

which had come up from Lake Chad by prior arrangement, and after a long detour to avoid detection, presented themselves outside the fort. So totally unexpected was this cheeky intrusion that they were greeted with the Fascist salute from stray soldiers on the outskirts of the fort, and a number of men standing near the gate were called to attention by an N.C.O. Taking advantage of astonishment,—surprise is hardly a strong enough word—the party at the gate was promptly settled and the fort set on fire with mortar shells. The aerodrome was occupied, the hangar and everything in it destroyed and thirty prisoners were collared. And so it went on, until by the spring of the next year Italian control of the inner desert was ended.

And the life on these patrols. The fighting was fast and furious while it lasted, and in between were days of weary travelling over the desert. Away from a base for weeks at a time the food carried had to be concentrated. So stew made its appearance—it would hardly be the Army without it. But gazelle meat made a welcome change. Shooting these swiftly-moving animals with a tommy-gun from the back of a swaying, bumping truck at fifty miles an hour was sport de luxe.

And in camp at night there were snakes, if you slept on the ground, to be guarded against, and scorpions, the bite from which would incapacitate you for thirty-six hours.

As problems arose they were dealt with. On one occasion a camel was carried by truck for five hundred miles, sent out on a reconnaissance and then returned by truck. It must have been difficult for a camel to look dignified after that. There were caches to be made for future patrols, mines to lay on enemy routes, emergency landings for our aircraft to be selected and prepared, and enemy aircraft to dodge at times.

For a while one patrol did garrison duty at Kufra Oasis, and as by this time the Group had expanded and had elements of Imperial and other Dominion troops in it, social life sprang up. There

were Rhodesian troops in the Group, so the "All Blacks" had to take a crack at the "Springboks." They played ten minutes the first half—and by mutual consent seven minutes the second half: and the "All Blacks" made the only score of the match, a try in the first half.

Wireless kept them in touch with happenings in the rest of the globe, and the day the news came through that the Anzacs were fighting a rearguard action in Greece, the patrol at Kufra Oasis was turning out a guard of honour for a visiting Free French Colonel. A sports meeting was held, two items of which were a competition in marksmanship using Bofors guns and mortars, followed by a smoke concert. Oh, yes—it was still the Army. There were growls over orders to shave, parades made their appearance, and two whiskered miscreants found themselves "on the mat" for aversion to razors.

So from small beginnings the Group had become a valuable addition to the Desert Army, and as the Inner Desert was cleared and the battles surged up and down the Mediterranean coast of North Africa the Long Range Desert Group played its part in all the campaigns, its tasks growing bigger all the while, but always surmounted, until in that final clean up of the Afrika Korps it was the Group which did the advance reconnaissance for the Eighth Army's advance into Tripoli and later into Tunisia. And when the famous "left hook" outflanked the Mareth Line it was a Group patrol which led the New Zealand Corps on the job.

What memories those men of the Long Range Desert Group must have. Chief of all—the desert itself. The illimitable space; the blazing heat, the numbing cold; the colouring at sunrise and sunset. They will remember the comradeship of the evening meal by a small blaze of crackling thorns; the thrill of the swift swoop on an enemy outpost, the too hectic excitement of dodging enemy bombers; the toil and exasperation of freeing bogged trucks. Of them it can be said their place in history is secure. Salute—Long Range Desert Group.