

attacked that line. On the third day he broke through it and was only stopped when he was almost within sight of Alexandria. Some of the Germans who broke through found a pipe-line running the length of our El Alamein defences. They tapped it and drank some of the water which gushed out. Next day those who had drunk the water surrendered in an agony of thirst. The water in that pipe had been salt. It was a new pipe-line being tested for leaks and I never wasted fresh water in testing. It was Mediterranean water which the Germans had drunk. After the Germans had been halted, there ensued four months of static warfare around the El Alamein positions. Near El Alamein station was one of my key water points. There I had four pumping-stations, pipe-lines radiating in all directions and many millions of gallons of water in underground storage. For some months this key network for the water system was under direct observation from the enemy, and they used to shell and bomb it regularly. Yet so well was everything protected underground that practically no damage was done.

During those months of static warfare the enemy repaired my pipe-line, developed wells at the western end of it and pumped water eastwards to his El Alamein positions. Many times I have watched from our forward positions his water-carts queueing up at his water point, and he was using my pipe. That annoyed me considerably. When we finally broke through after the decisive breach at El Alamein the enemy blew up the pipe-line as he retreated. His demolitions were not very efficient,

however, as regards draining the pipe, probably because he followed his drill closely. He placed his charge of high explosive under the pipe at mathematically regular intervals at a kilometre apart. And it just so happened that those kilometre points were often on high ground so the water failed to drain out of the pipe; and when we advanced we found that pipe half-full of water, a great convenience to our armoured divisions in the pursuit.

Then I had to repair that pipe-line. The worst part, of course, was where it ran through the battlefield itself. There it had been shattered by shell fire, riddled with bullets, and squashed flat by tanks. To make matters worse it rained heavily, and much of the desert became a lake. There were hundreds of unburied dead lying around after the battle. It was impossible to bury them until the water subsided. As my men repaired the pipe, the bloated dead floated round them. By the time I had the pipe-line repaired, the pursuing Eighth Army surged on past the end of it. The pipe-line was now of no more use. For the remaining 1,500 miles between Egypt and Tunisia I got water for the Army by boring wells in the desert, and the speed of the Eighth Army's advance was measured by the rate at which I could tap underground water. At last I stood on the green plain of northern Tunisia. North of me rose the mountains, seamed with running streams. No need to develop water resources there. I felt very tired. Three years. 2,000 miles. It was a long, hard road to look back on.

## RED BEACH

Leading to the beach is a lane,  
White powdered, rutted and confined by walls  
Of drystone. Laden almond trees hang down,  
And the peasants tend the melon-plants below,  
There was a sniper in those woods two months  
ago,  
And burnt out tanks were half across the  
way;  
But now a donkey cart, lurching in clouds of  
dust,  
Is all that passes with its load of hay.

In the woods the birds are singing  
Where the bullets sang then. The green  
crickets cry  
Where the bull-dozers churned, and the dry  
Lane was spattered with wet, crimson  
flowers  
When the Stukas dived.

—By Capt. J. C. Aldridge, C.M.F.,  
from "*Verses From Italy*,"  
a Three Arts Club Publication.