

(continued from previous page)

completed graves, and the work continues at a great rate. All the graves with their white crosses, close together, rows on rows of them, covering many acres of ground, make an impressive sight, and strange to say, rather inspiring than depressing. How this comes about I don't know, because I hold no illusion that there is any glory in war, yet the very deep impression made by this huge cemetery, just a sandy area of desert, is far removed from the physical horror of war.

"There is a road running due south from the coast road just at Alamein station, and the front line during the static period crossed and re-crossed that road in several places. It runs inland, straight as a die, and our destination was just 20 miles in. Minefields, and, more dangerous, scattered mines, cover the whole of the desert.

"It was most interesting to see that area again, although we could not get to the spot, on account of mine danger, where disaster overtook our unit. We passed the very places we saw so dimly on the night of that rather desperate advance, the scores of dugouts and built-up stone shelters that proved such a curse to us when they contained enemy, and such a godsend at times when we needed shelter. I stopped the truck on top of the ridge and looked up that wadi where we went right through the Italians and left them to fire on our rear at first light, the same wadi that C—— and I scaled down to save our precious hides in the afternoon.

"We found the people we were looking for without difficulty, although the only sign of their presence was some washing hanging out to dry. They are living underground, in big stone and concrete dugouts, built there in 1941, very strong places, well underground, and quite comfortably cool. Captain Overton, in charge of the Graves Unit, was most interesting. The job of the Graves Registration Unit is not of the macabre character one might imagine. They are amazingly keen and interested in it. As they point out, there is an abiding satisfaction in making a positive identification and providing a resting place for some chap who was "missing, presumed killed," and thereby providing some measure of comfort for his people. Here again, it is difficult to put into words just where the satisfaction lies in what must at times be a most unsavoury occupation, but it is a work of mercy, and I was most agreeably impressed with the spirit in which it is carried out, and the thoroughness which characterises every phase of its execution. There are now only about 20 New Zealanders 'missing' in the whole of the Alamein area. Many have been found and identified, others have been picked up in hospitals, P.O.W. camps, and all the various places where people can get lost in such a scramble. It is marvellous that so many have been found in an area which saw such hard mobile fighting over such a long period. Strangely enough, two of the 20-odd are from our old platoon.

"There are only a dozen men in the Graves Registration Unit, and they work over the whole battlefield, foot by foot, going out in trucks each day to the area they're examining. It is a job of considerable danger, too, as some of the graves are still booby-trapped, and they have lost their full complement of trucks many times over on mines. So far they have escaped without human casualties."



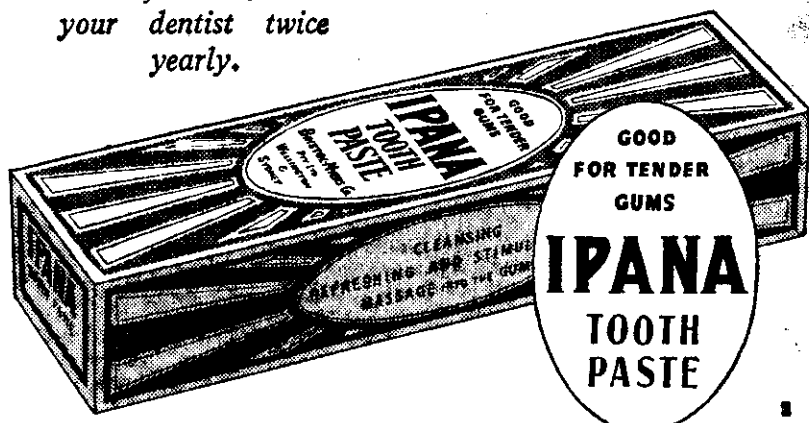
Susie makes Shells—

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