

KUWI

Bedouin

A KORERO REPORT



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A TRACKLESS, waterless waste: uninhabited, unknown: a dreary monotony of rolling sand-dunes some of them 400 ft. high and running for scores of miles without a break: a land where by day the naked heat can kill, and night makes it like a valley of the moon: the Great Sand Sea, barrier to the inner Libyan desert. Impenetrable, impassable were the adjectives applied to it. But picked New Zealand troops, led by a British officer who had used his peace-time leaves exploring this very area, penetrated it, and as they gained experience, mastered it. They brought the twentieth century to an unknown portion of the world where through countless ages the wind had eroded the earth's crust in places to the naked rock, and replaced the soft padding of the camel with the roar of petrol-driven trucks. Then they rolled up their sleeves and roared far into enemy territory: gathered information, took prisoners, shot up forts which fondly believed their isolation was sufficient protection, left the enemy bewildered and apprehensive, on edge in a territory he thought secure. They distracted his attention from the area where the main blow would come, in the north, and forced him to dribble away men and materials in a vain attempt to stop their depredations. So it stands—the first saga of Long Range Desert Group.

In the early summer of 1940 when Italy entered the war information as to her dispositions in the Inner Libyan Desert was scanty. It was known that

she held a line of oases and wells running from Benghazi 800 miles into the interior, and that at Kufra she had a fortified post and aircraft. The danger that from Kufra and Uweinat air raids or mechanized assaults might be launched against the Aswan Dam or the river port of Wadi Halfa was evident, and it was vital to find out all that was happening in the interior across the Great Sand Sea, 600 miles west of the Nile.

It was finally decided that the best means of obtaining information would be by long-range reconnaissance into the interior by small mobile columns. They would have to be self-contained in fuel for up to 2,000 miles and in food and water for at least some hundreds of miles. They must traverse the greatest belt of sand-dunes in the world and operate in enemy territory without maps and where no help could reach them in the event of casualties to men or machines. To train and lead these columns British officers who had explored this or similar parts of the world were found, and picked officers and men from the New Zealand troops in Egypt formed the personnel. In six weeks the organization training and equipping was complete, and the Long Range Desert Group was ready for those exploits which brought it fame and praise, and to the humbler members of the Group, in the words of one of them, welcome change from parades and fatigues; adventure and excitement enough.

During the training period one of the chief "arts" to learn was the driving