



A patrol speeds across the hard stony surface of the Inner Desert.

was sewn with a needle and an ordinary piece of string. A truck which broke down was towed a thousand miles to a spot where it could be repaired. Desert sores broke out on some men after they had been on several patrols. Malaria attacked many. On one occasion three men developed the disease while on patrol. They carried on. At the end of the patrol they were evacuated to hospital. By that time they had suffered malaria for twenty-one days and temperatures were still at 103° . The going was as rugged as could be. At one small desert post where a patrol was stationed for a while the shade temperature was 130° , and men had to lie under their vehicles from eight in the morning until five in the evening. Flies added to their miseries at this particular post, and men ate with their heads wreathed in the smoke of a fire to keep the pests away.

Thirst, that terror of all desert places, the foe to be feared on waste of land or sea, struck at one patrol. Using their precious water to fill up a radiator which had leaked, they found on reaching the well at their next stop that the water was extremely brackish. They took some of it with them, but in the meantime drank the water from a Vickers gun. On the return journey they took the brackish water, strained it three times, boiled it, and added plenty of tea and sugar. They drank it—and were immediately sick. By the time they returned to their base they were near to the limit of thirst.

All this and fighting, too! For as yet no word has been said of any military fighting. The only enemy has been Nature—very much in the raw. A preliminary reconnaissance in the late summer of 1940 showed that a self-contained fighting patrol could cross the Sand Sea. Incidentally this patrol discovered on the interior a second range of sand-dunes of whose existence no one dreamed. From Siwa oasis, just inside the British "wire," the patrol crossed the Great Sand Sea and then swung west into enemy country where it sat for four days on the main enemy route from Benghazi to Kufra, studying the tracks of vehicles that had passed. As rain falls rarely there, perhaps once in twenty-five years, tracks remain, and for the experienced civilized man have as much a story as prints of birds and animals for the savage.

The stage was now set. The Great Sand Sea had been crossed successfully, dumps had been set up, and a reconnaissance of the enemy's territory made. So after an inspection by the C.-in-C., who commended them on their work, they set out from Siwa, and for the first time a military force crossed the uncrossable desert. And from then on the raids went forward, daring to the point of impudence, as witness the one on Murzuk, chief town of Fezzan, and 1,200 miles from Cairo. In order to maintain secrecy all wells and tracks had to be avoided and the whole trip was done through unexplored country. A fortnight after leaving Cairo they joined forces with a Free French patrol