

Kaponga Box. They came off it to join the Division for the Second Libyan campaign. The next New Zealand connection with it was when the 6 (N.Z.) Inf. Bde. with 8 (N.Z.) Fd. Coy. marched into it as an outpost position of the Alamein Line in June, 1942. The rest of the Division was up at Mersa Matruh and arrived back some days later after the historic battle of Minquar-Quaim and the rearguard action to Alamein, but never took an actual part in the occupation of the Box.

In Fortress A the sappers took over all works, including mine-laying, completion of anti-tank scarps, wire fences, and water-supply.

The water-supply consisted of a pipe-line from Alamein to a central reservoir and pump-house, from which it was distributed to several reservoirs in the area. From the pump-house a further line, just completed, led to Fortress B on the edge of the Qattara Depression.

As up to now the maximum amount of water had been going west to the Egyptian frontier, salt water was pumped to Fortress A to test the line from Alamein and was stored in a reservoir to test the line from A to B, just completed.

The necessity for garrisoning Fortress A having been foreseen, only, and this is the crux of the story, fresh water was being pumped from Alamein when 6 (N.Z.) Inf. Bde. occupied it.

The salt water in stock was being pumped to Fortress B. This line was built by a Wog contractor and leaks developed at nearly every other joint, necessitating much work by the repair gang under my C.S.M. After all the salt water was in the line, it was not all tested, so that fresh water was pumped in behind the salt. Just as the water was emerging in the reservoir at B, orders

were received that B would not be held. So the valves were taken out of the pump and the water allowed to run back to our own reservoirs. When all the fresh water was back, the salt water was run to waste.

A watch at the reservoir into which the fresh water from Alamein was being delivered was kept so that if the pipe-line was cut we would know at once by the cessation of the flow at the outlet.

Between A and the South Africans at Alamein on the coast an Indian Inf. Bde. took up a position with only a few days to prepare it. The Huns overran them and cut our pipe-line. As soon as the inward flow of water ceased a signal was sent to Alamein to cease pumping. It is generally understood that owing to the size of the "flap" and the difficulties of communication it never got anywhere and fresh water, not salt water, was pumped to Rommel's troops for two days.

I did not see any Indian troops in Fortress A. Indian troops, which, as I have already said, were overrun, held an area between A and the coast, also another Indian Inf. Bde. was to have held Fortress B, but because of lack of supplies, lateness in getting water there, and paucity of guns it was never garrisoned.

Fortress A was never overcome by the enemy, as our N.Z. Bde. withdrew because no guns could be spared to help hold it.

It is doubtful if the enemy, as Major Rainier claims, ever got within sight of the spires of Alexandria or that 1,100 men of the 90 Light gave themselves up. I say that the correct story, which should be told in the interests of historical accuracy and the honour of the sappers of 8 (N.Z.) Fd. Coy., who issued fresh water at Fortress A, is as I have written it here.

