

W.D. 13/12/40

Dear Jim,

Another note to tell you we missed the bus - had no share in the really brilliant victory that has cleaned Gaggiani out of Egypt - the whole Corps Reserve - the only Reserve up - and on Wednesday thought we were certain to be used as for awhile Sidi Barrani held out stoutly, but the bastards collapsed & so did our hopes. Jim Barrani, my 2 ife is up with the Bede transports taking up nations & helping to bring in prisoners & that's all the share we are getting. It's the most bitter disappointment of my life and I'll say no more about it.

It really has been a brilliant victory, good planning, good well trained troops accustomed to the desert (though not a whit better or more seasoned than us) some "infantry" tanks which the Italian AT. weapons couldn't stop - and SURPRISE.

Roughly it went this way -

The Italian had the 1st & 2nd Libyan Divs, 1st Blackshirt Divn, Malitta's Group - 5 bus plus odd tanks & Libyan Armoured Group forward in a line of staggered camps. Echeloned back, right back to the frontier, were the 62nd & 63rd Metropolitan Divs & the 2nd Blackshirt (I think) plus more AFV formations. We had the

Indian Division (4 Ind 5 Bn. regular Bns) the Remainder
 Division a certain number of 1 Tanks with the
 4th N.Z. Bde in Reserve, ~~the latter~~ also a small
 force of under 2 hrs from the Matruh garrison.
 Counting in Bns only & excluding us as we
 didn't get in - 13 Bns (2 with the Arm'd D.) eqpt
 41 on the tanks & other arms in preparation.
 If they had kept the initiative & attacked, we'd
 have had more trouble.

Our splendid Remainder Division,
 formidable Humans in light tanks, R. Tank Corps
 in Currier tanks had maintained practical
 command of all the ground outside the Italian
 Camps & so surprise was possible. But
 it was necessary for the force to lie up all
 Sunday - a damned cold day - hiding within
 striking distance & thanks to perfect discipline
 & staff work & good air co-operation, this was
 done.

Then the attack came in at dawn
 eqpt the rear of Malletti's group on the R. side,
 while the Arm'd Division seems to have driven
 past the rear of the 3 forward Divs direct
 for the coast. Malletti's was killed & his force
 destroyed or captured & the infantry pushed
 north to Sidi Barrani which was taken by
 attack from the West and some sharp fighting
 the battalion attacked without any support
 & had heavy casualties. The enemy seems to
 have fought - up to a point - but they caned

in when the infantry closed. In some cases they let the tanks through, bombing them at close quarters but turned it in when the infantry got up. Guns, foot, tanks & aircraft seem to have co-operated perfectly & the staff work & command must have been splendid. I've told you before that the Western Desert Army is a very fine one.

By Wed. afternoon the It. were surrendering freely and the supporting divisions made no effort to help, but batted for Libya, harassed by R.A.F. and the Armoured Division and the Navy. They apparently suffered dreadfully near Sallum, where they had to think out of the coastal plain sparsely as if passing from Sumner over Seaborough Hill to Tynkin's Mistake.

Today I hear that our Armoured Cavalry are near Bardia - the It. ^{strongest} base in Libya & that the tally of prisoners is up to 37,000. I was in Matruh this morning & saw hundreds of prisoners being ferried to a debarkation point to Alex^a & the railway working to capacity on the same track. You all think our casualties will certainly be under 1000, 600 they say, out of about 15000 men - at the most engaged.

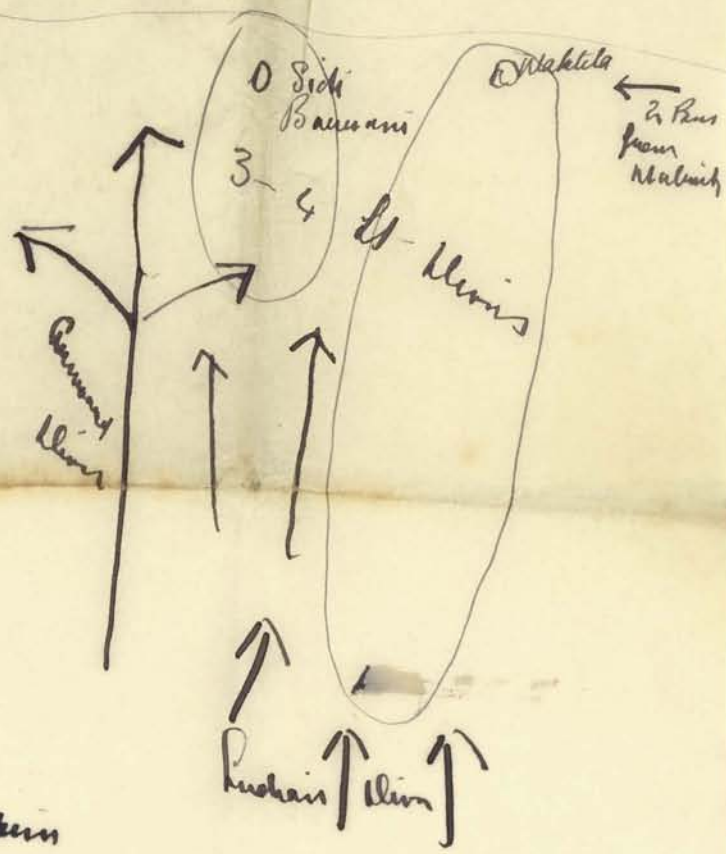
I can't get over it that we missed

Whatever happens won't make up for missing a share in our first victory of the week. The whole Bde is down east. The whole affair was fought out in better winds & sandstorms, today is perfect.

Ballum

Sea

3-4 blivins



Very roughhanded but general idea. Our people made a big flunk march to get round.

A great show for the old Regular Army. We were the only other force in the Western Desert, have been here since July - longer than the Indian D. Should have been in the party, were to have been until recently, but that I'll have to wait to tell you about when we meet again.

My son & dunnies had the pleasure of taking a Corps Commander & 2 blivins Commanders on one step into captivity.

Yours
Thip