

WWII Primary Source

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Butcher, Auckland, NZ

Gunner Thomas Kirby Pollock

Service Number: 24717

6th Field Regiment, NZ Artillery

Served: North Africa, First Battle of El Alamein

Killed in Action 4 July 1942

Buried in El Alamein War Cemetery, Egypt

Died in NZ 1977



Look for further information:

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Archives New Zealand (archives.govt.nz)

WORLD WAR II DESERT WAR

NORTH AFRICA

(LYBIAN CAMPAIGN)

Copy of diary written in the field during the "Crusader" action in the Libyan Campaign.

(16 Sept 1941 to 29 Dec 1941)

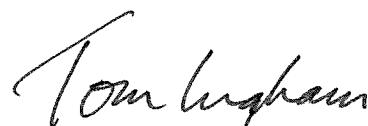
GUNNER: (TOM) T.K. POLLOCK

(24717 - Joined at Whakatane)

R.H.Q. 6TH FIELD REGIMENT (48 BATTERY)

Original Diary Held By:

(Tom Pollock's nephew)



C/- 7 Fickling Avenue
Hillsborough
Auckland N.Z.

April 1987

(Note included in diary)

PLEASE DO NOT LOSE

Dear Beryl,

This is my diary of the Libyan Campaign just a brief summary of some of the events. I wrote it and have not re-read it since writing. I entered up mostly every evening missing sometimes and making up next day, it is just as I saw things, I'd rather you not read it, as some things may upset you, if you want to well O.K. The first half is O.K., as it is before action.

Dairy sent home up to todaay 13 September 1941.
(No record of this diary to date)

Saturday 13 September 1941
Went to Helwan with Mills for Doc Hays washing. Bought Xmas cards and sent them away also Haydns parcel, comics bucket animal book, diary odds and ends.

Tuesday 16 September

Loaded up with drinks at YMCA etc. left Molfazal 1.30pm got as far as the halfway house 85 miles at 7.15pm everything moving up, passed big aerodrome, planes all sizes parked over area miles in extent, desert drome made tea, bully-gomins. etc. tucket in at 9.30pm.

Wednesday 17 September

Rose at 4am made the boys a cup of tea, orders are rifles all loaded, tin hats worn, if raided no leaving trucks as in Greece, trucks to go like hell off the road and spread out, personnel to lay on floor if possible 130 miles to go. Past Ameryd and Alex R.A.F. Bomber gave us a fright flew along out convoy so low that we could have nearly jumped up and touched him, his wing only about thirty yards out from out trucks. Reached Alex 2.30 branched off to Baggush on Mersoh Matruh Rd. Spread out and halted for tea at 5.10 Streams of military traffic both ways Camped out areas both sides of road from turn off workshops hospitals etc. Can see sea.

Passed desert dromes,
hundreds of planes are in-
pieces, passed us going
back on trucks.
Did 102 miles today.

Thursday 18 September

I rose at 4am made boys cup
tea. Mediterranean mile
away no ship in sight.
Moved off at 8am. Indians,
Africans, NZ Corps for
miles. Streams of
traffic both ways O.I.
tanks on trailers being
brought back for repairs,
big beauties. Shot down
planes R.A.F. also being
brought back quite a number
also on ground. Travelled
103 miles passing camped
soldiers and gear all the
way. Many aerodromes en
route well stocked with
planes. Plenty of
escort all day too.

Friday 19 September

Arrived at Baggush. After
passing Daber dug in straight
away, we are third line of
defence. Everyone lives
underground in dugouts,
trucks and guns all out of
sight. Same positions as
our troops had in January.
Like a rabbit warren every-

thing under ground, each
four or five chaps having
quite a big room. 13
bombers R.A.F. going over to
give Jerry hell. Bombers
and fighters flying over us
R.A.F. all day. Another
flight of 12 at midnight. I
was on piquet.

Saturday 20 September

Mail in, big disappointment
every man in R.H.Q. got one
or two letters but me.
Went for swim in Mediterranean,
lovely and warm but sand is
full of oil from sunken
ships, got it all over our
feet. Butcher shop in dug
out quite a work of art.
Cemetery along side us of
boys killed in last push
six months ago. One of
them is an English Lord.
Alex newspapers are being
flown to us daily till we
make out push. Cut down to
two water bottles a day of
water to wash shave etc. and
drink. Doing a spot of C.B.
today. Jack Rider and I
got giggles at midnight when
making cocoa in dugout
before going on prowler,
couldn't stop and got quite
sore laughing so much.
Killed a scorpion today, not
so good. Hell of a job to

keep my rifle clean, sand
is like flour, very fine.

Sunday 21 September

Church parade at 1.30pm at
the Oasis about a mile
away. Bully Bexwerth flag
on it for alter. Desert
dogs keep us awake at
night howling, they are
never seen, too wild.
Our bombers going over all
the time in relays.
Growing a moustache.
Another mail in and again
no mail from Beryl, can't
understand it. We have
dugout parties now, one
dugout invites another to
the evening and cards and
supplies supper, such as
it is. Sometimes they
are quite good. Our
truck, Q.5. challenged
frank's truck Q.4. to a
500 match, winners to turn
on supper, we won. Good
supper. 30, 4th Regt,
boys washed out to sea in
undertow, 4 drowned.
Must watch our step.

Boys that were drowned were
buried in the little desert
cemetery today, will all be
shifted after war, buried in
just a blanket sewn up.
Volleys were fired. Rained
like hell today, first for
nine months. No air raids
yet. Had strange birthday
party in dugout. Jack
Rider, Tom Woodell, Mark
Reorely and I, they bought
some beer and new bread and
we had a great time. They
like the fruit spread that
Nora sent.

Tuesday 23 September

We are having our own lunch
today. Frank pinched some
onions and tomatoes, Jack got
a loaf and I supply the steak,
the best food ever. Get
very hungry here with sea
air. Flares dropped on
our dromes last night. So
bright that one can read by
them twenty miles away.
They nearly float. Sky
is full of our bombers going
out on raids.

Monday 22 September

My birthday, I have ordered
beer for our bottle party.
Fed up no mail, everyone
gets it but me so bugger
them, I'll play same
game.

Wednesday 24 September

Watched a big flight of our
bombers going away last
night at midnight. Circl-
ing over our heads with
their wing lights on, the
only way we can tell that

they are ours. They zoom and roar over our heads as the drome is only just over the hill. Jack and I went to the heavy work-shops, No. 42 and picked up our L.A.D. boys who have been cutting observation holes in cab roofs for our trucks. Camped on beach and dug right in, while there I washed my tarpaulin we tried to catch some fish with it but was too heavy. Wrestling with Joe Delamare, I put a leg lock on him and put his knee out of joint we go it back alright. Great to watch formations of bombers with fast fighter escort weaving in and out so as to kill their speed. Boys put a notice on my Butcher Shop dugout while I was away, "Tom's 'Ole"

Thursday 25 September

Jack Rider gone to Alex for stores, extras, etc. Two pay trip. Claude Chapman's birthday last night so we held party in his dugout.

Friday 26 September

Colonel gone crazy putting swags of the boys on the mat for untidy beds and stupid pinpricking

things like that when we are all but in action. Jack and I play crib every night have some great tussles. I'm on piquet tonight worse luck. Bombers going over our heads in relays nines and tens. Jerry Stuka dive bomber escorted in by two of our fighters one either side, made him land on our drome, nice new one too.

Saturday 27 September

Boys digging like hell. Getting more stuff underground. I did four hours of it this afternoon, I'm black as a nigger seldom wear a shirt now.

Sunday 28 September

Today has been one continual drone R.A.F. gave Jerry hell today 118 planes all heavy bombers went over all at once did we get a thrill, I'll say and ever since, odd lots have been doing same. Got a luminous oil gauge from a crashed Blenheim near us today. Went down and swam in little lagoon in sea with Nick, Wally Mills, very nice too.

Tuesday 30 September

R.A.F. Dive Bombers overhead all day practising sending burst of fire into the sea
BRRRRRP BRRRRRP.

Terrific raids either by Jerry on Mersoh Matruh 27 miles away or our naval gunfire, not quite sure which, ground trembled even away back here. Got good mail from B. today.

Parcel from Doris. Had wonderful feed today in big dugout, we always laugh when using it during day. Roof is community lavatory seat three holes with tip up seats or rather lids on holes, during the day we open these up for ventilation, also good for observing what kind of planes are up. We always laugh at the prospect of someone using them. Scorpion chased me out of bed last night, what with bull ants, scorpions, snakes, asps etc. not so good.

football. Frank and I then drove down to the F.S.P. and drew the Regt's Rations I drove all round and distributed it and finished by 4.30pm. Sky alive with our planes, had a look at the German Stuka Dive Bomber on the drome which our boys R.A.F. shepherded down. Nearly full moon.

Thursday October 2nd

We of R.H.Q. doing gun drill in our spare time in case we are needed, using E Troop guns. Big doings at Mersoh Matruh last night, sky was lit up with Ack-Ack fire and heavy detonations. Played crib with Claude Chapman while etc. boys went down to the oasis on a beer beano. Only drawing 50 pt. a fortnight, enough for stamps. Flies eat us alive most persistant damn things I ever knew.

Wednesday 1 October

Anniversary of arriving at Maadi Base Camp. Did my own jobs and then took over Tom Woodill's truck to let him go to play

Friday October 3rd

All paying in 25 pt to finance our canteen, just a small one for R.H.Q. stamps, beer, cigarettes, chocolate. Had card party ?? in Q4 last night, 3

games all. They turned on a good supper, tinned fruit biscuits, cocoa. Colonel came over and had a long yarn, one of the rare occasions on his part. An old Valencia came over today looked funny lined up on Drome with Glen Martins, Lysanders Blenheims, etc. R.A.F. are painting circles on the captured Stuka. Driving A.4 again today.

Monday October 6th
Topees taken away today looks like action soon. Killed a snake today with a shovel, two feet long. Flies are very trying. Our canteen opened quite well 16 Pounds first days takings. Jack Rider and I beat Tom Woodill and Frank at 500. Dr. Hay treating me for piles, nearly had to go away for operation, damn sore. New N.Z. Ack Ack Regt. just came up, mobile Bofors look good too. Anti Tank Regt. also just came in, N.Z.'s too, guns mounted on cut down 3 ton trucks, very mobile. Had a swim with the boys.

Thursday October 9th
Went on ten day manoeuvres left camp at 11am went 32 miles back to Daber and cut inland. North 15 miles, rough stony, rocky and dirt, got lost and found twice. Picked up guns at 7pm. Fillet steak for lunch. Travelled till 12-15 midnight in desert formation. Slept on rocks, tired out. Each truck doing own cooking.

Saturday October 11th
Nothing but dashing full pelt from place to place in pitch dark, ground terrifically rough, no lights, each truck ten yards from next, sometimes crawl sometimes go like hell and 50 miles an hour in close convoy is sure nerve wracking. Dust hides each truck, it hangs in palls. Anti-Tank Artillery etc. etc. criss-crossing all over the desert.

Sunday October 12th
At G.O.C.'s conference he stressed that our infantry must not stop to star gaze atour shells going overhead but must keep going into the barrage, our range being lifted as they cover the ground. Ditto with mine-fields to tread lightly but

not to dodge about, as mans weight won't set one off and if attention is side tracked enemy will mow them down with covering machine gun fire. G.O.C. indicated at tough time taking Halfaya Pass. Lot of fun straightening out Ross and Haj's bikes with a pick after terrific rough ride on our truck. More manoeuvres tomorrow. No mail missed again.

Monday October 13th

Roger Morrison (or Mertle) and Scotty gone to hospital with dysentry. Still at Baggush. Been as far as Sidi Haneish. The plaintive notes of the last post strike our ears so often as another one of these great fellows are laid in the little desert cemetery, it is nearly full now. Dusk is the usual time.

Three burst are fired as a last salute the mates of the deceased usually make him a cross to their own pattern, some are well made and clever, others very simple and plain.

R.A.F. crosses are usually black with white lettering, five sergeant pilots

were put there in one day. Went for swim with boys, picked up shells for Beryl. Got her and my own ring back by post today wearing them on fingers side by side.

Tuesday October 14th

Tomohawks and Hurricanes came swooping up off adjacent aerodromes and roar low over our heads then letting go with their machine guns at the sea, just a test, but it brings back memories when those same splutters were aimed at us.

Another poor devil laid in the little fenced off plot today, one of our own boys died with dyptheria.

Rain and wind today with heavy dust storm just before. Flies are fair buggers. Water supply cut down again today. Y.M.C.A. mobile cinema here tonight, three cheers!

Thursday October 16th

Curried bully today and one had to stand in the wind while eating it to keep from catching fire

Sunday October 19th

Co. Frazer 5th Field injured badly, intelligence officer

killed, driver injured, his car went over a land mine in Marsoh Matruh.

Monday October 20th

Boys all on leave from G.5. So I take it over and go on manoeuvres for three days, Bert Jones cook and 2 only occupants.

Friday October 24th

Manoeuvres just same as last three, driving at night in formation etc. very dark nights but get a lot of thrills.

Monday October 27th

Another air raid today or rather tonight landed on the aerodromes just adjacent. Sky is full of our aircraft all day. Officer buried in the little plot also one other N.Z.E.T. Went to Quasaba. Got a new officer today, Billy Blyth going back to A.T.R. His name is Clarkson - Dobbs so all the boys are giving each other hyphenated names. Pork came in today and we had a great feed.

Thursday 30 October

Sent a cable to Marj. Another raid last night in bright moonlight but we missed it.

Sunday November 2nd

Quiet day.

Monday November 3rd

Church parade in full battle order today. Mills played football and had his pants torn off so Nick took his off and stood on the sideline for the rest of the game without any. He didn't care.

Tuesday November 4th

Killed scorpion alongside my head crawling up the wall. Frank cut his tail off, black one too. Driving for rations today. Hultquist M.P. committed suicide yesterday, buried today prior to transfer to our Regt.

November 5th

Held party in Q.4 last night I sang so much I couldn't speak at the end. We have formed the Western Desert Scorpions Quartet, Frank (base) Tom Woodell (Melody) myself (tenor) we were encored so

much that I lost my voice (Labatory man) (German Clock Mender) and so on. Did a shoot over the sea today. I passed, my new rifle is a corker. Big air raid last night we were singing as loud as we could to drown the roar of night fighters and the crashing of bombs on the adjacent Aerodromes. An old scotch soldier says "Dinna think" its the worst thing one can do out here. He says "When you can't sleep, work'. and when you can't work sleep'. Never think'." He certainly is right.

Pork again today.

Thursday November 6th

Drove for Tom Woodill today, was shown over the latest types of Glen Martin Maryl- and Bombers and a big Bristol Bomber. 24 hour Ariel Blitz going on today, planes landing and going all day, sky full too. South African pilots showed us round.

November 7th

Jerry hit our train at Fouka last night blew up most of it, ammo etc. Looks as if we move up soon everything points that way.

Phil Oldham killed a fox I am curing it for him after skinning it last night, accidentally pulled its plume off. More Grumann fighters flying about today. Went to Doctor today about me chest and breathing he said, just hereditary asthma if it gets too bad he will have me injected. Sighted etc. Check-Slovak schooner sneaking up to Tobruk with supplies for our chaps hugging the coast too. Known at the most dangerous trip in the world today.

Saturday November 8th

All Blacks played Springboks over by the heavy workshops area, must have been about eight or ten thousand of us there, N.Z. won 8 points to nil. Good game too. We were surrounded by a battery of N.Z. ACK ACK, guns in case of a surprise visit by Jerry. Our unit number changed to 53. Getting ready to move, got four agriculture books from Cyril Leesdale.

2nd General Hospital from Helwan, just moved in lock stock and barrell. Snowy Sheffield still with them too, must try and see him but it is nearly hopeless as our Div. is scattered all over the desert in an area of hundreds

of miles. Got new photos of Beryl and Haydn. Corkers too.

cold and hard stony ground
71 miles.

Monday November 10th

Life is a story in three volumes the past, the present, the yet to be, the past is over and hid away the present we are living every day. the next to come, the yet to be is locked away God keepeth the key.

Thursday November 13th

Left Sidi Haneish at last to move up, our convoy 100 miles long. Bert Jones, Bill Mason, Jack Rider and myself in Q.5. Passed Mersoh Matruh at 3.15pm everything moving up. Last twenty miles at full pelt over rough stony ground, hell of a ride got to our dispersal area to find we were the last truck the trucks later having got lost, not close enough on our tail. They found us an hour later, twenty three of them carrying mostly rations and cooks etc, bedded down at 10 o'clock very

Friday November 14th

Laying up today, travel tonight, slit trenches very hard to dig. One of the boys accidentally shot only a hundred yards from us I Thought he was fooling at first but saw him writhing on the ground so raced over to him. Shot through the throat blood just pouring out I'm afraid he's a gonner couldn't do much till Doc. came along.

Saturday November 15th

(Sunday November 16th??) Poor devil died a little later a cobber accidentally shot him with his own rifle. Travelled 60 today over rough rocky ground in desert formation, guns all round us we in long column in the centre. Hell of a journey bumping and jarring all day. Got to our spot at dusk at a bearing of 282. We are now 43 miles from the Egyptian-Libyan border 30 miles inland. In a mug of water I did my teeth, shaved, washed, washed my feet, finally washing a pair of sox what a job. Resting today being

Sunday as well. Thousands of vehicles moving up stretched out for miles in width and miles in depth.

November Monday 16th (17th??)

R.H.Q.'s their D on R's broke down and had to be loaded onto our truck, going too rough. Slit trenches have to be dug as soon as we stop in solid rock too, country is as barren as ?? Moved off last night at 6.15pm in close formation 15 yds between columns, seven of these and 15yds. between vehicles. Zig-wagged till 12.15 midnight skirting mine fields. etc. Quite a number of the lighter vehicles getting bogged in heavy sand. Pulled out by four wheel drive trucks, picked each other up again. 6th 2.B. all moving up now, 12 miles from the border, R.A.F. patrols us. Thousands of vehicles everywhere one looks, to the horizon in every direction. Bedded down till 5.am and "stood to" at that hour. Resting again today. Moving up again to night should contact Jerry any time now. Jerry has gone back a few miles for rations

Eric Wyeth badly burnt by primus blowing up, he has gone back. Any vehicle breaking down now must be immediately burnt, hope ours keeps going. 25 miles last night. Still doing pretty well for tucker, leaving Bully and biscuits till we have to, our acquired? stuff is still holding out well.

Life is mostly froth and bubble

Two things stand like stone
Kindness in another trouble
Courage in your own.

Tuesday 18th November

Travelled 30 miles last night at four miles an hour plowing through sand etc. Heavy going, Pitch black nights, no lights, cigarettes etc, trucks loom up along side going full bore in heavy sand, one has a very unnerving job driving at night here, trucks are so close to keep contact, collisions are many but what's a few dints between friends R.A.F. is doing a great job, no raid yet.

Wednesday 19th November

15 miles last night took six hours to do it winding

in and around mine fields. I have got dysentry worse luck. Terrific lightning storm fork and sheet all night. Very near to Jerry now. I wonder if he hears the roar of our advance it is terrific. Dysentry must worse.

Thursday 20th November

Passing just water with a little blood had nothing to eat at all two days. Boys made a bed for me on top of the load forward, am so weak can hardly stand. Doc. wanted to sent me back to hospital. I did not want to go after getting this far so he has given me another day. I'm swallowing concrete by the gallon. Sleep is very hard to get as driving is all of night and stops during the day, can hear the guns now up in front, last night star shells tracers etc. filled the sky. Gives one a funny feeling moving up into it again.

Friday ???

The angry grumble of guns is incessant now, 28 fighters went over just

now. The navy is shelling too. One of our D on R's fell off his byke and the clutch handle pierced his throat, bleeding to death. Rotten damn things in such rough country.

Friday ???

Moved 15 miles up. Jerry came over and raided us at lunch, our Bofors got going and kept them well up, they gave them hell, then the R.A.F. came and off they went. A very big regiment of medium tanks picked us up last night, all disguised as 3 ton trucks. They are travelling with us now we are holding the left flank, the Indians have pushed Jerry out of Sidi Omar. Our bombers going over in great numbers, so are the fighters, another raid today but the R.A.F. get stuck into them. Dysentry getting worse have had nothing to eat at all for three days and getting weaker all the time. Doc wanted to send me back today but I pleaded for another day, it might stop tomorrow, 36 passes in twelve hours, still passing a little blood, have barely stirred for two days bar running outside! Doc gave me some gruel, Bill

made it up, first to eat for ages. Our chaps contacted Jerry this morning bashing up forty five tanks, captured 200 prisoners also made big holes in the IRI Crack Division "Rigotetto", 3 planes yesterday 8 today, twenty four R.A.F. gone over again. These tanks with us are "Valentines" 16 tons armed with a Besa cannon firing 800 shells to minute and a Biren 21b gun and mortar. We move now at a moments notice. Relays of 40's 15's, 20's all day long going to Jerry.

terrific barrage this morning so many guns firing that it sounds like a machine gun. 15 more Jerry tanks were destroyed yesterday making a total of 60 we lost 20 I tanks which are some of the best.

Friday 21st November

Jerry reccy planes came over late in the afternoon yesterday our ack ack opened up from all directions but he was too high. Had a quite night. Our machine gunners doing picket for us. We captured an enemy aerodrome by parachute troops with 17 planes 200 ground staff and 70 pilots. Our boys escorted the planes back to our lines which will be repainted and used from our side our artillery is sending over a

Saturday 22 November

We moved post haste yesterday at 2pm chasing Jerry going full bore, at 5pm we ran right into his flank and shells started bursting all along our lines but a Tommy Regiment had the situation in hand so we kept going trying to cut the rest of him off at the coast road. Travelled till 2am in the morning twice running head first into salt swamps and what a mess guns, limbs, quads, 3 tonners, P.U.'s etc all mixed up side on, end on, backing and rocking, well and truly stuck, the roar of revving engines was terrific as they towed one another out back or front first talk about a mess, Q.4. got bogged well down so we went right through and came back head on to him and hitched up. In the process of jerking to get him started the two cable burst asunder and came flying back and

coiled itself round the cab miraculously missing me who was standing on the step by inches, it would have just decapitated me with no trouble. We bedded down for four hours and then off again. Six Jerrys walked in and gave up. Dawn broke to find us standing to and also to find four strange trucks and a staff car full of Jerrys in our lines which we promptly snaffled, I think they mistook their lines in the dark. The trucks were Aussie ones captured by them in Greece and painted over with swastika and signs. A Jerry plane dived over us this morning having a look but our Ack Ack gave him a hell of a fright. We will be chasing him all day today by all accounts, sleep is rare, tucker is bully, sausages beans and biscuits. One gets plenty of excitement these days. Whopping I Tanks moving up ahead all the time, beauty's too. Allan Ross and Steve Weir captured an Iti and Jerry in an Aussie truck going to Fort Cappuzzo, they also get a blitz buggy for themselves. Hurrican just shot

a Jerry down in a dog fight near us. Just passed 4 graves of tommies near a bomb hole. R.E.'s crosses made out of Benzine Boxes, so pathetic. We have now travelled 330 miles west. Heading straight for Tobruk now twenty miles to go Jerry has been pushed out by I tanks. 50 more just passed us manned by Tommies waving and singing out to us. My dysentery is still crook, am only a passenger. Took me all my time to dig a slit trench.

Sunday 23rd November

Day of days today, yesterday late afternoon we travelled at 4pm till 9pm. I was picket with Bill Mason from 11 to 3, funny sensation not knowing when attack will come, the boys sleeping under and along side their trucks some talking in their sleep etc. us wandering up and down rifles ready, the sky lit with star shells and flares up a few miles, something is going on up there. We moved at 3pm again and stopped at dawn, as dawn broke our guns not 50 yards from us gave us a thrill by opening up, we were just eating a tin of sausages then she started

our machine gunners went into action at a hazy number of trucks a hundred yards away, shells started landing in our lines, bullets screamed all round us, Gee: tracer shells were going in all directions I grabbed my rifle and got behind a wheel as did Jack Rider we saw hazy forms in the dawn, our guns did great work getting direct hits on tanks etc. straight away, then four or five of our trucks crews made a charge with machine guns at four Jerry truck loads of Jerry while we covered their advance, bullets were screaming and ricochetting all round us, one went through our windscreen, just missed my bum and Jacks legs. We got down behind the wheels, and then we saw our boys stop firing as the Jerry's came out holding up their hands.

The action lasted about an hour all told and our few vehicles right in the centre of it all. I did not feel scared at all, just wild but felt shaky after it was all over. We captured eight signal cars a swag of

trucks about two hundred prisoners and knocked out a number of tanks and trucks. I was put on to guard with some others the Jerrys, some only boys, some were badly wounded. I watched them being dressed, the others were searched, one came in on a stretcher but died, we had no casualties at all. Jack took over as guard and escorted them back a bit so I had to take over the driving, we got going again for another mile or two and ran into another swag. Jack came up in an anti-tank truck. Our guns went into action only two hundred yards ahead of us against a swag of Jerry tanks. This had been going on now for 5 hours. Shells are flying in all directions and we are just hoping for the best. Jerry shells are bursting around us all the time, we are right in the middle of it all. Our machine guns and infantry are only about 8 or 9 hundred yards ahead cross-firing with Jerry. We must all keep together here in case of flank attack from any direction. A big tank battle went on today and our anti-tank boys got badly knocked about, some of our boys have gone too,

poor devils. We hear our boys in 4th Brigade took 8000 prisoners yesterday. Our own total to date is something like 2000 prisoners, am getting over my dysentery. These Big Bertha shells rock us, one can hear them coming, so it is not quite so bad, my ear drums just ring with explosions, and this damn tin hat gives me a headache but can't be helped. One forgets about eating, only doing so rarely, ones tummy seems to nervous to take very much, our own tanks are parked around us, mostly knocked out and the tank engineers are trying to fix them up. We watch our boys firing and watch the hits. One Jerry tank came up to within five hundred yards before we let him have it and did we hit him? I'll say, it blew up later. We recaptured 12 of our own tanks today, our own boys from R.H.Q. going out and driving them into our own lines. Jerry shelled them while doing so, three casualties.

Wednesday 26th November

Captain Sellers killed this morning, hit a land mine, driver two broken legs. 3 guns put out of action today. 400 casualties in 25th B. yesterday, hard going. We advanced and landed right into heavy Jerry shell fire, shells landing all round us, we smartly turned round and got out O.K., advancing about two hours later when our guns had silenced Jerry. 115 tanks came in last night thank goodness our squadron got sadly bashed by gunfire, three left out of sixteen. An African convoy of Red Cross came in to us after Jerry let him go; we fired on them luckily missing them not knowing who it was, 10 three tonners, 4 ambulances full of the remnants of S.A. Brigade. B Echelon, they were pleased to see us.

I have missed a week of writing up partly for time and partly because I could not write of the terrible times we went through Jerry's

tanks breaking into our brigade, our efforts to blast him out of existence etc. We were always only a few yards away from our own guns for protection, as Jerry was all round us coming up at our back our sides our front night and day.

I've had as we all have had, one long headache at the roar and crash of our own guns and Jerry's shells landing in our area. We have had many casualties and the jitters are as common as cold, who wouldn't?

Monday December 1st

This was our worst day, the night before we stood by to move at 8pm and finally moved up at 11pm arriving at our halt at 2pm we immediately dug in, in rocky ground as best we could among a night party of our infantry who were burying dead Jerrys.

They were lying everywhere our infantry had fought this area two days before and it was not so good. A trench I thought would save me a lot of toil

in was already occupied by a dead Jerry so I made my own a few feet away. At dawn we had a look around and found ourselves on top of an escarpment and what a mess. I finished my hole and at 8.30 Jerry started shelling us, we got down as usual and he started using smoke, before we knew where we were we could not see a hundred yards and the dust made it worse, out of all this about forty Jerry tanks came out of the haze and machine bullets were flying like hail, our trucks were mostly in the road of our own guns who opened up full bore at a hundred yards range some having to fire through our own trucks to get at him. Trucks caught on fire everywhere, Jerry firing shells from his tanks as well as machine guns just blasted us right and left, one gun crew were blasted off their gun and crawled back on hands and knees to fire again, to be blasted off again and what could, crawled back again, another shell landing under the gun blowing them all up. Colonels car hit fair in the middle his batman and I.O. being killed

men falling around like ninepins, our driver thought it best to make a dash for it, so up and off over to the truck, I lifted my head to see the truck moving and did I go, I'll say bullets were screaming, shells were bursting and oh gee! I made it, grasping the back and scrambling in as best I could laying flat on the floor hoping for the best, we got out after running the gauntlet for about half a mile but did not know which way to go. Our officer came pelting down so we followed him, trucks here and there would burst into flames, what a shambles. One of our trucks were pulling a mate into the back when a tank shell hit him in the back, disembowling him but saving his four cobbers.

Doug Agnew was hit in the back, we scampered for Tobruk full pelt and what a ride, will I ever forget it? Shelled most of the way in. We looked back to see trucks and tanks blazing, and the sky full of smoke. We have practically no officers left at all the Colonel refusing offers of lifts, showing us the way out, no word of

him as yet. Wonderful chap. We got into Tobruk through lines of defences well out, and tallied, up, we have lost well over half the Regt nearly all our guns and crews, and what is left is a sorry sight. There are twenty two left of the 24th Batt. over 800 strong, a hand full of 25th. batt. some strength, 26th nearly same. Anti-tank is the same. I bet our casualties lists are terrific. Off our truck we lost Bill, he must have been left behind poor little devil. Our trucks are riddled with bullet holes, some being blown half away, but still somehow went. Stories from the boys are terrific of escapes and awful happenings. The hospital ship has taken a swag away tonight.

Wednesday December 3rd

We are just resting in Tobruk now and it is great; peace and quite but what happens now we can't see as our division is nearly "mah feesh."

Thursday December 4th

Fred Davey came dashing in today looking me up to see it I got out O.K. he is well and did not so badly, his convoys of benzine being

chased about the desert a bit by tanks, but otherwise alright. The last was seen of Col. Weir was him sitting behind a few rocks balaclava on, no tin hat smoking his pipe and firing a Tommy gun as hard as he could go, refusing all offers of lefts, but urging etc. vehicles to get out. He had discarded his crowns and was to all intents and purpose a one pipper in case of capture. One of our guads got a tank shell fair in the back, exploding and setting it all alight, along came another shower of shrapnel and burst the camel water tank on top, showering water down on to the fire putting the lot out, what a miracle. Another got a fizzer right through one side and out of the other not exploding, behind the drivers seat. Tobruk has had 2000 air raids to date but the barrage of Ack Ack fire is phenonemal, we saw it last night the sky is just long lines of tracer shells. We got under our truck and watched it out of the way of falling shrapnel. Jerry still lands odd long range shells amongst

us but we don't worry much after the terrific amount we have had pelted at us. Mills got a big piece of shrapnel on his head and bashed his tin hat in, he being O.K. A big push is being started, while what is left of our boys help to guard Tobruk etc. Poles are going out with others. They are tough boys. The Black Watch have been badlybashed here too, and Aussie telling us of a bayonet charge by them at a machine gun post, two of them headed for one gun and left a trail of blood fifteen yards long and finished up with their bayonets home, but both dead as the Jerrys were too. Tony Freyberg got out O.K. and we hear he wants us back at base to reform again as quickly as possible. Some of the boys are using French 75's, as our own guns were blown up or lost. We have made up one battery of eight guns out of the three regiments, what a big loss. Jerry sends a lot of fuzzers over and do so sigh with relief when we hear a dull plop and she skids along the ground. All the trucks or the few we have left are riddled with bullet and shell holes and what marvellous

escapes some of them were. Lofty Cole came tearing out in his Quad towing a limber when he found it was on fire, he stopped and put it out with his fire extinguisher and drove on, to be cornered by a Jerry tank a bit further on who caught him amidships and blew the lot sky high. Walter Batty ahead saw it, stopped, swung his truck around and fired point blank at the tank blowing the tracks right off it, nine Jerrys got out, so he let go another among them and that was that, what a hell of a thing this sort of thing is, but one sees red and can't be blamed. Jeff Stogg went out last week with three trucks of ammo to help the 4th Feild Regt. at night, he has not been seen since. Major Rowle got it in the face, a big loss. Our other two majors are both missing, in fact our offers are nearly all gone. Today we have just been in our truck resting out of the rotten sand storm.

Friday December 5th

Just resting and getting a few more things that we lost in the way of warm

clothes. Mills Haslam's name was picked out of a hat with six others to broadcast onto a record. He was so excited he forgot what to say, he intend to say that Tom Pollock and his cousin sent their love etc. and were O.K. but it all vanished when the time came. Rumours of us going back to Alex by boat, as we have had no reinforcements, and our division is only odds and sods left. But we did what we had to, drive Jerry back as far and past Tobruk etc others are carrying on now. They all are pretty wild (the Tommies) that we were made the shock troops again, as these always get the full blast of all they have, and we certainly got it. One of our officers came back last night, he had been talking to a Tommy Officer when a shell landed right between them blowing the Tommy to bits and not scratching our bloke.

Saturday December 6th

Still resting, the Tobruk hospital is very big having 15 wards with about 70 beds in each and the hospital ship takes a load every other night. Tobruk has been such a pretty town but is just a shambles now, hardly one wall

standing, over 2000 air raids, we had one last night. There are 37 ships sunk in the harbour mostly Italian. The Poles are very feirce, but decent chaps from our point of view. Last week a Tommy regiment was told to take certain hill held by Jerry but got badly cut about, so the Poles were sent in, given a weeks supplies, a weeks ammo, and told to get it, in they went and inside of two hours they had fired off their weeks ammunition and stormed the hill and took it. They dont take prisoners. Jerry gave us a bit of morning hate this morning landing a few all round our trucks from long range, we all are as jumpy as hell etc. old nerves need a rest badly. The 4th Brigade boys tell us they retook the place where the Jerry tanks skitted us at Sidi Rezegh and they buried 400 or our boys there, what a blow to N.Z. Out of our 48th Battery only 23 came out from over 200 the other two Batteries faring nearly as bad. R.H.Q. lost about 39 out of about 90 counting L.A.D SIGS etc. I went

today, out of Tobruk to a point along the Derna Rd to get some canned beer, and cigarettes, the first seen here for five months. Tobruk and outer defences in the perimeter is just littered with skittled tanks, trucks, armoured cars and etc. and big holes in thousands. Hospital ship arrived again today, also six others and a destroyer, it is almost unbelievable as till a fortnight also they only slunk in at night, unloaded in an hour and away again post haste.

Sunday December 7th

R.H.Q on parade now is a sorry lot, about ten were there this morning all dressed differently, one looked like a Jerry, Jerry boots and coat, another like an Aussie, another like a Pole, and one in our own gear. Bob Day and I went to Holy Communion today, we were a queer gathering, planes droning overhead on patrol. A dozen or so infantry came marching up, the officer called out "Battalion Halt". It sounded so queer, as a battalion is roughly eight hundred men, these were all that is left. We go back to Baggash tomorrow.

Hurrah'. Xmas in a
peacefull area.

Monday 8th December

Left Tobruk at 7.15am got a few shells lobbed at us as we went out but got through O.K. Turned off the Tobruk - Bardia Road at 39 kilo's and struck out into the desert, very rough going - picked up an escort of Anti-Tank and Div. Cav. who escorted us for 30 miles. We did 90 miles and just got through the wire and stopped.

Tuesday December 9th

Started again at 8 and travelled all day doing 128 miles. Waited for fresh benzine supplies and off again in single file, picking up the road, Cairo side of Sidi Borrani. Had a couple of halts with benzine block age but finally got back to Buggush at 2.30 in a raging sand and wind storm. Worst ever. I got 12 letters that night GEE! They were good after having none for a month.

Wednesday December 10th

Got back to my old dug out, cleared it out of sand and am waiting now for fresh meat, the first for a month.

Thursday December 11th

150 reinforcements came up to us which has filled a few blank spots, but we need a lot more. More mail and parcels are arriving all the time.

Friday December 12th

The church army has put up a marque near us for selling teas, chocolate, cigarettes etc, Whoopee. Jack Rider, Frank, Tom Woodill and I had a terrific feed of fillet steak and tinned veggies. and fruit and milk to finish, hell it was good.

In the five days I missed writing up, we had run out of tucker, so our truck with Frank Rearery Jack Rider and I went out at night to try and pick up our supply column. We left at dark on a bearing of 110 and was supposed to pick them up three miles back, we got that far after seeing nothing and halted. What a weird sensation away out in the desert on our own. Black as the inside of a bull

and we all scanned around to try and see something. The silence was terrific, one could hear the thump thump of our own hearts, we whispered to each other to quiet our breathing and try and pick up any sounds which we did, but nary a sound did we hear. A motor byke all bashed up loomed dimly up a few yards away, we went over to it to find it was a Jerry one alongside a Jerry direction post. We were starting to get a bit jittery by then. As everything seemed like a morgue. We all thought bugger this, we are too liable to be picked up here, so made up our mind to go back, the engine starting seemed like a thousand; one expected a hail of shells or something all the time. Jack stepped on it after betting our back bearing on the compass, and did we go, I'll say, he shook the guts clean out of us, but we got back safely and heaved a sigh of relief when one of our gun crews called us sharply to a halt. We went out again at dawn to find the column was 13 miles back and on getting there, ran nearly into a

tank battle on our right only a mile away. We stuck a full load aboard pronto and got out smartly as shells were starting to make nasty noises. Star shells and Verey lights are continually in the sky at night and one does not know what they might mean, one just wonders and hopes. Swags of our bomers fly over us all day escorted with fighters, we cheer them on. The Anti-tank boys went out to our last battle area at Sidi Rezegh to sabotage our guns if possible, and they had a hell of a job lifting and dragging the crews away to get the guns out, one officer lying prone sighting along his rifle just as if he was alive. They were going back next day to bury them but got called away, some other unit will do it. Reports from captured boys of ours and where we have recaptured in this crazy battle, they say the Jerry's respect and treat all N.Z.'s very well, sharing blankets and food what they have with them. The Itis do the same but they hate the Aussies as bad stories have got about. The Jerry's we capture are well treated, being both clothed and fed well. One of our hospitals changed hands four times in one day.

These are very much respected. The A.D.S next us is a sight, trestle tables are operating tables, candles and lamps for light, dozens laying waiting outside on stretchers, and walking wounded too. They all shaft with us, what a job for them. A captured German Doc. looks after his own in a seperate tent Jack went out and got 24 of our infantry boys who could not get back before, being there for two days, all being wounded, one poor devil having had an explosive bullet in his privates, splitting open each testicle, the same to his penis and blowing most of his crutch out, they brought him in lunched up in in a Bren Carrier, a mass of coagulated blood, poor devil. Major Rowle died today, much better for him too. Shortly rush had his legs pulped, one can go on and on and on but whats the good.

Tuesday December 16th

The weather for last two days has been terrific storm and rain Jack has gone up the bluie again

attached to Div. Ret.

Monday December 29th

I have seen many men break down and cry at various times, and for strong men to do so, one can be sure it is under heavy stress. After leading us out of our last days action in which we got bashed about a bit, our Quartermaster broke down when he realised the job was done, and didn't care who saw him, it was a touch and go job. Our Colonel, Steve Weir when at Maadi Base Camp giving a lecture to reinforcements, officers, and men did the same. A stronger and braver man one could not wish to find, more a more manly man. In the course of telling about an incident on our last days fighting, he quoted the instance of how he was watching our gunners, some of whom had blown off their guns by shells fire from tanks, and how they were to be seen grimly crawling back, one badly wounded in legs and body with a shell in their arms, others dragging them any way they could, striving desparately to gain their object of ramming another one home, to blast the tanks which had blasted them. In

describing this action he broke down, they were his gunners, knew them all by name, had been through Greece with most of them, had harried them with bad language and good, praise seldom being given, but praise from him was praise indeed. So one realises that ones softer emotions are not always controllable even in the strongest of us. At one part of this crazy campaign, one of our advanced dressing stations was taken by Jerry.

General Von Rommel came in and asked in good English how things were. Our Doctors told him that they were short of water so he sent a truck away to get some, which later returned to say he was sorry but he could not get any as the British had cut them off. Rommel them passed out saying as he went, "Its a great war isn't it?" In quite a jovial manner. His big car and five motor byke escort them made off for their own lines.

German prisoners assure us of the good treatment given to our boys who are captured and is proved by those who have escaped. A popular way of getting

release was to say one say a medical orderly, upon which they would be shown in which direction our lines were, driven up to a few miles of them, and then released. Such a lot of Jerry's died with that queer look of amazement and wonder on their face, it seems to impress itself on ones memory. Another thing I call back, two of our Signallers one driving and one reeling out telephone wire to the Batteries from R.H.Q., crawling along about five miles an hour, shells bullets etc. whizzing round like bees and these two boys oblivious of it all, looking a little worried, but still laying wire, skirting the array of flaming trucks, belching guns etc. still doing their job as they knew it, they had had no order to retire so carried on. They did not come out. We had shifted to the lee of A Troop guns to get what shelter there was, we did not realise we were in the worst spot possible, and thus were the last to see these boys disappear into the haze of smoke and mist. Pat Leslie and, and again - in the five days I had not time or inclination to keep up my

diary.

One night, just after tea I had just washed up, or should I say wiped our plates with a dirty wash cloth and had handed out a mug of tea to our truck crew of four, when Jerry started shelling us from our rear. They landed so damn close to us that our minds were but a single thought, into our slit trenches we took our mugs of tea and as one salvo burst, we would duck up, grab our mugs and take a mouthfull, wait till we heard the next lot coming and down again, hugging mother earth as close as could be. We were not quite below the surface, very rocky. This went on till after dark, over two hours, and they just plastered our area but luckily, damage was slight. I cracked unseemly jokes with young Bill Mason who was by then getting pretty well under the weather, and Jack was little better. I passed lighted cigarettes to them both, lighting them one off another in an endless stream. Old Bert and I seemed to get calmer and did our best to wise crack the two boys, and it succ-

eeded in quite a surprising manner. In a momentary lull a soldier came up to my trench, and he sung out to us if we were alright, I piped up and told him "yes why?" He told me he was an Medical Orderly from the 5th Field ambulance which was about a mile to our left and saw us getting plastered, so thought he might be able to do some good over here. I told him our own doctor and R.A.P. was handy, but it was very good of him to come over. He stopped and yawned for about a quarter of an hour, lying down along-side us in the noisy spells. He then said he would go further over and see if his services were needed. He left us and fifty yards away we all yelled "DOWN" and he sprawled flat as another lot of shrieking Jerries came over, one landing only about twenty yards away from our holes. The flash lit us up like on a screen and the concussion is terrific. When the earth, shrapnel etc. had stopped sailing over us, I bobbed up to see our Orderly pick himself up and sing out O.K. and glide off in the dark. Great fellows these. Shortly after Jerry ceased fire and must

have shifted, as we got no
more that night. But our
heads sung for hours after.
I'll always remember the
soft "pitter pitter pitter"
of falling dirt intersper-
sed with a dull heavy
flop or two long after a
shell has exploded, it
reminds one of someone
whispering.

Tom Pollack died on the 4th July 1942 during a Stuka raid in the "Kapongo Box" - as described by (Nick) RACF H. Nicholson (24691) who was in the same truck crew during that attack and later entered the events in his own diary as detailed in the following extract.

July 4th Saturday 1942

Since dawn this morning there has been a big battle going on. so far the N.Z. div. have captured 92 field guns, 1000 prisoners and brought down several planes. We are going to attack this morning according to rumour. It has been a bad day for us today. Jack and Tom were killed by bomb while Mo and Tom Woodill were wounded. Mo rather badly. It all happened so suddenly that I can hardly realise it is true. We were sitting in the back of the truck and we were getting to the stage where we almost ignored the drone of planes as they had been going across all morning when another batch came over. We climbed out and put the glasses on them but Jack, Charlie and I just sat in the truck. Mo said they were Jerries and we all jumped out and as we hit the ground Mo yelled "Duck." Charlie went for his trench while Jack, Tom and I dived under the truck. I had no sooner hit the ground when I thought of my slit trench on the other side of the wheel and decided I would be better in it. As I hit the trench I was almost bounced out again by the first bomb explosion. Each one seemed to come nearer than the last. The next thing I knew, Mo was yelling that he was hit in the neck. I hopped up and put a dressing on the wound and called for one of the boys to go for an ambulance at the A.D.S. which was just over the hill. Charlie got up and we decided to get him over to a P.D. and take him round ourselves. Just as the truck was pulling off Tom Woodill ran up and climbed aboard. He had a nasty gash in the chin. On the way over I found that Mo had another wound in the arm. After we had handed them over to the ambulance chaps we started back to the truck to get Tom some cigarettes. We started to wonder how Jack and Tom got on. I remembered that they had kept very still when I yelled out. Just before we got back to the truck a chap said to us "I think a couple of your cobbers are marfeish." It was only too true when we reached the truck. They were both lying there dead on the ground where I had laid beside them before I decided to get into my slit trench. They were both badly smacked. Jack had a hole in his chest you could put both your fists in and Tom had a hole in his stomach and his intestines were hanging out. A piece of shrap. had also gone through his thigh and broken it. As for the truck it was riddled. Jack and Tom were taken away in an ambulance to be buried. Charlie, Tom, Frank and I attended the funeral and after they were buried we put stones round them and made a cross of stones on each grave. They were buried next to each other. We saw Mo later and he seemed pretty strong. I went on

ration truck this afternoon to keep my mind occupied. We went out to the guns with rations and they were getting shelled. Planes came over and bombed again this afternoon. Three of our tyres were punctured in the first raid.

Three other unless were in Africa at the same time

Howard Ingraham

was killed in action
at El Alamein.

Russell & Bill Ingraham in Field Ambulance
returned home, both decorated.