft. The unit lost five vehicles before Tobruk was reached. Here the unit gradually disintegrated into small groups which were all moving to the east until the camp allotted to it in the Tobruk area was reached. The first vehicle reached the camp at 1400 hours but by nightfall only a dozen had arrived and the whole head of the convoy appeared to be missing. The following day the unit continued to Sidi Omar where the rest of the convoy caught up with the unit and by 16 June only 80 men and 19 vehicles were still missing.

On the same day the Brigade left Tobruk for the Egyptian Frontier to take up the defence of the minor passes of the Halfaya escarpment. 1/2 FFB occupied Halfway House on the Sollum — Halfaya — Barrani escarpment while CTH and NMR covered Araqib and Rakait.

The second stage of the long retreat began when 1 SA Div was ordered to evacuate its positions on the Egyptian frontier and to move to El Alamein. 2 SA Bde was to remain behind to guard the escarpment passes. On the afternoon of 23 June, however, the Brigade was ordered to leave the border area as well. Before abandoning its position 3 Fd Coy was to demolish the ammunition, petrol and supply dumps as well as the waterworks

and the passes themselves. Lt Pryde and Maj Palmer remained behind to carry out the demolitions while the rest of the unit left in the main convoy for El Alamein.

El Alamein revisited.

In July 1942 when Auchinleck took command of the Eighth Army, he decided to build the final defences for the Nile Delta in the area stretching from the railway station at El Alamein to the Qattara Depression — an area of about forty miles which formed a natural bottle-neck.

The El Alamein Line, as the line of defence became known, consisted mainly of three defended areas or boxes at El Alamein, Naqb Abu Dweis, nearest to the Depression in the south, and Bab et Qattara which was more or less in the middle of the two. XXX Corps was to be in command of the northern sector of the line and XIII Corps, the southern end.

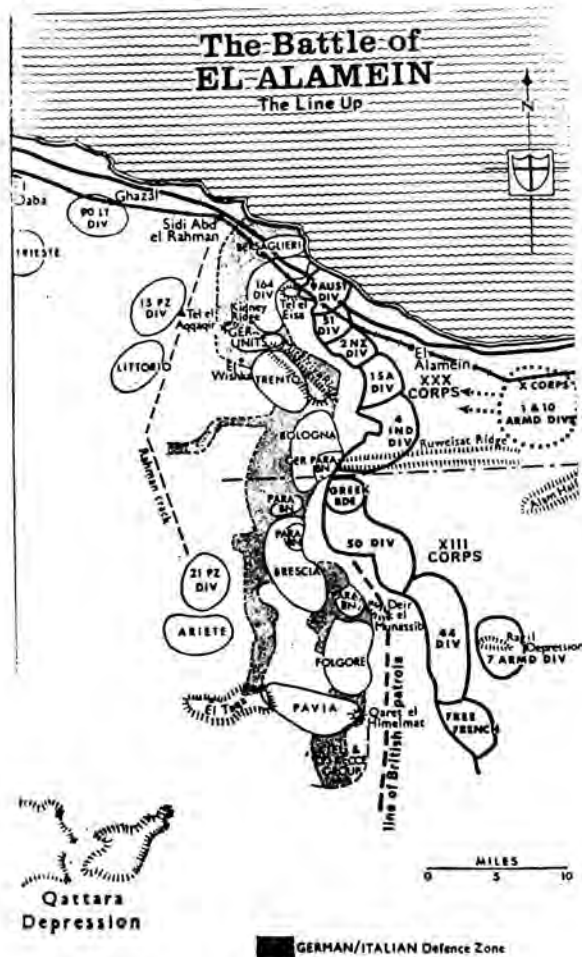
When 1 SA Div arrived at El Alamein it took over command of the Box and started pre-

paring the defences. On the 25th June 1942 2 SA Bde arrived, and temporarily took up position in the Alamein Box. Preparations were made for 3 Fd Coy to move south to the Qattara Depression but the move did not materialize and the sections were dispatched to their respective battalions and only HQ remained in the camp. Minelaying started immediately and 10 000 mines were laid by the 20th.

At this stage Auchinleck was well aware of Rommel's disinclination to attack fortified areas. Genl Pienaar was instructed to hold the Box at El Alamein with the least possible forces and to employ the remaining troops in mobile Battle Groups to operate outside the perimeter. 3 SA Bde was made responsible for the Box and the troops operating in the Battle Groups moved out. 2 SA Bde's Battle Group under Brig O. L. de W. du Toit moved to positions south of the Box and more or less a mile west of Alem el Onsol with 1 SA Bde's Group four miles to the west and just north of the Ruweisat Ridge. 2 SA Bde's Group comprised 1/2 FFB to which Lt Trevorrow with 20 details from his section were attached. The remaining infantry of the two Brigades, including the remainder of 3 Fd Coy, was sent to Amariya to form another group called Scrubforce under Col E. P. Hartshorn.

During this period the Sappers at Amariya were re-equipped, and a third of the personnel were given permission to spend a day in Alexandria. The rest of the unit in the forward areas was not so privileged, for Rommel's pursuit had already brought him to the El Alamein Line which he attacked on 1 July. The sappers in the forward areas were therefore engaged in mine laying, demolition preparations — if retreat became necessary again — and defensive works. Some participated in a number of patrols and night reconnaissances.

On the night 26/27 July the unit participated in a major operation with 69 Bde and 2 Armoured Bde. The sapper contingent, consisting of 56 men under Maj Palmer and Lts Pryde and Luyt together with a detachment of 20 men under Lt Banks from 2 Fd Coy, was instructed to clear a 300 yard gap through an enemy minefield. The path was to be marked with special signposts for the advancing infantry. Work would commence



at midnight and a preliminary path about 15 yards wide was to be completed by 0030 hours. The rest of the path was to be completed by first light but owing to a heavy concentration of fire, completion of the preliminary path was considerably delayed. The rest of the path was completed by 0420 hours. At first light 69 Bde passed through the gap but were unable to make further progress and suffered heavily. All the troops in this area were also forced to withdraw a 1 000 yards, and the rest of the day was spent under very unpleasant conditions.

2 Armoured Bde following behind decided that the situation was unfavourable for a tank attack and the operation was cancelled. At 1800 hours the sapper detachment withdrew and by 2000 hours the whole force was retiring.

Sgt W. L. Aitcheson was awarded a Military Medal for his conduct during this operation. Despite extremely heavy fire he repeatedly returned to continue his search for mines, even after the main party had been withdrawn.

After the raid work continued on the defen-

ces. The unit was called upon not only to lay minefields but also to lift them. On 30 June 568 German mines were lifted. A number of derelict vehicles in no man's land were demolished because it was suspected that they were being used by the enemy as observation posts. A considerable amount of time was spent on digging in and on construction of artillery positions.

On 13 August Genl B. L. Montgomery relieved Genl Auchinleck as commander of the Eighth Army. Once in command Montgomery realized that before an offensive could be attempted his troops would need a period of reorganization and training. Despite the difficulty of holding the front and training at the same time, groups were relieved at certain periods to move back to undergo intensive training. On 16 September it was 2 SA Bde's turn and 3 Fd Coy accompanied the Brigade when it moved to Alem el Onsol. Here the Brigade was to train in conjunction with 40 Royal Tank Regiment which was a part of 23 Armoured Brigade. After the usual digging-in 3 Fd Coy started to work on the minefields while all the sappers who were not employed



Improving and renovating the defences.

trained. One of the aspects of the training programme which received much attention was moving troops through a minefield by night, culminating in a very instructive night exercise. Training continued through the rest of the month until instructions came for the Brigade to relieve 3 SA Bde in the El Alamein area. 3 Fd Coy was to relieve 2 Fd Coy. The change-over was carried out on the night of 2/3 October.

The Second Battle of El Alamein

Preparations continued for the forthcoming offensive which was to take place before Operation Torch, (the landing of the Anglo-American forces in Algeria and Morocco). From the outset it was realized that the battle would be dictated in its early stages by the minefields, laid by both sides in an attempt to give depth to their positions. It was therefore essential that the start of the battle would take place in moonlight. There was a full moon on 24 October and so the 23rd was chosen as D-day. The minefields were not only one of the factors that dictated the timing of the offensive but also led to code-naming of the offensive 'Operation Light-foot'.¹²

The offensive was launched to trap the enemy in his 'present' area and to destroy him there as outflanking movements were not possible. At this stage the flanks of both forces rested on the Qattara Depression to the south and on the coast to the north. The main blow was to be directed from the north by XXX Corps with massive artillery support. Once the enemy defences had been breached the bulk of the armour, X Corps, would follow through and move into a position astride the enemy's supply lines. It was hoped that this would draw the enemy's armour which would not be able to stand against the more powerful British. After the destruction of the enemy armour, the Allied forces would move against the infantry. XIII Corps in the Southern Sector would attack simultaneously to prevent the enemy from moving his troops to the north.

At that stage XXX Corps consisted of four divisions. From north to south were the 9th Australian, 51st Highland, 2nd New Zealand and 1st SA Divisions. These divisions were to attack on a six mile front lying between two ridges, the Tel el Eisa and Miteiriya. The



Genl B. L. Montgomery.

first two divisions were to drive due west to form a northern corridor while the other two were to advance in a south-westerly direction to secure Miteiriya ridge, which was considered the key to the enemy's positions on this part of the front, and would simultaneously establish the southern corridor. Once these corridors had been formed X Corps under Lt Genl Sir H. Lumsden would pass through and position itself at the far end to bring on the expected armour battle.

The operation itself involved a series of infantry attacks to gain possession of the enemy minefield in order to make gaps for the armour. The assault was divided into two phases. The first phase consisted of the attacks made by the four divisions to capture the enemy's forward defences, while the second phase was directed at the separate ultimate objectives thus securing the bridgehead, code-named Oxalix. During the advance on the final objective six tracks would be

cleared by XXX Corps to pass the armour through. The tracks were called (from north to south) Sun, Moon, Star, Bottle, Boat and Hat. 1 SA Div was responsible for clearing Hat, Bottle and Boat, west of the Springbok Road up to their termination at the western wire. 3 Fd Coy, would be responsible for Bottle, 1 Fd Coy for Hat and 2 Fd Coy for Boat.

Before the start of 'Operation Lightfoot', section No 2 of 5 Fd Coy under Lt A. O. Simpson was attached to 3 Fd Coy. The detachment arrived on 17 October 1942. After its arrival the Company's night patrols were doubled because the Sappers were to start lifting mines in no man's land. Various minefields were lifted and fenced in before the operation was launched. On 21 October the unit was instructed to provide sapper guides to assist in dropping fences surrounding the cleared fields.

That evening the engineers started to clear the lane 'Bottle' which was to be 40 yards wide. The unit was to mark it with a low trip-wire fence and short pickets placed to the right of the road moving in the direction of the enemy. The top of these pickets were either painted white or covered with a white cloth binding. 3 Fd Coy was also responsible for clearing a gap for each battalion (i.e. the NMR, CTH and 1/2 FFB) attached to 2 SA Bde.

On 23 October, 1, 3 and 5 Fd Coys moved forward to the concentration areas near the startline and at 1930 hours 3 Fd Coy was in position. At 2140 hours the artillery barrage began and continued with maximum intensity for fifteen minutes. The Royal Air Force assisted with this task in order to silence every known gun or gun position. Meanwhile section 4 under Lt A. O. Simpson had followed behind 'C' Coy of Regiment Botha. After advancing about 500 yards the first mines were encountered and an eight yard wide gap was immediately made. Towards its completion the enemy fire became so intense that the party was pinned down for over an hour but Cpl Fairall managed to reach battalion HQ to lead the support weapons to their position.

When the anti-tank fire decreased the party crawled forward to clear and mark the track. During this whole period section No 4 was unable to use its mine-detectors due to sniper

and machine-gun fire. Despite this drawback the sappers managed to reach the area where the infantry was to consolidate. After clearing the various areas required by the infantry the section tried to reconnoitre the area ahead but was pushed back by a counter-attack.

Despite initial success XXX Corps had not been able to pass all the armoured divisions of X Corps through. The advancing infantry had taken longer than planned to reach their final objectives: the Australian and New Zealand Divisions managed to take their final objectives but 1 SA Div and the 51 Highlanders were still a few yards short at daybreak. During the day they reached their objectives and the infantry bridgehead was now virtually complete. 1 Armoured Div was able to pass through the northern corridor but 10 Armoured Div, using the southern one, was delayed at first. On reaching the infantry bridgehead 1 Armoured Div began to exploit its position and 10 Armoured Div followed later on.

After the different gaps had been cleared, 3 Fd Coy began to assist in consolidation of the infantry positions. Some of the mines lifted in enemy minefields were relaid and a section of the Qattara road was cleared. During the latter assignment ten large scale booby traps were found connected to 500 lb bombs.

On the night of 26/27 October Lt Meadley's section was instructed to lay a minefield in an area which was very open with no natural cover. The sappers came under fire when they began. They then attempted to find cover behind one of the mine trucks but the enemy brought down anti-tank fire on the truck. Only when the artillery laid down a barrage could work continue. On cessation of the barrage the party was again exposed to machine-gun and anti-tank fire which wounded the section Sergeant.

At this stage three-quarters of the front had been mined at intervals of ten yards while the rest of the mines had been placed in position on the ground. When CTH could not supply any further cover to enable the sappers to complete the field, Maj Palmer (OC of 3 Fd Coy) instructed them to abandon the work. By now the section was completely pinned down, making retreat difficult and the men

were forced to roll and crawl to the trucks. After the retreat one of the group was reported missing. Only later on was it learnt that he had the unfortunate experience of being pinned down in a shellhole for about twelve hours.

The next day (27 October) the Company learned that 1 SA Div would be relieved by 4 Indian Div to take over the New Zealand front and 2 SA Bde would move back to the reserve position. The move was carried out the following day. On reaching 2 SA Bde's new position, 3 Fd Coy began delousing and consolidating it while No 2 Section began working on a new lateral road under Miteiriya ridge. During this period the detachment from 5 Fd Coy was instructed to return to its unit and left on the 27th. Work continued in this area until instructions were received for 2 SA Bde to relieve 151 Bde.

Delousing the new area commenced immediately as did work on the minefields. However, on 14 November the Company was instructed to move to Qassasin where it remained until it was instructed to move to Suez. On 1 December the Company arrived at the Transit Camp to embark for Dunban.

From now until the end of the war the unit would operate in the Union, training many of

its members for service in other engineering squadrons serving in Italy. Even in training the Company made its contribution to the domestic war effort. At Cape Town and Potchefstroom detachments of 3 Fd Coy erected field works, strengthened coastal defences, constructed bombing ranges and made improvements to military camps. For 3 Fd Coy the war drew to a close on 8 May 1945 on a far quieter note than it had begun, and in sharp contrast to the hectic activity of two years foreign service in the front line.

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1. I.S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East Vol. III*, (London, 1960) p. 3.
 2. Genl C. W. M. Norrie succeed Genl Pope upon the death of the latter on 5 October 1941.
 3. J. A. I. Agar-Hamilton and L. C. F. Turner, *The Sidi Rezegh Battles*, (Cape Town, 1957), p. 75.
 4. J. A. I. Agar-Hamilton and L. C. F. Turner, *op cit.* p. 75.
 5. This was the most important part of the training as the desert is bare and featureless with no distinct landmarks from which to take your bearings.
 6. N. Orpen, *War in the Desert* (Cape Town, 1971) p. 139.
 7. I.S.O. Playfair, *op cit.*, p. 96.
 8. N. Orpen, *op cit.*, p. 181.
 9. Agar-Hamilton and Turner, *op cit.*, p. 6.
 10. N. Orpen, *op cit.*, p. 180.
 11. Agar-Hamilton & Turner, *op cit.*, p. 38.
 12. F. Majdalany: *The Battle of El Alamein*. (London, 1965) p. 71.