

The Originals.

‘Rebirth’

L Detachment Operations
December 1941 to the end of
March 1942.

By the end of the moonless period in March 1942 the men of L Detachment returned to Kabrit again after a series of operations against the enemy more than ably assisted by the men of the LRDG.

This was when the last of what i call The Originals operated before their number was bolstered by the first batch of men recruited in January of that year and when operations resumed in May of that year they would be accompanied by these men and would learn the harsh truths of operating behind the lines.

They too are also of course Originals and i mean no disrespect to them when i do not include them as The Originals.

They replaced those men who were lost on Operation Squatter in November 1941 who through no fault of their own and through the

fortune of war never had the chance to carry
on the fight.

It is to those men and all that followed that
these pages are humbly dedicated to.

Alan Orton.

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The Return.

They were back. Putting behind them the all too recent failure of Operation Squatter and the loss of so many of their comrades and friends, the survivors from that ill fated operation had returned from their base camp at Kabrit where they had gathered as much supplies and replacements to replenish their loss's they returned. Failure this time round was not an option and could not be contemplated. This time round though they had a new card to play. Lt. Col. Guy Prendergast of the Long Range Desert Group had on the 28th November sent a signal from Siwa oasis to headquarters " As L.R.D.G. not trained for demolitions suggest Pct. used for blowing up of 'dromes". Another myth about who came up with the idea of using these desert stalwarts of observation to transport L

Detachment to their proposed targets can be put to rest. David Lloyd Owen was later said to have been their Godfather but put simply Prendergast seems to appear to be the originator of the idea. With parachute operations now out of the question for the foreseeable future L Detachment would now be driven to their targets by the L.R.D.G. and hopefully returned safely after the completion of their allotted tasks.

When Stirling and his men had originally returned from Squatter on the 25th November those requiring medical treatment were sent to the Medical Aid Post at Jaghbub oasis whilst the rest took time out to rest and recuperate and Stirling decided here he would lay low and not return to M.E.H.Q. knowing that the hand rubbing gloating opponents to his scheme would finally bring down the curtain on his scheme. On the 26th November just the

following day though he received instructions to proceed to see Alan Cunningham then the G.O.C. 8th Army at Fort Maddalena. Before he left he sent those who were able back to Kabrit.

David Stirling was a relieved man when Cunningham seemed not to be too worried at the poor outcome of the operation that had come off so badly. His interest was mainly in what Stirling had seen whilst behind the lines, had he seen any tanks was his main concern.

He'd only been able to watch the road for about half an hour before he deemed it time to head for the rendezvous and all that he had observed were trucks heading to the front. Stirling later also met with John Marriott.

Brigadier Marriott had just arrived at Headquarters from the action at the front where he was commanding the 22nd Guards

Brigade, they had previously met in Cairo during the summer and was known to Stirling.

Stirling explained to him that he was in a bit of a predicament in respect of himself, his men and unit and fears that the end was in sight for them. Sympathetically Marriott listened as Stirling told him that to continue in his view he needed to be in a position to attach his unit to another unit, a fighting unit which would in turn give him access to supplies and give him a fairly free hand so he would be able to operate deeming it an absolute need to stay away from those at M.E.H.Q. He needed to be off the beaten track away from any prying eyes and ears.

Marriott thought that he could help and told him of Brigadier Denys Reid who with his E Force had just captured Jalo and had plans that he would operate against the enemy from there for the next few weeks.

Brigadier D.W. Reid had enlisted into the London Scottish in October 1914 and was later commissioned into the Seaforth Highlanders. After the Great War he joined the Indian Army and during the East African campaign he was in command of the 3/5 Mahratta light Infantry in the 29th Indian Brigade of the 5th Indian Division. They later took part in the fighting in Libya and as an Independent Group known as Oasis Group took Jalo. Here he formed E Force which included an Infantry battalion and Engineers from his brigade, a South African Armoured Car Regiment and Reconnaissance Battalion along with both British and South African Artillery units.

Jalo was an oasis band was situated about one hundred and fifty miles from the coast and where the main brunt of the fighting was taking place well away from the mainstream

areas for operations but was close enough to enable Stirling and L Detachment to launch their raids upon the enemy airfields.

Jalo oasis was not what many thought it to be, it was certainly no beauty spot and its waters were so salty that it was almost undrinkable. It was a desolate sand swept spot with clumps of scraggly palm trees along with a few Arab villages and their huts made of mud and dung. There was never the less a few Italian buildings and a fort. In years gone by Jalo had been a hive of activity being the centre for the Majabra, a local tribe who travelled through the desert as merchant caravaneers but that was long ago and now it was a poor place to be but ideal for Stirling's purposes.

On the 30th November Stirling was finally summoned to Cairo all of a sudden the picture had turned bleak but as luck would

have all he needed to do was run past them his latest plans and get their approval which was accomplished, if the summons had been to M.E.H.Q. then the picture would have been quite different.

Sirte Operation 14/15-12-1941.

A.D. Stirling.

W.G.Brough, C.S. Cattell, J.M.Cooper, Burns.

From the old rundown storehouse that served David Stirling as his HQ he finalised his plans for L Detachments series of operations, Fraser would remain here for a further 10 days or so before setting out for Agedabia, Jock Lewes would only have to wait a couple of days before setting off for El – Agheila while Stirling and Paddy Mayne and their groups would leave just after dawn in 7 LRDG vehicles led by Captain C.A. Holliman, Gus to all formerly a tank man and now in command of the Rhodesian patrol S1. Stirling would attack Sirte and Mayne would go to Tamit a journey of some 350 miles across the desert.

The LRDG trucks were camouflaged green and rose a somewhat odd combination which close up led the men of L Detachment to believe they would stand out like a sore thumb but it was a colour scheme that really paid dividends as the vehicles would remain well blended into the terrain and would be very missable until one got close up.

With all of the gear stowed on board the 7 trucks and the SAS men perched on any available space that they could find they set off to begin Stirling's new campaign against the Axis forces.

Mike Sadler led the way as navigator followed by Gus Holliman and the rest of the patrol. By midday the bitter cold of the early morning had worn off and they experienced the intense heat of the day causing them to strip down those extra layers of clothing they all wore to keep out the cold.

At noon the trucks stopped to check their navigation ensuring that they were where they thought themselves to be, Mike Sadler was an expert in desert navigation and they soon confirmed their position. This also served as a break for lunch and the SAS men were amazed at the fare on offer. So used to the rations supplied to them which were not the most appealing or appetising by their own people here they came across tins of good stew and amazingly tins of steak supplied from New Zealand a far cry from the usual Bully beef and biscuits.

Early afternoon and they set off again until night fell and they laagered for the night. Sadler again checked his position with the stars, the LRDG mended any punctures that was a frequent occurrence with desert travel and attended to the maintenance and upkeep of their vehicles. Stirling's men cleaned their

weapons. The evening signal was received over the wireless and decoded but there was nothing of importance to report.

Over the evening meal sat around their camp fire they went over the plans and checked their maps before turning in.

For the next three days they travelled on stopping only for navigational checks and meals and the continual changing of punctured tyres throughout the long hot days seeing nothing of the enemy or anyone else for that matter.

On the third day out the steering broke on one of the trucks which took several hours for them to mend and finally travelled on to make up time as quickly as the desert terrain would allow them. As night fell they estimated their position to be 70 miles from Sirte.

The following day found them on very rough going and could only complete around 20 miles during a 3 hour period of stop start driving the unrelenting desert playing havoc on the transport.

Having remained undetected for so long the always remained vigilant and kept the ever present lookout for enemy aircraft and vehicles and also their own aircraft who could quite easily spot them and shoot them up regardless of them displaying their aircraft recognition panels.

As noon came they searched for a place to stop and again check their navigation and take a quick lunch.

A Gibli reconnaissance aircraft of the Italian air force was spotted heading towards them and they manned the Lewis guns a somewhat old and obsolete weapon of American origin

dating back to the Great War which each truck carried on an air mounting. As the aircraft approached Holliman gave the order to open fire causing the aircraft to take evasive action before dropping bombs which caused no problems having landed well wide of their mark before flying off. With the enemy now knowing that they were in the area the party needed to find cover fast, the desert offered little in this way but they headed for a patch of scrub that they had driven past some 2 miles previously and stopped, covered the vehicles as best they could with the netting that they carried and then took themselves some distance away.

A short time later the sound of approaching aircraft could be heard as they searched the desert landscape for them. For a quarter of an hour they bombed and machined the area but flying off, although the men on the ground

feared that they would wreak havoc on their trucks no damage was in fact done. Once the aircraft had flown away they decided they would remain in hiding and take their lunch.

At 14.00 hours they continued travelling stopping around 16.30 hours within one hour night would fall they were now 40 miles from Sirte. Holliman then made the decision to take the raiders that night to a ridge overlooking the airfield at Sirte which would then allow them to spend the following day hidden up and to observe.

Again another Gibli flew over them, this was a lightly armed but very manoeuvrable aircraft, it did not attack them but circled high above them keeping well out of range before heading off to make its report.

It took several hours of driving the last part without the use of headlights to reach the spot Holliman had earmarked and shortly

before they reached it they found that one of the following trucks had become bogged down in soft sand and needed digging out. The little convoy came to a halt and turned off their engines and prepared to dig the truck out but were surprised to hear voices and that of transport moving and quickly suspected that their maps of the coast road area around Sirte were quite wrong and the road curved inland from the sea where they were now positioned.

The Italians were probably out searching for them after receiving the reports from the aircraft but they didn't seem to understand what was going on.

Stirling knew that he could not afford this operation to become a foul up there had already been one and another could prove fatal for them so here he decided Mayne and

his party of McDonald, White, Chesworth, Hawkins and Reg Seekings should head for the airfield at Tamit 30 miles west of Sirte where they hoped surprise would still be on their side, Stirling himself with Brough, Burns, Johnny Cooper and Charlie Cattell.

Stirling took the option of not risking all of his team preferring to go in with just one other man Jimmy Brough who had come with him from No.8 (Guards) Commando who had also survived the ordeal of Operation Squatter. Brough carried all of the Lewes bombs in his pack which totally laden weighed some 80 pounds but at least the superior Italian packs that L Detachment favoured was up to the task.

The airfield was a wide open space with no wire and only the odd post to be avoided. They could see the Italian bombers parked up and were able to quite easily count the 30

Caproni Ca 309s which in their eyes was just the perfect target to open the SAS account.

This though was only a reconnaissance their attack was due to go in the following night which would allow Paddy Mayne hopefully to operate without the enemy being alerted.

As they cautiously moved around the airfield looking for a hideaway they almost bumped into a pair of Italian guards trying to sleep.

Disturbed from their slumber the startled guards began firing somewhat indiscriminately. From other areas on the airfield more guns opened of all calibres opened up in all directions with the Italians not knowing where this imagined attack was coming from.

Stirling and Brough quickly removed themselves from this scene of panic and

headed swiftly to an area of scrub where they could lie up and continue their observation.

They knew that they would have to remain concealed here until darkness fell and took it in turns to sleep as they waited for the darkness to engulf them.

As they lay in their hideaway they were suddenly aware of noises, voices, the voices of women, cautiously peering out of their area of scrub they saw a group of Arab women working on a small piece of land they were cultivating.

Just before the night fell the women left and they were not the only things to leave.

Within the hour as they prepared themselves for the work ahead the sound of engines came ominously from the direction of the airfield. Checking with his binoculars he could see the Italian bombers warming up ready for

takeoff. As they finally flew off into the darkening night Stirling realised that the previous nights encounter with the Italian guards had been more costly than he had ever imagined.

All that was left for them to do was head for the rendezvous and link back up with Gus Holliman arranged for 00.45 hours that night.

All that was left was to hope that Mayne would not encounter any mishaps and he would strike lucky.

Finally L Detachment had made their mark.

Stirling and Brough on their return to the rendezvous and Gus Holliman's truck wanted to lay mines, Holliman agreed that he would wait while they were laid and as they took cover to it was to long before an Italian truck drove over one and was destroyed.

They now headed back for the main rendezvous and arrived back safely just after sun up but there was no sign of Mayne although they had seen the flashes in the sky and knew that he had scored their first runs.

3

Tamit.

R.B. Mayne.

E.McDonald, H. White, T.R.Chesworth,

A. Hawkins, A.R. Seekings.

Paddy Mayne's group was made up from those who had been with him on Squatter, Ed McDonald as his Sergeant and Harold White, Reg Seekings Tom Chesworth once a moaner but now seemed to have settled down and Tony Hawkins who was a bit of a scrounger.

The LRDG dropped them close to their target at Tamit leaving them only a 2 mile walk. They had arrived late in the afternoon before they were able to take cover in the dunes around the airfield and watch where any sentries may be patrolling and more importantly where and how many aircraft were on site.

Although they arrived late at their destination through the dark they could make out the shape of the aircraft on the site, Fiat C 42's Italian bi-planes they couldn't though make out the number or the dispositions of the defences.

Moving out of the hide up around midnight they checked around the perimeter as far as the sea coming across a group of buildings with one showing some light. As the party moved closer in they could hear the voices of the occupiers and guessed that it may be the pilots mess.

Mayne opened the door and opened fire with his Thompson sub machine gun wreaking carnage within satisfied with what he had done he pulled back. All hell let loose from the defenders with their guns firing in all directions not knowing from where or from

whom the firing that they had heard was coming from.

As Mayne rejoined the party firing was going on all around them keeping them close to the ground as bullets from the firing guns flew past them almost catching Tom Chesworth he gave the signal to head to the airfield itself where they were able to plant their bombs on both a petrol and a bomb dump they also set charges on telegraph poles before turning their attention to the aircraft laying as many Lewes bombs on them as they could.

Ed McDonald now returned with White, Hawkins and Chesworth to the LRDG patrol with instructions for them to wait as Mayne and Seekings sought out more targets.

They soon though run out of bombs as they came to the last aircraft but Mayne wasn't going to leave this one, he jumped up to the

wing and reached into the cockpit and removed the instrument panel which was most probably waiting to be fitted before rejoining Seekings to make their way out.

Only having gone a few yards the bombs started to detonate destroying the petrol and bomb dump and then the aircraft started going up they raced as quick as they could to the rendezvous being guided in by the headlights flashing of the LRDG Ford truck and quickly made the escape.

They were late getting back to Stirling at the main rendezvous who had to wait nearly three hours before they showed up.

When they did and passed on the news of their success they were elated some 20 odd aircraft and its pilots were no more and petrol and bombs and telegraph poles had been put to the sword or rather the Lewes bomb.

They were in business at last.

They arrived back at Jalo on the 16th December after a journey which remained uneventful content that they had partially completed a highly successful operation.

El - Agheila Operation 14/15-12-1941.

J.S. Lewes, W. Fraser.

J.E. Almonds, J. Baker, E.T. Lilley, R. Bennett,
D. Kershaw, A. Phillips, F. Rhodes, G. Rose,

J. Storie, A. Warburton.

Twelve men set off on the planned operation at the airfield at El – Agheila for some like ex Guardsman and 8 Commando James Baker known to all as Lofty, Welsh Guardsman Arthur Warburton and from No. 7 Commando Arthur Phillips a Royal Warwick it would be their first outing having missed the drop on Operation Squatter, Bill Fraser was also on op's for the first time although he was officer in command of the rendezvous party on Squatter having missed the raid due to a broken arm. All the others taking part had all

returned from Squatter and were now eager to start proving their worth.

A New Zealander 2/Lieutenant C.S. Morris from T2 Patrol would along with 13 other LRDG troopers and 5 trucks would take the SAS men to their target. Jock Lewes thought that an Italian Lancia would be helpful to their cause so he took that along also. The plan was simple, destroy enemy aircraft and while they were engaged with this Morris's men were to attack the enemy some 25 miles north east at Mersa Brega and also to attack enemy traffic on the coastal road up to 100 miles north west of El – Agheila, H.Q. also required a prisoner.

Setting out on the 10th December they crossed the Marauda – El – Agheila road by the 11th close to a salt marsh south west of their target known as Sebka Kebrit. The going was rough causing them many problems and

to add to their worries they found that one of the tracks that they had hoped to use had been mined.

The original plan had been to drop the raiders 11 miles south west of the airfield but such were the problems they encountered circumventing the salt marsh Morris decided enough was enough and headed back in a south easterly direction to a point some distance from a village. By this time the party had covered some 120 miles over very inhospitable terrain, steep hills and rocky ridges, the monotony only being broken by the sight of Gazelles and other wild animals.

That night as they camped 4 miles west of the road they heard the sounds of traffic moving ominously south and come the next morning they drove off to investigate. Parking up and camouflaging their trucks about a mile from the road they cautiously approached it and

found new tracks including those of armoured vehicles.

Returning to their trucks they knew that they had to cross the road and luck now played a part as rain began to fall and so using this as cover they drove to a point about 8 miles to the east and crossed again the Marauda-El – Agheila road and then drove on towards the north.

Reaching the point where the raiders were to leave the LRDG men arrangements were made for a rendezvous and the SAS men set off for their target in the Lancia accompanied by 2 LRDG trucks.

Finally they reached the target of the landing ground at El – Agheila and camouflaged their trucks from any prying eyes. Jock Lewes and Jim Almonds set off on a brief recce of the road and area before Lewes and 10 of the SAS

men headed for the airfield and lay up until the 13th December. Luck was not with them the landing ground was deserted, they'd come all this way over such treacherous terrain and they'd found no aircraft. They wouldn't leave the scene though without accomplishing nothing though and Lewes and his men set about destroying telegraph poles running adjacent to the Tripoli road.

By this time Morris and his contingent of men had met up with the SAS men at the rendezvous and planned what they could do next. They came across a platoon of Italian soldiers but space only allowed them to take one prisoner a corporal whom they called Sambo, much to their chagrin the rest of the enemy soldiers were left behind.

The Lancia that Jock Lewes insisted on bringing which he believed would be of help behind the lines had been the bane of their

lives with its tendency to keep breaking down now could be used to deceive the enemy. They thought that if luck was with them they could use the vehicle to enter an Italian post located nearby after passing through a road block.

As the sun fell they moved off into the dusk and headed for Mersa Brega travelling along the main road. They passed many enemy vehicles travelling in columns of ten. Lewes took the lead in the Lancia but its headlights were not working so Lieutenant Morris in the following truck shone full lights onto the Lancia. This vehicle was now to prove its worth and the faith that Lewes had in it as they remained inconspicuous throughout their drive.

They hoped to be able to destroy as many enemy vehicles that they could find at the roadhouse Lewes also hoped that they could

capture some officers as their Italian corporal had not been very forthcoming with any information. Their uniforms helped them as well in their ruse, similar in the darkness to those that the enemy wore, their attitude lent credence to the deception as well as the men appeared to be in the best of spirits as they sat in their trucks casually smoking and waving at the drivers of the German and Italian trucks as they passed them in both directions.

By midnight they reached a track with turned on the target and saw some 20 odd vehicles parked up with soldiers both German and Italian milling around waiting for food to be served. Lewes parked up and Almonds made the Breda machine gun ready.

One of the Italian lorry drivers got out of his cab next to Lewes's Lancia and asked Lewes

for a light for a cigarette which he obliged him with.

Lewes now played a game on the Italian thriving in the situation and told him that his party were indeed English, the Italian believing him to be German accused him of having a wonderful sense of humour and walked off. Lewes tone changed as he ordered his enemy to halt, as he turned around he found that he had Lewes revolver pointing at him. He was hustled into the back of his own wagon from whence he broke down and cried after a brief period of stunned silence.

Bob Lilley how started up the Italians truck and moved it about 50 yards to allow the SAS to operate from a more effective position. As they prepared to plant their bombs armed with Thompson sub machine guns and revolvers the men swiftly moved from vehicle

to vehicle planting their deadly bombs. Almonds now to his horror found that the Breda wouldn't work, having checked and fired it earlier and found it in good working condition he found that not only had the oil congealed but the firing mechanism was now fouled up with sand.

Those who were planting the Lewes bombs moved fast and efficiently amongst the enemy vehicles, the time pencils on the bombs set for 7 minutes, the shortest delay that they could set. All of the time that they were engaged in their task enemy vehicles constantly entered or left the compound, at last the first bomb went off and Lewes gave the order to get out initially taking cover behind a large Lancia truck.

The enemy soon recovered from their initial surprise and began to fire but without much discipline and they finally took shelter in the

roadhouse. The raiders hadn't the weapons to take on this target and so continued to place more bombs on the parked enemy trucks being able to ignore the sporadic and erratic enemy fire. They knew though that there was a risk that further enemy trucks would pull into area and so made their escape after destroying all of the trucks in the park.

Driving swiftly down the road for 2 miles or so they set about mining the road and destroying even more telegraph poles.

Further on in the escape they came across a most curious vehicle, a brightly painted truck and trailer, as they passed it they saw looking out from the back windows the faces of its occupants, women, they'd just passed a mobile brothel.

Here the group of vehicles left the road and drove out into the relative safety of the desert at night heading in the direction of

their adopted base at Jalo, after a few miles they heard the sounds of the mines exploding happy in the knowledge that a few more enemy vehicles had gone west, shortly after they heard the sound of enemy communications being put out of action as the bombs planted on the telegraph poles went off, all in all a good nights work making up for the lack of luck at the landing ground. After making around 25 miles from the main road and dawn approaching the group of vehicles stopped for breakfast after first camouflaging their vehicles, look outs were posted and took the opportunity of getting some much needed sleep.

As night approached after a day laying up with no sign of enemy pursuit or activity they set off again crossing the Marauder road again they found the going rough, rocky country with areas of soft sand which

constantly bogged down their vehicles which left them the back breaking work of digging them out. This type of country didn't last forever and they were able to make good progress once they hit good going. They made camp some 50 miles from Jalo and home and waited for morning.

Back at base Stirling and his men along with the LRDG had been concerned that this party had yet to return and some had pretty much given them up as lost but at midday on the 18th December they finally drove into the warm and welcoming oasis.

Handing over their prisoner the SAS men met with their comrades and compared experiences and celebrated with a party of rum and lime with even the Italian prisoner joining him, a successful end to a reasonably successful operation along with the work Paddy Mayne had done at Tamit where 25

enemy aircraft had been destroyed along with bomb and petrol dumps and many of the enemy killed, Stirling though had drawn a blank having been observed from the air and was unable to operate.

Agedabia Operation 21-12- 1941.

W. Fraser.

D.R.Tait, J.DuVivier, J.V.Byrne, A.Phillips.

For Lieutenant Bill Fraser the Agedabia operation would be his first in command having missed out on the debacle of Operation Squatter due to a broken arm sustained during the later stages of L Detachments training and preparations.

Parachutist Johnny Byrne would also be going on their first but would be accompanied by two of those who had returned, Bob Tait who had jumped with David Stirling and Jeff DuVivier who was part of Jock Lewes's stick. Arthur Phillips had operated with Jock Lewes at El – Agheila. All bar Phillips had come from

11 (Scottish) Commando, Arthur Phillips was from 7 Commando.

Stirling had planned the raid on the airfield when Brigadier Reid of E Force had asked him to put in a raid so that his force could move out on the 22nd December to link up Marriot's forces, with enemy aircraft activity this would become difficult and possibly very costly if they were caught in the open so Stirling devised the raid to destroy as much as possible on Agedabia airfield to limit the enemies activities.

They set out on the 19th December 1941 with S1 Patrol under the command of Lieutenant Charles Holliman commonly known as Gus of the L.R.D.G. on a trip of around 150 miles to their target area.

They arrived at Ain Naga in Wadi el Faregh around 40 miles south of Jedabya on the

night of 19th/20th and joined up with Lieutenant Olivey's S2 Patrol. Early the following morning on the 20th at 01.00hrs they were about 16 miles from Jedabya on the road to El Haseiat. Here Fraser and his section parted company being given a compass bearing and the position of the rendezvous after the conclusion of their operation. They marched off towards their target laden with weapons, bombs, rations and equipment until they were about 3 miles from the airfield but due to too much enemy transport activity they were unable to find a suitable position to lie up and so moved off to find a place where they could remain concealed from any prying eyes.

Having moved a few more miles they finally found a location which would give them cover and prepared for the break of the day so that they could begin observing the airfield.

At daylight they saw several hundred Germans digging defences half a mile to their north and scanning around their position they could also see similar activity to the east and west. Their position was about 8 miles from their intended target and through binoculars they made careful observations regarding the dispositions of the defences and the aircraft weather permitting. Throughout the day there were several rainstorms which forced them to take what shelter from the elements that they could find. They knew that the one thing L Detachment needed was a major success and so carefully noted the positions of the aircraft on the landing site they made their final plans, how to get on the airfield and more importantly how to get off to enable them to reach their rendezvous with the trucks of the L.R.D.G.

Dressed in the sand bleached overalls that covered their battle dress and with the minimum of equipment which included their revolvers a spare magazine for Johnny Byrnes Thompson machine gun and eight primed Lewes bombs per man carried in their haversacks already primed. One though had to be left behind as it had a damaged time pencil and was buried nearby. Their headwear was the scratchy cap comforter and they wore heavy rubber soled boots, each man carried in his clothing a map of North Africa printed on silk, a tissue paper map of Europe, a rubber covered hacksaw blade and a couple of them carried fighting knives.

As darkness fell the section moved off towards their target cautiously in a slow march of about one mile per hour stopping at the end of each hour to answer the call of nature as they were finding that their

bladders needed emptying frequently, something typically felt by men going into action. Three hours or so into the mission the last man in the line Byrne was called forward by Phillips to find Tait and Fraser beside a two wire stranded fence they had come to the perimeter, the lead man had not noticed the wire and had walked into it but luck was with them and no one from the enemy had been alerted. Fraser pointed into the darkness and told Byrne to take the lead and stepped over the fence to be the first of the party onto the airfield. They had somewhat luckily arrived at the airfield from the north which had meant that they had avoided a number of machine gun positions which had been sited for any possible attacks from the east. He quickly moved off and the others followed and were to soon reach the runway. Across from here they encountered the first batch of aircraft

containing both fighters and bombers. There appeared to be the occasional strolling sentry present on patrol but they quickly became aware of men sleeping beneath the wings of the bombers which they assumed to be the crews. Acting fast they began to place their bombs, the fighters got one for their noses while the bombers had one placed high up on their wings. DuVivier and Byrne entered a hangar but it proved to be too dark to search properly. There was a bit of confusion as Fraser was seen climbing up onto the wing of one aircraft to place a bomb but Byrne and DuVivier had already visited this one.

The aircraft were close together parked in groups and the men methodically dealt with each aircraft in the group before they moved to the next, although they had to act stealthily they never saw any sign of the enemy guards that must have been about. On

the centre of the runway Fraser and Tait encountered a tractor and a lorry and these too had bombs placed on them.

Right on time at 00.42 hrs the first of the bombs detonated in quick succession and the airfield was engulfed in flames. The enemy now reacted swiftly believing that they were in the middle of an R.A.F. raid and machine guns, light anti aircraft guns opened up as searchlights combed the night sky for their attackers not knowing obviously that they were actually at ground level. Two machine guns firing on fixed lines now opened fire down two sides of the airfield which would hamper the L Detachment men in their withdrawal. All the time the ammunition in the aircraft was exploding and the fires had spread to the petrol and ammunition dumps, the enemy's guns rapidly firing skywards not a shot came their way. With the airfield lit up

by the flames of the burning aircraft they now spotted a previously unseen group of German fighters these they knew they had to take out and so collected what bombs were remaining a total of seven, one short. Fraser now order the other three to make their way back to the rendezvous while he alone would tackle the remaining fighters but they would have none of that and remained to cover him. Fraser along with Byrne ran towards what now appeared to be brand new Me 109-F's and lay their bombs and to make sure that they got them they yanked the pull switches which would give them just fourteen seconds before they exploded. Fraser kept watch as Byrne placed each bomb but he missed the seventh fighter and ran onto the eighth as Fraser stood by the seventh shouting for him to return but by now all of their bombs were used up. The first bombs now went off

followed by the last three and as luck would have it all eight were enveloped in flames.

The airfield was now lit up like day and with the noise and bedlam all around them they formed up in a line and rapidly made their escape as from above they heard the sound of bombers from the R.A.F. who dropped bombs on the area of Jedabya on the El- Agheila to Benghazi road, to add to the cacophony of sounds one stick of bombs hit the airfield itself .

The time was 00.55 hrs and as one of the anti aircraft guns located near to a desert fort by the desert track opened fire which gave its position away to Frasers men and they were able to the airfield well away from it and effect their escape. In a half circle movement they headed for the track accessing it well away from the fort and headed off into the desert walking and then running checking the

kilometre stones which marked the track to see how far they had gone. Sand had drifted onto the track which they had to go around which delayed to some degree, some of the drifts were as large as hills and was certainly an unwelcome sight.

By 03.00 hrs they began to feel the effects of the last two days and their lack of sleep, the elation temporarily wearing off and they still had a long way to go to the rendezvous. If they were late would the L.R.D.G. wait? Spurred on with the knowledge that they had to make it on time again they pressed on alternately walking and running without respite until at 0.500 hrs as dawn was breaking they finally made it. They could see no sign of the patrol and thought that their lung breaking efforts had all been in vain but soon a heard a voice calling them and they

were led to one of the Patrols trucks which were parked up just west of the track.

The truck drove off and rejoined the rest of the Patrol which was waiting concealed some five miles away. Luck had been with them again as they were four hours late making the rendezvous and staying on had put the Patrol in some risk but they had showed their kinship to these brave raiders and that they would never let them down if possible.

Within the hour they came across the lead elements of Brigadier Reid's E Force, the Kings Dragoon Guards a most impressive sight for them to see. Fraser made a brief report to Reid who was more than impressed with the outcome of their operation and thanked them wholeheartedly.

E Force moved on leaving the Patrol to make a temporary camp, make breakfast, brew up

and importantly to put out aircraft recognition signs, wooden circles painted as R.A.F. roundels for any friendly aircraft to see.

As they gathered around for a breakfast of tea and porridge made from biscuits two R.A.F. Blenheim light bombers came into view and spotted the laager, whether they saw the recognition panels or not or thought it was just a ruse used by both sides to avoid attack remains unknown but attack them is what they did. Opening fire on them one man was killed and another mortally wounded, Corporal Laurence Ashby and Private Reginald Riggs both of the Royal East Kent Regiment 'The Buffs' and attached to the Rhodesian Patrol were both needlessly killed but such are the fortunes of war. The aircraft continued on their attack but as the men on the ground had now dispersed to what cover they could find there were no further

casualties. Finally with their work done the Blenheim's flew off leaving the L.R.D.G. and L Detachment men to curse the R.A.F.

The bodies of the two men were carried to the back of one of the trucks and laid in the back covered up, quickly clearing everything up the Patrol sped off before a short time later halting close to a large boulder to sadly dig the graves for their two deceased comrades within its shade. At this landmark they solemnly buried their dead without the presence of Fraser and his group. The Patrol leader had asked them not to attend the sad but brief service as to them it was a personal thing and they did not want the company of outsiders, although acknowledged by the Rhodesians that the attack was not their fault they were British and so were the aircraft that had attacked them. Fraser and his men understood the situation and took no offence

and so silently waited for the burial to be completed, hear at this landmark two men now lay buried.

The following day the Patrol finally made it back to Jalo on the 23rd December and Fraser made his report to Captain David Stirling. All

in all it would be the most successful operation carried out by L Detachment in regard to the numbers used. From a total of thirty nine usable bombs they had accounted for thirty seven aircraft, a tractor and a lorry for no loss of their own except for the two unfortunate casualties from the L.R.D.G.

Patrol.

Fraser's men had completed a remarkable haul vindicating Stirling's overall thesis proving what a small number of determined men were capable of.

The rebirth was now pretty much complete.

Christmas had come early.

Sirte Operation 26/27-12- 1941.

A.D. Stirling.

W.G.Brough, J.M.Cooper, C.S.Cattell,

A.R.Seekings.

David Stirling reckoned that if they returned to Sirte and Tamit the enemy would not be expecting another attack so soon if indeed they expected one at all. At this time the Italians were quite unaware of the SAS and most probably along with the Germans also with no knowledge of them most likely thought that it was the work of Commandos.

L Detachment certainly had the edge on them Mayne had found at Tamit were slack and too easily alarmed to be of any effective use once any firing started with all this in mind they would return again Mayne would take on

Tamit but without Reg Seekings who would on this trip be going with Stirling to Sirte.

Again it would be down to Gus Holliman's S1 patrol to take them to their targets and they duly left on Christmas Eve 1941 having made their final plans and preparations on the previous day with Mayne acknowledging that in future he thought it best to deal with aircraft first before attending to any enemy personnel unless it was really necessary.

This time out they chose a different route to their targets just on the off chance that the defenders had wised up to their previous attempt.

The maps though were unreliable and it would be some time before the British issued their own updated versions so in the meantime they would have to rely on what

they had and also the experience in these matters of the LRDG.

They aimed to reach a point on the Wadi Tamit which started on the outskirts of the town and spread deep into the desert. Much of the area was marked on the maps as unpassable especially in the southern regions but once they got neared to the coast the surface hardened and for long stretches the going was good enabling them to move on swiftly.

The fleet of LRDG trucks encountered no aircraft on the journey which was rather uneventful unless to count the numerous tyre changes and each evening they were able to light their fires which if anyone saw would think belonged to the Nomads and heat up their stew.

From the wireless on one of their stops they heard the good news that Rommel and his forces were withdrawing from the Gazala line to positions around Agedabia.

Cooper and Seekings working together for the first time and with a dislike for each other assisted with the mending of a truck which the LRDG were having trouble putting to rights.

At 21.00 hours on the third day of the operation they reached their destination and planned that they would in the early hours begin their attacks.

Mayne had 6 miles to go to the airfield at Tamit but Stirling had further to go to Sirte some 25 miles, after servicing the vehicles and getting their weapons and equipment ready they went their separate ways.

Stirling's journey was over poor going and they could only manage a few miles an hour.

After some considerable time Mike Sadler again navigating for them was able to tell them that they were now around 2 miles from the target.

They were able to do little as they heard the ominous rumble of traffic from the coast road.

Tanks on transporters, armoured cars, supply wagons and troop carrying vehicles were all heading in the direction of Rommel's new positions. After consulting with Gus Holliman it was decided that they could not get to Sirte cross-country in time and they would have to wait until the traffic which was moving swift and fast had ceased.

At 02.30 hours they could see the rewards of Mayne's actions and hoped that they would

be able to do the same themselves but still they had the problem of the German traffic to negotiate. A further hour had passed and the traffic had eased before there was a time when all was quiet and the 3 vehicles of the patrol drove out of the desert onto the coast road and headed on its way to Sirte.

Driving along they passed parked up enemy vehicles and large areas taken up by the enemy's camps before finally arriving at a spot they felt was suitable for the rendezvous. With only an hour left now until dawn broke they would have to act swiftly, choosing a password they headed off to the airfield. Following the coast road they quickly came to their target and found that the enemy had tightened up its defences, wire now spread as far as they could see along with patrols moving around the perimeter.

They knew that with the little time that they had to accomplish their task that attempting to gain access through the wire was just not possible so they made for the road and hoped to be able to find a more accessible way in, they were now challenged by a sentry on guard at a barricade which covered the road, they halted and remained silent and alert weapons at the ready before quietly withdrawing to the safety of the desert.

But now it was 04.30 hours and they had only until 05.00 hours to reach the rendezvous before Holliman would be forced to retire. There was no hope of attacking the airfield and so abandoned their plans.

They reached the rendezvous with Stirling in the lead who now forgot all about the password until he heard the safety catch of a rifle being made ready, he saw the muzzle of a Lee Enfield aimed ominously at him swiftly

making himself known not knowing that he had had a most lucky escape, the LRDG had not chambered a round.

Unless they had no other option the LRDG strictly speaking was not to engage the enemy their main role was that of observation and reporting back on a daily basis their findings so it could be forwarded on to HQ for intelligence evaluation. They were never to risk their precious vehicles but Holliman was a kindred spirit to Stirling and longed to have a crack at the enemy and agreed with Stirling's proposal to attack enemy transport.

Just as the light of the new day began to break they drove onto the coast road and travelled in the direction of Tamit hoping to avoid any armour and seeking out soft skinned targets.

They soon came across a pair of trucks parked up with their crews sleeping nearby, pulling up the SAS men stealthily approached the trucks and planted a Lewes bomb on each, with time running out and full light approaching they spent the next twenty odd minutes driving along the Via Balbia firing full pelt and throwing grenades at anything they came across.

They left behind a great deal of destruction and confusion to the Italians as they headed for the main rendezvous.

Both parties reunited 70 miles south of coast avoiding enemy aircraft on the way before setting off back to Jalo. Once again Stirling had been thwarted in his attempts.

Tamit Operation 26/27-12-1941.

R.B. Mayne.

E. Mcdonald, R. Bennett, H. White,

T.R. Chesworth, A. Hawkins.

With David Stirling's assessment that the enemy would not be expecting another attempt at Sirte and another successful attack on Tamit two parties set off from Jalo with Captain Gus Holliman's S1 patrol. Lieutenant Mayne's party differed slightly from their previous foray behind the lines with Reg Seekings being borrowed by David Stirling for the Sirte operation. He was replaced by Bob Bennett who had been with Mayne on Operation Squatter and also had been on the El – Agheila operation.

Ed McDonald, Harold White, Tony Hawkins and the great complainer who was once suspended over the edge of a cliff by an irate Paddy Mayne during a training exercise Tom Chesworth who also had been with Mayne's Squatter stick again accompanying him.

The outward journey met with no problems and after splitting up from Stirling's section they were dropped 3 miles from their target the airfield at Tamit.

Laying up to observe their target they saw that although they had been there previously the Italians seemed not to have learned any lessons. A few strands of wire had been erected around the airfield and there were now seven or eight machine gun posts sited as well but apart from this they could see nothing that would hinder their approach to their target or indeed on the target itself.

The targets were Italian Savoia bombers which were spaced evenly around the airfield. Unbeknown to the attackers this was a brand new squadron which had only just arrived and were to take part in bombing operations against the besieged island of Malta.

As the time for their attack approached Mayne and his men prepped up their Lewes bombs deciding that a thirty second delay on the time pencils would be more than adequate for them to complete their mission.

As night engulfed them in its darkness they set off and as they had anticipated they encountered no problems getting on to the airfield and soon set about preparing to wreak havoc amongst the enemy aircraft which were spaced around fifty yards apart. Sprinting quickly between the aircraft they stealthily laid their bombs easily avoiding any

Italian guards who appeared to be somewhat peacefully sleeping.

The time pencils though had a habit of not being entirely reliable and the first one went off some ten minutes prematurely which roused the Italian guards. One called out as the SAS men rapidly made their exit and had a grenade thrown at him by Paddy Mayne. During the confusion of the exploding aircraft which left the raiders silhouetted against the flashes both Ed McDonald and Harold White became separated from the others but successfully reunited with them shortly. Heading now for the LRDG and their trucks they encountered no further problems of any significance and eventually joined up with Stirling's unsuccessful team some seventy miles south of the target area off the coast of the Mediterranean.

The destruction of 27 aircraft, 3 Lorries, 2 Trailers containing aircraft spare parts and several fuel dumps led to this group being called 'Paddy's Own' but it would be the last time Tom Chesworth and Tony Hawkins would operate with Paddy Mayne.

Arae Philaenorum (Marble Arch) Operation.

27-12-1941.

W. Fraser.

D.R.Tait, J.DuVivier, J.V.Byrne, A.Phillips.

This raid proved not to be a success after their previous outing which had claimed so many aircraft. This target was located close to Mussolini's famous monument on the border of Tripolitania at S.V.5492. Frasers men set off along with Jock Lewes party with the same L.R.D.G. patrol on Christmas day led by 2nd Lieutenant Morris of T2 Patrol, Frasers men were to be dropped off first close to their intended target and then move on to Nofilia and part company with Lewes men and head for the agreed rendezvous and after picking up Lewes party they would then return and pick up Frasers.

After a somewhat uneventful journey Fraser and his men were dropped off around 10 miles south of the airfield. The cover was good and they lay up in a small hollow screened by scrub and soft sand, the area resembled that of the sand dunes found at some sea side resorts but the sea was a sea of sand. They arranged their equipment and settled down to wait for night to fall. During the long cold night they kept watch and tried to sleep wrapped in their blankets.

Throughout the following day they lay hidden again keeping a watch until finally as dusk fell they collected their bombs, weapons and equipment and set off for the target. In just less than two hours marching they reached the airfield or to put it more correctly the landing strip and its accompanying shed but what was to greet them was to be a disappointment the strip was empty. This left

them with no choice but to head back to their layup and wait for Morris and his patrol to pick them up. Again they settled down each taking his turn as watch but by when night had fallen the following day there was sign of the patrol although they knew that there was a possibility of a problem they remained not unduly worried but a further twenty four hours passed and the alarm bells began to ring. They watched as a continual patrol of German Stuka's passed overhead and saw them bomb an area some fifteen miles distant and saw as black smoke rose in columns, they had no idea at this time who or what had lay beneath the bombs and smoke but later they would learn the true story and it's sad ending. Water was now extremely short and all they could do was to moisten their lips and avoid drinking to conserve their dwindling supply which by now was down to about half a pint

per man, to be left isolated like this in the desert was each soldier's nightmare come true and they now began to weigh up their options. Tait made the suggestion of marching to the coast road to see if they could ambush a truck and drive back to Jalo, although this idea had its merits meaning they could take with them all their bombs and equipment to be used on further operations it had a snag, they would have to navigate across hundreds of miles of desert without the aid of a sun compass a very serious problem. A further very real problem was if they did manage to capture a vehicle there was a very real possibility of it breaking down at some point leaving them in a very isolated and perilous position.

Bill Fraser decided that their best option open to them was to march parallel to the coast road which would keep them in some sort of

contact with the civilian population and to try and reach the last known British positions some two hundred miles away east of Mersa Brega. They would though hold out at their hide out until the very last moment in the forlorn hope that the patrol would turn up.

Although the training that they had undergone initially on joining L Detachment this march would be behind enemy lines and would present many dangers from the air the land and possibly from the native population a different prospect indeed.

Six days into the operation and still with no sign of the L.R.D.G. patrol and with water pretty much gone they now had only one option that being Frasers suggestion.

They hurried about burying the bombs and equipment that they could no longer take with them and at first light they set off after tidying up their hiding place. Rations for the

journey was limited to biscuits, cheese and raisins and a tin of emergency chocolate, this would last them no longer than two days. Each man with his haversack and blanket and what little of their precious water that they had left in their bottles set off on the march but trouble hit them as soon as they had started. Having spent some six days of inactivity their bodies did not react well and it was only their self discipline that was able to let them carry on.

In single file they marched each taking a turn at leading under the relentless sun stopping for ten minutes each hour but taking no water at these rest's preferring by agreement to wait until dusk before they would wet their lips. They halted at midday and sat around together and hoped that this would not be how it would end for them.

On and on they went the rear man taking over from the lead man after each all too brief rest period each man setting a past pace only once did a man lag behind and after catching up at the rest spot he found that the ten minutes were up and he would have no rest as he now led the group, the call of nature cannot be ignored!

At dusk they scraped holes in the sand and tried to sleep wrapped in their blankets until the chill of the morning woke them up and off they set again. Rigidly they stuck to their routine but now on one of their breaks they agreed to walk through the night, resting up till then. Dusk came and they drank the last of their water but at least now they would be marching in the coolness of the night.

Through that night they marched and only stopped the once as the sun came up. They now resumed their normal routine and by

mid morning they knew that they were making good time as in the distance they spotted the salt lakes to their east.

They knew that the water in these lakes was undrinkable but as they headed to them their speed increased until when they reached the

largest of the lakes which took them two more hours they flung themselves down on the water's edge and tried it. Their wishful thinking which had developed a 'periapt's its drinkable' proved obviously to be nothing more than wishful thinking and they each spat out the foul water even trying in desperation other parts of the lake but each time all that they got was the same result.

Their faces and beards were now covered in salt and due to the salt water they had swallowed they found that they were acting in a strange way, dehydration, exhaustion and salt was having its effect on them. They tried

to tell themselves that it was possible to drink small quantities of salt water without any effect but the result of drinking just brought on vomiting, in desperation they argued that it may not be salty desperation was setting in.

They spotted some caves on the north shore of the lake and slowly set off for them. Fraser and Jeff DuVivier suggested that it could be possible to distil the lake water, Arthur Phillips and Johnny Byrne thought it was a mad idea but set about the process willingly.

The distilling process lasted throughout the afternoon and by dusk about a pint had become available for use. Tea they thought was the best option and they set about brewing up. The result was a brew which tasted like urine and Byrne, Tait and Phillips spat out the foul brew, Bill Fraser and DuVivier though drank theirs.

Phillips and Byrne now set off on the suggestion of Bob Tait who also went along to set off on a recce to try and find a source of drinkable water while those that remained carried on with the distilling.

After an hour's march they reached the coast road and watched as enemy vehicles passed them by. Keeping to the south side of the road they marched along until they came to a temporary parking spot marked off by empty barrels, it could hold up to four vehicles. Byrne kept watch with his Tommy gun which he had steadfastly refused to leave behind when they had began their march whilst Phillips and Tait re-arranged the barrels so that only one vehicle could have access.

After an hour or so a covered enemy lorry carefully pulled up , from the rear the L Detachment men positioned themselves so that they cover both sides and waited for the

driver and any passengers to get out. No one did so carefully advancing cautiously listening they guessed that the back was empty. Tait went to the right as Byrne and Phillips went to the left. Phillips opened the door and Byrne pointed his weapon at two Germans inside.

Tait and Phillips searched the truck while Byrne kept watch on the Germans having relieved them of a pistol that they were previously examining. Luck was to a certain extent with them as although the truck was empty there was one Jerry can of vital water.

The Germans were lying face down with their hands clasped behind their heads as Byrne kept a watchful eye on the road. They were unsure now what to do and contemplating taking the truck back to their cave but the terrain they would have to travel over was not ideal. They could along with the Germans

and the water return to the cave on foot and see what Bill Fraser had to say about returning back to the truck and finding a place in the area where the desert was more suitable and proceed on their journey this time by wheels and not by foot. With daylight approaching they along with the German prisoners in tow carrying the water set off on the return, around half a mile from the cave they decided to turn the prisoners loose and duly sent them on their way but were surprised to find as they took a drink of water that they were returning. One who could speak some English told them that they were scared of getting lost, something that they all feared in the desert. Bob Tait pointed to a star in the sky slightly east of where the truck was parked up and sent them on their way again this time telling them not to come back.

They finally reached the cave to a welcome like Royalty or more likely the water was the Royalty and Fraser and DuVivier drank their fill. A brew up was in order but it was decided against and as the water took its effects they found that they now had their appetites returning and feasted on cheese and biscuits.

After filling their water bottles and taking the can with them they resumed their march and by dawn found a small cave to lie up in. There was concern that the two ex prisoners would pass on the information of the three men who had assailed them and so they thought it best to remain concealed until they had got an idea of what lay ahead for them.

By midday there was no sign of enemy activity and so they set out in an easterly direction on what was to be a reasonably uneventful march and that night they slept soundly for the first time in several days.

The following morning they continued on following their usual routine stopping each hour and stopping for a brief lunch break.

By the afternoon they had broken their self imposed water discipline and their water bottles which held only two pints dwindled fast.

The following day as a sand storm began their water had all but given out and they struggled on until eventually after several hours they had no choice to shelter as best they could until the storm subsided somewhat and they could carry on.

When the storm had calmed down somewhat they were more than surprised to find themselves very close to an enemy laager.

Over a wide area they could clearly see hundreds of Italian vehicles parked up in an orderly fashion. The Italians roused

themselves from the storm at the same time as the L Detachment men and began shouting to each other. Creeping away they flung themselves down into the first cover that they could find.

At 19.30 hrs on the 7th January keeping watch from their hiding place in a hollow in the sand one vehicle they noticed was parked some distance from the main group and Bob Tait took a compass bearing on it and they waited for darkness to fall. An oil lamp helped guide them to the truck which was hanging up in the back with a blanket somewhat ill fitted acting as a black out, with the aid of the compass they approached the truck. Fraser and Phillips climbed silently into the back as the other three kept a vigilant eye. The Italians in the back thought that they were Germans and cried out that they were their allies but soon shut up when they realised

that they were in-fact British, Phillips now joined them in the back as Tait and Byrne kept up their watch. Tins of fruit and sardines were soon thrown out of the back of the truck along with a small stove. A large water bottle was found and Arthur Phillips passed it to Bob Tait who found after taking a draught of it was in-fact petrol. With no water available they tried the radiator but this proved fruitless. They now proceeded to do a full search of the vehicle and its occupants, the five Italians were cooks and all it now contained was bedding but no weapons. Jeff DuVivier spoke to one of the cooks and convinced him that the whole vehicle park was surrounded by British forces and an attack was planned for the following morning. Leaving the enemy cooks to their own devices they moved around the vehicle park via a large detour they continued marching to the

east, the ground in the Wadi El Faregh was broken and covered in rocks which made their march all the more difficult as it was hard to keep direction but by dawn they had found cover and lay up for the rest of the day until dusk.

Sitting around in their new hideout but with no water they decided to make inroads into the supplies that they had taken, a two pound tin of jam was disposed of first followed quickly by the sardines and finally the pears were consumed with great relish.

Night came again on the 8th January 1942 and so did the march, heading north out of the wadi they came quite unexpectedly to a vehicle track heading north to east and soon spotted a vehicle approaching but they could do nothing about getting hold of it so waited for another to come.

Arthur Phillips the smallest of the party volunteered to stand in the middle of the road with a blanket over his head pretending to be an Arab and flag the next vehicle down while the rest of the party took up covering positions. Within the hour a vehicle was sighted. What turned out to be a German Mercedes had to swerve to avoid Phillips and stop. The L Detachment quickly pounced on the Germans and disarmed them throwing their rifles into the dark and then demanded water but once again they were thwarted, there was none, they tried the radiator but the contents proved to be salty.

At least now they had a mode of transport and with Fraser and Tait and the German driver in the front and Phillips, DuVivier and Byrne with the other German in the back they drove off down the track until they turned onto the coast road and through quite heavy

traffic they drove to Mersa Brega, here the traffic had emptied due to mines on the road.

Instructing the driver to take the next right turning which petered out into narrow rutted track and they slowed down to a crawl with the driver telling them that the area was mined, finally being given so many confusing instructions that as the track forked he drove into a salt marsh in-which after a struggle they found that they could extricate themselves. Their position was now south of the Mersa Brega to El Agheila road in an area known as Sebkha es Segira.

Fraser told the two Germans to march back to the coast road whilst they themselves stayed with the truck until they were out of sight before continuing themselves to the east and through the salt marsh.

As day broke they hid not daring to show the slightest sign of movement, all day long they endured the relentless sun and pitiless conditions until at last as the night fell they yet again continued. By midnight their nostrils were assailed by the stench of battle. They passed graves of fallen British soldiers who had been dragged out of their resting places and stripped of their clothing and boots, through this deeply saddened by the fate of their comrades in arms they continued.

A shout went up and for the first time in their journey the five men panicked and ran full pelt back around two hundred yards and then threw themselves to the ground and lay quiet and motionless trying to work out from where it had come from. It was only a solitary shout and they wondered if it was a shout at all but as they quietly talked it over between themselves they became convinced that a

sentry had heard them and had indeed challenged them. They began to believe that they had approached the perimeter of a defensive box and so quickly but quietly they moved off to the left and as nothing seemed to be happening they believed they were in the clear suddenly though a volley of shots rang out and they immediately threw themselves to the ground there now followed a fair degree of shouting but importantly the no more shooting. As they lay and waited for the disturbances to die down they pondered the future would they get away. As it became quiet and settled they crawled forward slowly, cautious of making any noise that would again alert the guards, any inadvertent noise that they made they halted and listened before carrying on.

In the distance they spied a light which turned out to be from a paraffin lamp hanging up in a

tent belonging to an Arab. Fraser threw a stone onto the top of the tent to see if there was any life inside, they all began to notice an awful stench of death which seemed to be coming from within. From within the tent emerged a man and his child, as they crawled out they asked him for water and the Arab pointed to a petrol tin which was half full of water, the contents was foul and stank to high heaven but they were glad of any water and all drank from it. The Arab now pointed to the source of the overpowering stench, lying close by were the bodies of his wife and another child but were unable to clear up how they had died even though they were able communicate with him fairly well. They were able to find out though they were in a sort of no man's land and the Arab pointed them in the direction of the British lines, cordially thanking the Arab they left.

They were elated and lifted to think that they were close to salvation but still moved with caution. By dawn they found themselves amongst a large amount of armoured cars and tanks but they were no threat to them as they were the burnt out hulks of a recent battle. They searched around for food and found a few tins blackened by the fires which had engulfed the vehicles but there was a part of each can that they found which was edible. They moved on slowly as the ground again was rocky and descended into a deep ravine, at the bottom they looked up to the top of the other side and were greeted by the sight of armoured cars of the Kings Dragoon Guards. They were safe now for the time being once again amongst friends with the ordeal of the trip very nearly behind them. An armoured car escorted the lorry in which Bill Fraser, Jeff DuVivier, Bob Tait, Arthur

Phillips and Johnny Byrne travelled back to their own lines at Msus and as luck would have it they found two jars of rum and some cans of condensed milk which they rapidly consumed with great relish. They had to own up in the end to what they had done but their actions were graciously brushed aside.

From here the section was flown to 8th Army Head Quarters and Bill Fraser made a report to General Ritchie.

Their return to the rest of their comrades after being away for over a fortnight with no one knowing if they were alive or dead was soon sullied with the news of the death of Jock Lewes.

Nofilia Operation 28-12-1941.

J.S. Lewes.

J.E. Almonds, E.T. Lilley, J. Storie,

A. Warburton, G. White.

Nobody knew that by the end of this operation L Detachment would lose its most inspirational member and its implications would bring this dedicated group of men to almost crisis point but as they started out on Christmas day 1941 all of that was to be in the future.

Lewes's party consisted of John Almonds known to all as Jim, Bob Lilley, Jimmy Storie, Arthur Warburton and George White. The plan was to attack enemy aircraft at Nofilia. On the 24th they had watched as David Stirling and his party had left for their operations at

Sirte and spent the rest of the day collecting their kit and loading it aboard the LRDG Lorries, they would be accompanied by Bill Fraser's party who were to operate at Marble Arch.

Early on the 25th both groups boarded the Lorries of Lieutenant Morris's T patrol and set out on the outward journey. It would take them around three days to get to the vicinity of their objective far to the north east and across the Marauder road. Luck was so far with them as they made their journey without encountering any enemy patrols both on land and in the air and by the 28th December they reached a spot some 12 miles from Marble Arch. Here the 2 parties of L Detachment watched from concealed positions as German Stuka dive bombers landing and taking off from the airfield.

All the time they were making preparations for their own attack and arranged a rendezvous with the LRDG to take place within 3 and 5 days. Bill Fraser's party now left them and Lewes and his party with the LRDG headed off towards Nofilia. The following day they parted with their transport and headed off on foot, Almonds who was in charge of navigation estimated that they had 18 miles or so to go before they reached their destination, Lewes himself looked after the time keeping. By the early hours of the next morning after a long tiring march they estimated that they were now only a few miles from their intended target and Lewes gave the order to rest up.

The area they were now in had several enemy encampments and had to move stealthily to avoid any contact with them, they finally came across a fissure in the ground which

they hoped would conceal them from any prying eyes and set about camouflaging their hide up as best they could covering themselves with sand and scrub.

Settling into their hideaway they took on board some food and settled down to try to get some much needed sleep and rest. They were though awakened by the sound of engines as a flight of enemy aircraft the much hated Stukas flew over them.

Lewes and Almonds now decided on a reconnaissance to get the lie of the land and set out in the direction of a hill where they guessed that the landing ground was located. The weather was fine and in the distance they saw the welcoming waters of the Mediterranean Sea, turning away from the sea and headed towards the landing ground a

distance of around 8 miles and took up positions to observe.

They could see over 40 aircraft parked on the ground with several troop encampments and supply dumps dotted around the area.

Here they now made plans for their attack which was to go in that night. They knew that the moon that night would be almost full which meant that they would not be able to attack the target until the early hours of the morning which would not leave them too much time to do the job and get away.

They located a number of aircraft which were parked up that would be their primary targets and waited patiently still observing for the evening to come so that they could return to their main hideaway and pick up the rest of their party ready for their attack.

Once they had picked up Lilley, Storie and White leaving Arthur Warburton at their hide up they quickly returned to the bir that they had spent the day observing and settled down and went over the plan before resting until the setting of the moon and their attack.

As the moon went down they silently left their layup and made for the aircraft they had previously ear marked for their attentions. They noticed the guards which were spread around but all of them seemed to be asleep and as they stealthily moved none of them were disturbed. They proceeded to plant the first of their bombs on the aircraft, carefully placing it on the port wing close to the fuel tank to ensure maximum damage a second aircraft was also made ready for its destruction but events now took a turn for the worst as they were unable to locate any further aircraft. Sometime during the day the

Germans had moved their aircraft without the SAS men being aware of it, the two that had been left behind were non operational.

After moving quickly around the airfield for about 20 minutes they realised that there was only 2 left somehow the enemy had got the planes away but just how they didn't know.

Suddenly the bombs that had planted detonated quickly followed by the second but neither caught fire and they could only assume that the fuel tanks were empty.

They now had to effect their escape and after watching for a while the enemy activity going on all around them they exited the airfield picked up the waiting Warburton and after travelling about a mile they set down their remaining bombs with a time pencil set to explode them as they continued their getaway. Again they set off on a bearing back

to the rendezvous and the waiting LRDG. They had a trip of roughly 25 miles to make and it gave them plenty of time to ponder the conundrum of the missing aircraft. Were they towed away or was it that from their hiding place the noise didn't reach them or did the wind direction change? Whatever was true was now immaterial the raid was a failure as far as the destruction of aircraft was concerned but it did though prove again that David Stirling's basic principles were correct and that they could achieve so much.

Again with Almonds dealing with navigation and Lewes the time they made their way to the rendezvous, as daylight broke enemy aircraft took off to seek the would be saboteurs but their search failed to find them as they marched as fast as they could to the relative safety of the LRDG patrol.

As night fell they arrived back at the LRDG camp and the welcoming sight of the 5 trucks which would hopefully bare them home to safety.

They wasted very little time once they had reached the patrol and quickly boarded the trucks and set off in the direction of the rendezvous set to pick up Fraser's party covering around 20 miles before stopping.

Night brought respite from the enemy who were now searching for them and they were able to brew up and have themselves a feed of bully stew but more importantly to get some much needed sleep.

As the sun came up on the following morning they all boarded their trucks and continued on the journey to reach Bill Fraser and his party keeping an ever present watch for the enemy aircraft which would soon be up

searching for them. For several hours they saw no aircraft but knew it would only be a matter of time before they sighted one and would have to go to ground and hope that they would remain undiscovered. Just before 10.00 hours they spotted an Italian Savoia aircraft heading in their direction and knew that they had been spotted it would now be only a matter of time before more aircraft would begin a systematic search for them to try to destroy the intrepid raiders. Shortly a Messerschmitt ME 110 saw them and headed directly at the five trucks, realising the gravity of the situation the patrol stopped and they hoped luck was with them as the aircraft passed overhead and that they hadn't been seen. The ME 110 was armed with four machine guns and two 20cm cannon which could fire 650 rounds per minute and could inflict crippling damage not only them but to

their light trucks. The aircraft passed low overhead and initially they thought that they had got away with it but the aircraft banked and they realised that the Germans had indeed spotted them. Four of the LRDG trucks including George White started up and raced for a group of rocks the other vehicle with Lewes, Almonds, Lilley, Storie and Warburton. With the sun behind him the German aircraft came into attack very low and opened up with his armament. Almonds manned the Bren gun and rapidly fired off rounds at their attacker, on the second run the Germans fire hit the truck but although it received damage none of the SAS men were hit. Almonds and Lilley in the back of the truck realised that the truck was now a death trap and shouted to Jock Lewes who was in the front seat to bail out and head for the cover, the former two detached the Bren and along with some of

the LRDG men headed for a rocky knoll. Unexplainably Lewes still remained in the truck.

The enemy aircraft now diverted its attentions to the men taking cover behind the knoll which afforded some cover it only being head height and as the German attacked they were able to remain out of direct line with his guns by playing a type of 'ring of roses' game and still being able to get off bursts of Bren gun fire.

Whether they hit the aircraft or it was out of ammunition they did not know but they were grateful to see it break off its attack and head for home but they knew that shortly there would be more aircraft seeking them out.

Almonds and Lilley with a few of the LRDG men now ventured cautiously back to their abandoned truck and saw what damage had

been inflicted on. The drive shaft was shattered by the cannon fire but both the petrol and water tins were found to be ok, but they couldn't locate Lewes and decided to head south to try and meet up with the rest of the patrol, they had covered about 7 miles when they spotted 2 Stuka dive bombers in the distance and quickly took cover after spreading a camouflage net over the truck and grabbing some water bottles. Throwing themselves down into the sand they covered themselves as well as they could with scrub and sand and hoped for the best. The Stukas soon spotted the lone vehicle and commenced to shoot it up they also shot up the desert floor hoping to hit the former occupants, almost as quickly as it had started it ended as the Stukas flew off in search of the other trucks and soon located them, circling above them and then going in for the attack.

Explosions and machine gun fire was heard and soon four plumes of black smoke was rising in the distance, the ominous signs that all of the trucks had been hit.

As they waited in their cover until they were certain that the attacks were over they realised that with four trucks gone it would be a long way to Jalo and home.

Jim Almonds and Bob Lilley along with an LRDG man now rose from their cover and headed away from their burning truck and headed in the direction of the four others but the smoke soon brought more Stukas to the scene who savagely machine gunned the desert in search of the raiders, the Stukas were operating in pairs so they could keep up a constant staffing attack on the area. By late afternoon quiet had returned to the desert as the end of a hot day, hotter in more ways than one approached they broke from their

cover to look for any survivors. As they reached the top of a hill of dunes they spotted two figures in the distance, Almonds drew his revolver and fired a shot to draw their attention, on hearing it the two men headed towards them, suddenly another German aircraft appeared on the scene this time is a Fieseler 'Storch' a reconnaissance aircraft. Again they all dived for cover as the aircraft circled above but seem content that there was nothing left it flew off.

They now met up with the two men from the LRDG who told them that Jock Lewes was dead.

An LRDG man then told them what he had been told had happened, Lewes was wounded in the thigh during the attack on the truck and bailed out and tried to make for cover finding some in the form of a desert bush but the German had spotted him and a

burst of gunfire caught the unlucky Lewes full in the back, if it didn't kill him instantly then he most surely would have died very quickly.

Jimmy Storie who was close by was himself lucky not to be hit, he and a few of the LRDG troopers dug a grave and lowered the body of Lewes down, covered it as best they could and said a prayer, leaving a marker of a rifle and helmet with his name and number scratched on they hoped sincerely that someone would pass by in the future.

What was left of the patrol now gathered together including its leader Morris and they set about trying to repair one of the trucks that was thought that with a bit of cannibalization they could get one up and running. A number of the LRDG and decided that there only option was to walk home and along with SAS man White they started on a journey of 200 miles a task that they

miraculously completed in eight days but as they crossed the Marauda – El Agheila road White whose feet were by now nearly raw from the marching had no choice but to fall out and take his chances, luck was with him as he was eventually picked up by the enemy and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner.

Back at the trucks with typical ingenuity of the New Zealanders one of the trucks was made ready to start the sad trip home.

Lieutenant Morris who had obviously lost touch with the men who had decided to walk home presumed that they had been killed collected together his group of men and the SAS men and set off on the journey with little or no water and only hope to accompany them. They had though left what supplies they could afford just on the off chance that the rest or some of the party now missing had actually survived but it was precious little.

By midnight they had driven through a rock strewn desolate country of gorges, cliffs and precipices expertly driven by a New Zealand driver, crossing the Marauder road often having to turn back and retrace their route to avoid the obstacles they constantly faced.

On New Year's Day 1942 they were still headed in a south easterly direction and soon found themselves on better ground for driving and shortly in the distance they spotted the welcome signs of Jalo oasis. They had survived the bitterest encounter so far by the depleted L Detachment but their return was down to the great skills shown by those new Zealanders of Lieutenant Morris's patrol.

David Stirling sent for Jim Almonds and the other SAS men the following morning after they had had a chance to clean up not that they had much chance to do so, and to eat

and drink their fill and also for a night of rest
and sleep.

The report from Almonds shook Stirling to the
core, the methodical Lewes was going to be
pretty much impossible to replace a problem
that he himself would struggle to resolve.

He was especially upset that they were
unable to bring the body of his friend and
comrade back for burial but the unwritten
rule of the unit was that they were to be left
where they had fallen and hopefully buried
but if not then it would be down to the
fortunes of war.

10

Boureat 23-01-42.

A.D. Stirling.

D. Rawnsley (R.A.F.).

C.G.G. Riley, E.A. Badger, R. Bennett, W.G.
Brough, J.M. Cooper, A.R. Seekings.

E.P. Austin, J.H.M. Baker, C.S. Cattell,

D. Kershaw, F. Rhodes, G. Rose.

S.B.S. Party.

Lt. Duncan, Cpl. Barr.

Captain David Stirling had held a meeting with Auchinlek after he returned from the earlier operation and proposed with the assistance of the Long Range Desert Group he would be able to enter Boureat and destroy shipping etc. in the harbour. Auchinlek gave him the go ahead and told

him he needed to do it by the end of the third week in January. Auchinlek had also given him permission to recruit another six officers and up to forty other ranks. He made his plans in Peters his brothers flat in Cairo and decided that he needed to be back at Jalo with his men by the 10th of January, after the plan had taken shape Stirling returned to Kabrit to tell his men of the raid to come and also to tell Paddy Mayne that for the time being he was off op's for the time being and was to take on board the responsibility for training the new recruits in place of Jock Lewes. Mayne was not very impressed with this and allegedly accused Stirling that he was jealous of him and of his success's on the previous raids but agreed that he would do his best but in the end he retired to his

tent and is supposed to have read James Joyce novels and drank quite considerably not engaging at all with Stirling's request, one upshot of this was that Bill Cumper the engineering officer was ordered back to Cairo with it is said Mayne making no attempt to inter-veen. He'd also informed the R.A.F. that he intended to raid Boureat on the night of the 23/24th January and if they had any plans themselves to raid here during the moonless period could they postpone. They agreed to this saying that they had plans to bomb it on the night of the 22nd. Peter Oldfield of the Air Reconnaissance Unit also supplied him with reconnaissance photos of the area for him to study.

He arrived at Jalo by air on the 11th January with twelve men and on the 13th

Captain Duncan and Corporal Barr of the Special Boat Service arrived with their equipment also with them was an RAF Intelligence Officer David Rawnsley. They set off on the 17th with an L.R.D.G. patrol commanded by Captain Hunter with Mike Sadler navigating, the patrol consisted of one wireless truck and a further six for transport with a crew comprising of twelve L.R.D.G. men. They drove south to avoid any possible enemy detection but due to the terrain and punctures they only covered about one hundred miles per day. Before though they had left Oldfield had told Stirling that he had a new set of pictures and that he was studying them to try to locate some suspected new supply dumps and would as soon as he was able radio him the info

via the L.R.D.G. at Siwa.

By the 21st four days into the operation Stirling had still not received any word but the following evening the wireless operator received an incomplete garbled message from Siwa convinced that this was Oldfield's info Stirling asked Hunter to break radio silence and ask for a retransmit, this was a problem as they suspected that the enemy had direction finding equipment in the area and if they picked up their signal there was a distinct possibility of them being compromised. Hunter did though authorize the message and in due course they received a reply that as yet Oldfield had not been able to identify the new targets.

Hunter now said that the patrol needed to go to ground for a while as he suspected

that the enemy had picked up the transmission and so they hid up in a wadi but they were soon spotted by an Italian recon aircraft and had to find a new laying up spot some four miles further up the wadi. Soon six bombers arrived over the area and proceeded to straff and bomb up and down the wadi until about the middle of the afternoon.

At 18.00hrs Hunter ordered the patrol and reassemble, the only casualties were the wireless truck and the three men.

Guardman Smith and Anderson and the wireless operator were not located and the party assumed that they had either been killed in the bombing or had been able to drive away to avoid it. All three did survive and were picked up by enemy forces and spent the rest of the war as

prisoners of war.

The problem caused was serious as without a wireless Stirling would not know if Oldfield had any new intelligence for him. They resumed their journey for three hours stopping at a spot thirty five miles from Wadi Tamit and sixty five miles from Bouerat itself this was to become their main rendezvous.

At 20.30hrs the men busied themselves getting all of their equipment together and with the possibility of the area being heavily patrolled which meant that as they neared the intended target they would have to drive blind with no head lights to avoid detection Hunter decided that he could only risk one truck. They all piled in and Hunter drove them to a position about a mile from the port. They set off at

20.45 hrs with all the men and the assembled folbot aboard and they had to travel twenty five miles of rough going to reach the hard surfaced road that led to the town and harbour, by 22.15 hrs they estimated that they were about five miles from the track. The second misfortune now fell upon them as two wheels of the truck jolted into a large fissure on the desert ground and damaged the folbot beyond repair but soon the truck was on good going and Stirling now had to reorganise his plan so that instead of going for shipping they would make their main targets from the harbour installations. By 22.30 hrs they approached the Bouerat track which ran parallel to the coastal highway a further five miles away. After reaching the road they travelled

much faster and within thirty minutes as they approached the crossroads they knew that they were now twenty seven miles from the harbour. Another forty minutes later and they were one mile away and the truck pulled up about ten yards off the road the time was now 00.05 hrs which left them just one hour and fifty five minutes to do their intended work and be back at the rendezvous by 02.00 hours.

Captain Duncan, Corporal Barr and Corporal Rose made up one group and as they had the longest route and would probably not be able to meet the rendezvous deadline Stirling arranged that they would be picked up the following night about eight miles from Bouerat, the spot would be marked by stones and

twigs.

Two other groups were made up of six and seven men respectively, Stirling would lead one and Pat Riley the other.

Stirling's group took the lead. Cooper and Seeking's were with Stirling's group.

They started off with 5 minutes between the two groups and would approach the harbour from 2 sides, each would have their bombs set to go off at 02.30 hrs.

Stirling's group had taken the lead and soon the broken desert had given way to a more cultivated ground but keeping themselves close to the road but now found that they had to move away from it to skirt the village and enter the harbour from the beach, they were able to make

out the silhouettes of the houses as they silently moved past them in the darkness.

With the group moving swiftly and silently in single file they reached the water's edge before locating a path which would take them to the quay passing a house and an out building in the process. Soon they were on the pier and took their bearings. As they looked around they could see various quays and warehouses and decided that first they would walk along their intended target area and mentally mark out their targets. Keeping under cover of the lee of the buildings Stirling led his men ever watchful for any enemy guards but all was quiet and none so far had been seen. Not only were there no guards there was in-fact no shipping in

the harbour to be seen bar a few fishing boats, in the air they could smell oil and they guessed that probably the previous afternoon a tanker had been moored and offloaded its cargo but for all intents and purposes Stirling and his men had missed their targets.

Stirling now divided his group into two, one group would remain hidden by the warehouses whilst he along with two men would go into the warehouses and plant their bombs.

The first building they encountered was unlocked and they spotted what appeared to be some kind of pumping equipment so they placed a couple of bombs on it, to add to the destruction they left a few

other well placed bombs within the warehouse walls.

The next warehouse was locked but they were able to break open a window with ease and enter to find it stacked out with packing crates in orderly aisles, some rows stacked to the ceiling, enough bombs were planted to ensure their eventual destruction. The next building was empty but the next two contained tinned food and machinery and was duly dealt with.

In the third of these buildings a door to the side was found and Stirling decided to investigate where it went. Once outside he moved down an alleyway which led to the pier and heard noises, keeping perfectly quiet and still he was surprised to find he had come into contact with Pat Riley and

his six men. Riley, Stirling expected to be on the other side of the wharf but found out that they had found similar targets to what Stirling's group had and were now trying to get away but had come up against some unexpected wire and a guard post and had lost their way and hoped to get away from this side of the harbour.

Stirling told Riley to keep his men under cover whilst he had his men made their way out and that then they should follow on independently. Before they started off Stirling told his group to keep a look out for any petrol dumps as they kept closer this time to the road Reg Seekings thought that he'd spotted a dump and signalled to Stirling the direction. On

closer inspection the shapes Seeking's had seen was in-fact several rows of large fuel carriers, each with a capacity to haul 20 tons of much needed fuel for the enemy. This must have been the cargo that they guessed had arrived the previous afternoon and now it was theirs for the taking.

Within 5 minutes they had laid their bombs, nine in total with the fuses set to go off in two hours time which gave them ample time to make their exit. The now being 01.30 hours and as David Stirling set the fuse on a tenth bomb once again he came into contact with Pat Riley. Both groups had in-fact been sewing their bombs at the same time unbeknown to each other, both groups acting so

stealthily that neither had spotted the other overwhelming proof that their training had reaped great rewards.

They now decided that it would be for the best if the two groups stayed together as they were only a short walk from the rendezvous but not before Riley put a bomb in the breach of an anti aircraft gun in an emplacement that he had spotted, the gun crew oblivious to it all as they slept soundly in their adjacent tent.

Stirling scanned the horizon in the direction of the wireless station hoping to see signs of Duncan and his party but none was to be seen. There was now only 15 minutes to go to Hunters rendezvous deadline and they walked fast to reach it which they did with over five minutes to

spare. Once again they found themselves in the vicinity of a vehicle park and as Reg Seeking's and Johnny Cooper kept watch Stirling planted more bombs on the 12 lorries that he located taking no more than 5 minutes in his work. These three met up with the rest of the party at the rendezvous at 02.06 hours.

There was still no sign of Duncan's men and they now knew that they would have to pick them up the following night as prearranged.

As the party now in the trucks of the LRDG moved off they passed the fort by the crossroads they heard the sounds of their nights work exploding.

By dawn they had reached the second rendezvous and camouflaged their

vehicles and took cover waiting for the expected enemy reconnaissance aircraft to fly over searching for them. They were not to be disappointed as from first light until noon the air was never without the sound of aircraft overhead. The LRDG though were masters of concealment and their vehicles well hidden under netting and covered with scrub showed no evidence of their presence. Just after noon the weather darkened and the wind rose a prelude to a sandstorm which would mean that they would remain undetected, the elements were now in their favour.

By 19.00 hours the sandstorm abated and 2 hours later was no more than a strong wind although it was still clogged with sand. It was now time to attempt to pick

up the three remaining men and Stirling along with Riley, Seekings and Cooper and two others driven by LRDG man Gibson and accompanied by Hunter drove off to the rendezvous.

In case roadblocks had been set both Seeking's and Cooper rode shotgun lying on the wings of the truck with their Thompsons at the ready waiting to deal with any trouble, it was not to be a comfortable ride for them in such an exposed position with the biting wind cutting in to them.

The truck passed by the old fort and diverted onto the Boureat track running along side of the main road and after approximately 2 miles they came upon the sign on the ground meaning that their 3

comrades were lurking unseen in the darkness. A call went for them and they soon emerged from the dark and were able to tell the waiting men that they had been successful and the wireless station had been destroyed. It seemed that initially they had lost their way and had not reached their target until 01.00 hours whereupon he kicked over empty petrol can which alerted the guards who commenced a brief but cursory search before standing around smoking. At last the guards returned to where they had come from and they were able then to approach the station and prepare its destruction with 30 pounds of TNT. They did not finish until 02.00 hours and did not get back to the rendezvous until 30 minutes later which meant that they

would have to conceal themselves and lay up until the following night.

For nearly 20 minutes that night before Stirling came to pick them up they had watched as the R.A.F. had flown own over the harbour and bombed it, as they watched from the cave in which they had taken refuge from the enemy that during the day they had watched as Italian soldiers searched in vain for these raiders wondered just what was left to bomb there?

Time had now come for them to move out and rejoin the rest of the patrol and set out for home. They hoped that on their way they could find at least one more worthwhile target. They cut cross the

coastal road heading away from Boureat and back in the direction of the old fort.

Soon they came across the darkened shape of an Italian petrol bowser and thought that this could be a worthy target. The LRDG driver Gibson parked up some distance away from the truck and one of the SAS men ran to the truck, planted a bomb with only a 10 second fuse and quickly turned and started back, no explosion came as Seekings returned to safety and so he and Stirling made their way to the truck to investigate. The bomb seemed alright but the time fuse had failed to work. Stirling removed the bomb just as the fuse kicked in, dropping the bomb they made a hasty retreat, the bomb then detonated in the road waking

the sleeping Italian driver. Seeing the patrol about him he immediately surrendered in true Italian style.

A second bomb was planted and this time there were no problems as it destroyed the Italian vehicle. Sheltering behind their own truck they saw the Italian make a very hasty exit again in the best of Italian traditions.

They moved off again with Gibson driving and as they approached the fort they heard the tell tale signs of a mine being tripped but fortunately it didn't detonate but they know saw the signs of the enemy in the form of their shadows on both sides of the road, Stirling seeing the danger shouted to Gibson to reverse but the driver just put his foot down on the

accelerator. Cooper, Seekings and Bennett were in the back of the truck with their automatic weapons ready but the truck smashed straight through the Italians running several of them down, their ambush had failed and the raiders made good their escape.

Rejoined the rest of the party they lay up for the day hidden from sight and watched from their cover as the enemy vainly searched for them from the air. As night fell they made their preparations for the return to Jalo.

They'd been out of communications for some time and did not realise that Jalo had been evacuated and the 8th Army was in retreat as Rommel had launched his offensive. Eventually once they had tuned

into the BBC on their onboard wireless set they learned of the situation going on all around them.

On the 26th January all that was left at Jalo was the stores and Captain Alastair Simpsons and men from his G2 patrol were tasked with destroying them to save them falling into the welcoming hands of the Germans. They were also told to keep a watchful eye for Anthony Hunter and his patrol. It took them 5 days to complete their journey mindful that at any time a rampant enemy now on the march could quite easily scupper their hopes of getting back safely. As they approached Jalo all the vehicles bar one found cover while Hunters truck cautiously approached their base.

As they parked up they searched the site and found nobody and finally began helping themselves to some provisions that they found not knowing that most had been contaminated by Timpson's party of stay behinds. Luck was with as they had found what appeared to be the only batch that had yet to be dealt with.

The sound of a truck was heard which startled the men to their senses and were finally relieved to see Timpson.

That night after the situation was explained to them they set off for Siwa.

The raid was not the success that they had planned for at Bouerat by the time they had arrived it had lost its significance as on the 21st Rommel had launched his

counter to attack and was to recapture Benghazi, but it was a success in that it proved that they could adapt to any situation and make something out of possibly nothing. Their ability to adjust would set them in good stead for the battles to come.

Interlude at Kabrit.

February 1942.

With the war again turning against the Commonwealth forces in the Middle East with Rommel back on the offensive and Auchinlek's army in retreat losing all that had been from the bitter Crusader battles David Stirling took the men of L Detachment who had been operating since December of the previous year with a fair degree of success back to Kabrit from Siwa for a well deserved break. This allowed them to be able to take leave and eventually make ready for the next series of operations that Stirling was planning.

Their operational losses were not great in number but indeed were greater in stature. The loss of Jock Lewes would have its own

repercussions but only one other man had been lost, the unfortunate George White who had become a prisoner of war.

By the end of the first week the army was back at the Gazala Line and L Detachment was at its camp at Kabrit.

The men were now able to enjoy the freedom from the restrictions of their desert campaign with leave although most avoided the more popular spots in Cairo preferring the lesser used places as they wished to avoid any contact with the more aggressive of the older soldiers especially the Australians mainly because they knew that if they found themselves embroiled in any serious fracas they knew that there was every possibility that they would end up being R.T.U'd.

Stirling promoted some of his operatives, Bob Bennett, Charlie Cattell and Johnny Cooper

becoming Sergeants, Stirling himself was now promoted to the rank of Major. Jim Almonds took over the running of the Sergeants Mess and took on the job of upgrading the parachute training towers building a new pair with the help of a group of Italian prisoners, once the towers had been erected they along with the help of a section of Royal Engineers attempted to put in some bridging girders but the first tower collapsed and they then had to rebuild it but success was eventually achieved.

The first batch of replacements many coming from the ranks of the disbanded Layforce while others from the regiments of the line or other corps along with a French contingent whom Stirling had finally gained French consent to recruit were undergoing their rigorous training following the same regime as those from the original fifty men. Route

marches, rough and tumble football and rugby games, parachute instruction now led by Peter Warr and all oversaw by the ever popular Gus Glaze with Paddy Mayne in overall command. The problem was Mayne wasn't, since Stirling had taken him off operations to fulfil this task he taken to his tent with paperbacks and whisky and during the evening venturing out only as far as Sergeants Mess. In putting him in this position Stirling had not only clipped his wings but had pretty much nailed him to his perch. Mayne resented this, he was a fighting soldier, the main reason he joined L Detachment was to fight the train not be a stay at home overseeing recruits. He believed Stirling was jealous of his success that he'd had whilst on operations, he'd been firing broadsides while Stirling through no fault of his own was firing blanks. Seeing the state of affairs Stirling

knew that he had to clear the air and went to see Mayne in his tent. The upshot was that after a somewhat bitter row he realised that he had erred by putting Mayne in this position but in defence what choice had he as he needed an officer at Kabrit who had experience and presence? Paddy Mayne was now operational again and in place he put Pat Riley now Regimental Sergeant Major in his place assisted by Jeff DuVivier who now specialised in night navigation and calm was restored.

Even the engineering officer Bill Cumper possibly the original 'crafty Cockney' had returned to the fold not on attachment but as a fully fledged member of the SAS.

The veterans of the desert and the new recruits saw little of Stirling as once all had settled down he spent much of his time at Cairo planning again for their next batch of

operations which hopefully would commence once the next moonless period during mid March came around.

8th Army by now had consolidated its positions at Gazala and the fluid war of a few weeks ago had settled down ready it was hoped once men and materiel had been replenished to go back on the offensive and drive the Axis forces back.

Stirling had meetings throughout this period and raids were planned for Barce and Slonta, Berka satellite and Beninna. He also raised the idea of raiding Benghazi harbour to Brigadier John Marriott who assumed that he meant a full on Commando style raid. Stirling explained otherwise and no matter what Marriott threw at him concerning the viability of such an operation he remained convinced that he could make it a success.

By this time 2 new officers had passed out and joined the ranks Roy Dodd and Gordon Alston both would play a role in the forthcoming jobs. New also was the ex diplomat Captain Fitzroy Maclean who back in the previous year when approached by Stirling to join hadn't thought much of the idea now he was on board.

The time had come for them to resume and they made their way to their new base of operations, 'Cleopatra's Oasis at Siwa.

Beninna and the Benghazi Harbour Operation.

A.D. Stirling, G.W. Alston.

A.R. Seekings, J.M. Cooper.

S.B.S. Party.

R.K.B. Allott, D.G.C. Sutherland.

Moss, Sinclair, Pomford.

R. Melot.

What followed next was a series of operations all linked as virtually all of the available L Detachment men were engaged, Jim Almonds remained behind at Kabrit.

Stirling's plan was to take his force again accompanied and ably guided by the LRDG to conduct a series of raids in the Benghazi area. He and his contingent would raid Benghazi

harbour itself, Stirling remained convinced that he would be able to achieve success with this but there were those who still doubted its viability. His main objective would though be the airfield at Bennina

Paddy Mayne now promoted to Captain able the training debacle was to raid Berka satellite along with Johnny Byrne, Graham Rose and Bob Bennett.

The quiet but effective Bill Fraser would operate with pretty much a new team of men than on his previous outings. Ted Badger, Dave Kershaw and Ed McDonald were his NCO's along with Arthur Phillips and Tom Chesworth who up to know along with McDonald had always been with Mayne. They planned to attack Barce.

The new man Roy Dodd would be accompanied by Pat Riley, Jeff DuVivier, Bill

'Jimmy' Brough along with Charlie Cattell, Arthur Warburton and Jimmy Storey they would take on Slonta.

Also coming along was Gordon Alston who knew Benghazi well, a gunner by trade he had acted as Town Major when the Allies had last controlled the port and would be a valuable asset when accompanying Stirling and his team when they went into the port itself.

After making all the necessary arrangements and the stowing of all the gear, equipment and provisions Stirling and Mayne's parties set out in one convoy led by 2nd Lieutenant Olivey a Rhodesian of S2 patrol, also within the party was Belgian Captain Bob Melot and a team of SBS men led by Captain's Richard Allott and David Sutherland and 3 NCO's, Sergeant Moss and Corporals Sinclair and Pomford. Allott known as Tramp came from the Middlesex Regiment and the

Commandos, David Sutherland to many who knew him went by the name of Dinkey was from the Black Watch and had fought in France in 1940 with the BEF. He served with No.3 Commando and went to the Middle East with Layforce as part of No.8 (Guards) Commando and served with them for a time at Tobruk during its long siege. When Layforce was disbanded he became part of the reconstituted Middle East Commando and was part of the plan to kill or capture Erwin Rommel but the submarine he and his party were in ran aground on route and was unable to land. Two privates from the Senussi regiment went along as guides.

It wouldn't just be the SAS operating as on the 9th of March the 8th Army HQ issued No.HQ/8A/91/39/G (O) to XIII and XXX Corps along with the LRDG and the SAS also the Middle East Commando received a copy.

It detailed what was expected of them not only were the SAS to conduct raids the LRDG whose primary task would be the ferrying of the troops and also to continue with their reconnaissance work but also to work in conjunction with the Commandos. Before the next planned major offensive the task was simply to destroy all that was possible to all kinds of infrastructure and to force him to disperse his efforts and to lower their morale.

They set out on the 15th March but on the 17th the German staff car which they were using for deception purposes set off an Italian thermos bomb and injured both Sergeant Moss and David Sutherland which were serious enough for them to be returned for medical attention at Siwa.

By the 18th they had reached Gasr el Gehesc (S) S.2161 around 6 miles south east of Benghazi. Here they lay up and sent the 2

Senussi soldiers to reconnoitre Bennina and Barce. David Stirling along with Olivey and Melot checked out the escarpment east of Benghazi and on the following day they moved on foot to observe Benghazi itself.

This area of the Jebel where they had based themselves consisted of hills, stunted trees and shrubs with a fair supply of good water, within these foothills they were able to find good cover and when not out on reconnaissance or operating they experienced a comfortable time even obtaining goat for roasting from the local tribesmen.

On the 20th March the two Senussi soldiers returned from their information gathering trip accompanied by Lance Naik Ahmed Din from the 4/16th Punjab Regiment who had been hiding out in the area for the last two months.

Captain Mayne and his group had by now gone on their own way to raid Berka satellite in one LRDG truck with Corporal Merrick.

Major Stirling on the night of the 20th/21st along with Johnny Cooper further recce'd the area in a 15 cwt truck around the landing ground at Bennina but the going was poor and they struggled to get down an escarpment. That night to cover the activities of the SAS the RAF had arranged to put in a covering attack on Benghazi to keep the enemy's heads down and allow them to gain access.

This little expedition bore no fruit and no aircraft was found and so returned back to their base. Stirling though was still convinced that he could be able to attack and destroy any shipping that they could find in Benghazi, this would now become his main aim.

The night of the 24th/25th would see them make their attempt by this time Paddy Mayne and Graham Rose with Bob Bennett had returned from Berka satellite although without Johnny Byrne who was missing.

Stirling, Gordon Alston, Reg Seekings and Johnny Cooper along with Captain Allott and Corporals Pomford and Sinclair began their move in the late afternoon in his Ford utility wagon which had been modified and painted to resemble a German staff car. Guided to within 6 miles of their target by Lieutenant Olivey close to the Regima – Benghazi road which was to act as their rendezvous for the next morning, while he was waiting he took the opportunity to motor to the Barce – Benghazi railway line and laid some charges. The Senussi guides had been able to tell them that there were no road blocks on the main route into the town and access should be

easy, there were guards to be found in and around the harbour which was wired off. Hitting the road the party driven by Stirling himself headed at full speed and with the headlights full on. This ruse of sorts gave the impression to any who saw them that they were friendly forces although with weapons always at the ready the occupants took no chances and remained ever vigilant. Slowing down to a more leisurely pace once they arrived at the outskirts they drove through the narrow streets of the old town before finding the wider thoroughfare of the European quarter.

The plan was launch the folbot from outside of the Harbours barbed wire perimeter come around the breakwater and to make their way into the harbour via a breach to one of the outer walls which had been caused by bombs of the RAF previously.

Stirling pulled up some distance away from the shore in the front of a bombed out yard, taking all of the equipment that they needed he told Seeking's and Cooper to park it up out of sight covered by the debris which lay all around.

Around midnight with a cold wind blowing this small group of raiders moved in single file through blacked out alleys, no one was seen as due to repeated bombing of the area a curfew was in place. By the time that they reached the water's edge the wind appeared to have increased and they set about assembling the canoe.

The weather which was making the sea increasingly choppy was now becoming a major concern for Allott who in his opinion the sea would prevent them from operating. They decided to continue to assemble the boat hoping that the wind would ease.

Posting Alston as the lookout Stirling moved off into the dark to reconnoitre the area.

Passing craters caused by RAF bombs he avoided getting too close to the wire just in case one of the guards spotted him. He could

see warehouses and workshops and a somewhat inebriated Italian crooning a love song whom he was easily able to avoid as he moved down another alley. After an hour he

returned to his group only to find that the assembling of the boat was not going well, one of the parts of the half finished boat was damaged and they were unable to come what may fit the two interlinking pieces together. It

wouldn't have really mattered if they did make it join, the wind which they had hoped would drop had by now increased dramatically. Assessing the situation they that there was absolutely no point in attempting to take such an unnecessary risk on they

decided that there only option was to
abandon their plans.

Although there were targets and the
inaccessible shipping laying in the harbour
Stirling thought it wise to leave without
leaving any bombs, this would still remain for
him a target and the last thing he wanted to
do was to jeopardise any forthcoming
attempt.

The corporals of the SBS disassembled the
partially built folbot whilst Allott returned the
limpet mines to their bags and finally they
returned to the parked up vehicle finding
Cooper keeping watch while Reg Seekings
took the opportunity for a little cat nap.

They had no encounters of any significance
bar a man from a window enquiring what
they were up to and their reply left the man
quickly withdrawing from the window.

A building some distance off now began to burn and they wondered how this had happened as they knew that they themselves were not the cause, even the RAF saw the fire and reported it but it would appear that the fire was just a coincidence.

Returning to the rendezvous which they achieved an hour before dawn broke went without any major concerns apart from a puncture which was swiftly sorted out.

Meeting up with Olivey they returned to their main camp somewhat disappointed in their failure.

Another failure was when Captain Allott along with Cooper and Seekings made an attempt to raid the airfield at Beninna but the party got lost and were unable to locate it and subsequently returned.

Time had come for them to now return and by the 28th they had made it to Cheda bu Maun and met up with the S1 patrol the following day instructions were sent for Stirling to return as quickly as possible for a meeting, once they reached a spot near Hatiet er Retum they travelled north to El Adem whilst the balance returned to base at Siwa making home at 16.00 hours on the 31st March 1942.

Berka Satellite Operation 20-03-42.

R.B. Mayne.

G. Rose, R. Bennett, J.V. Byrne.

After breaking with David Stirling and his party Mayne with his 3 man team guided by Corporal Merrick an LRDG navigator drove to the foothills close to their target the satellite airfield at Berka, as they were dropped off they were told that they needed to be back at the rendezvous by 07.00 hours the following day they were also given a map reference for a second pick up 30 further miles on.

Setting off to find a hideaway so they could check out their target each man set off all carrying a revolver, grenades, fifteen Lewes bombs and the necessary provisions to see them through this period. Both Bob Bennett

and Johnny Byrne carried a Thompson sub machine gun and ammunition.

The area that they and the other groups were working in consisted of valleys and slight hills, grassed and with some vegetation including wild flowers which would give them good cover from any of the enemy's eyes. In their favour also was the locals, the Senussi tribes who inhabited the area were generally favourable to the Allies due to the fact that the treatment afforded to them by the Italians was poor and this would be shortly of great help to them.

As they lay up to observe they made their final plans and preparations and in the black of the night they set off. The track that they were taking was littered with loose rocks which had fallen from the foothills but they managed to advance to the perimeter of the airfield, Graham Rose known as Johnny and

Johnny Byrne known as Jock worked together whilst Bob Bennett teamed with Paddy Mayne. Rose and Bennett cautiously moved past a German anti aircraft position and its 2 guards and left a bomb to deal with it. They soon came across some dumps covered with a tarpaulin dug into the desert, they soon learned that the dumps contained bombs and left their calling card before going on to deal with any other dumps that they could locate in the dark. Meanwhile Mayne and Bennett attacked the aircraft planting bombs on fifteen of them.

The night was then lit up when the bomb left at the anti aircraft site detonated closely followed by those left in the bomb dumps. In the confusion Rose and Bryne planted further bombs on a petrol dump and decided it was time to get away. Both men raced for the perimeter and soon made it to the foothills

and took cover by a dried up well to consider their next course of action. Rose favoured heading for the first rendezvous but Johnny Byrne disagreed and thought it better to make straight for the second, as they argued the toss for and against it soon became apparent that come what may they would never be able to agree so they took the decision to split up rose to the first and Byrne to the second.

Johnny Byrne's would prove to be the wrong one although he located tyre tracks which appeared to be recent and to belong to the LRDG Chevrolet he would have a big problem finding the rendezvous. By dawn heading on a compass bearing he was clear of the hills and in open country but was unsure of his exact position, even with a map of the area he still would not have been able to confirm where he was as they were in general most unreliable.

Try as he did he could not find the rendezvous or the patrol or Mayne and the other two and it appeared to him that what lay ahead of him was possibly a 200 mile walk to the nearest Allied positions at Bir Hacheim a daunting prospect to face with what limited resources he had on him but he had done something similar in a previous operation with Bill Fraser so he was capable of such an exercise.

Carrying on in true SAS fashion he finally had to dump his machine gun and would soon find that what rations and water he had was exhausted. Local Arabs did come to his aid and was able to go on but would eventually be picked up by a German patrol would after a regrettable incident when the German officer thought that one of his movements was threatening him hit him with his pistol but shortly he was well looked after by his captors. Not so though when he was handed

over to the Italians whose treatment of him was very poor leading him to be beaten, half starved, unclothed and interrogated. Finally he would go to Germany where he would meet up briefly with Captain Thomson and 2nd Lt. Bonington both taken prisoner on Operation Squatter.

Rose managed to meet up with Mayne and Bennett as they headed for the first rendezvous but they became lost and unable to find with their near useless map.

They knew that they couldn't make the rendezvous and so headed for the second in what they hoped was the right direction hoping also to come across Byrne but again they were unable to find it. They appeared to be walking around in circles covering some fifty miles before Mayne came to the conclusion that they should head for Tobruk.

Without the necessary supplies they

approached some local Senussi for some water but first they had to overcome the initial suspicions displayed by them but once that they had convinced them that they were English soldiers they were welcomed into one of their tents, the locals even carried in their equipment and laid down blankets as a bed for them. They were fed with dates, a gourd of goat's milk, and water. Finally they accepted gratefully a brew of the local tea.

What they needed now was sleep and gratefully they lay down in their blankets and slept.

A great coincidence was now to occur and save the SAS men from a long march, one of the LRDG patrol waiting at the second rendezvous came to the encampment with an Arab to translate for him with a chicken that they had bartered for at another of the many camps located in the area and wanted it

cooked, the patrol was due to set back the following day and luck would have it courtesy of a chicken they would now be able to take back what remained of the raiding party and on the 24th March they rejoined David Stirling.

Barce Operation 20-03-42.

W. Fraser.

E.A. Badger, D. Kershaw, E. McDonald,

A. Phillips, T.R. Chesworth.

S1 patrol under Gus Holliman loaded with Bill Fraser's party left Siwa on the 16th March and the first two days of their outward journey was reasonably uneventful until on the 18th as they lay up 25 miles south west of Bir el Garrari (S) T. 5642 they received a message from HQ that there were enemy patrols active between Bir el Garrari and Msus 40 miles to their south west. The following day leaving behind 3 trucks under Corporal Eastwood at Sidi Zamut (S) s. 8475 which was 55 miles due east of Benghazi he headed with Bill Fraser and his men to a point south east of Barce in the hills (S) N. 8110, the journey

there was a rough one and on average they could only manage a desultory 1 mile an hour but had reached their destination by the 20th.

Eastwood's detachment now noticed an increase in enemy activity notably more patrols had moved off to the pre arranged rendezvous at Cheda bu Maun and was joined there after Holliman had dropped off Fraser and his men.

Fraser's group made for the airfield and was able to observe the activity going on around them though there was indeed little.

They were able to get onto the airfield but all that they found was 1 aircraft and 4 workshop shop lorries which they were able to duly destroy.

Holliman in the meantime had managed to salvage 2 vehicles that had had to be

abandoned on a previous patrol due to intensive floods in the area.

On the 27th Holliman sent a truck the rendezvous to pick up Fraser's group doing so and returning to the main party on the 28th.

After having joined up with S2 patrol the following day they received a wireless message instructing them to return David Stirling at once which would mean that they would now be in the position of being unable to pick up Lieutenant Dodd's party.

Holliman decided to despatch 3 of his trucks to the camp of Hamed bu Serawaliya who was acting as a local agent, asking him to locate Dodd's group and guide them to Sidi Musa.

By this time the Germans had occupied Sidi Musa and to be able to make contact with the group local friendly Arabs went on foot to locate them and to guide them to Hagfet

Gelfag and to wait until another patrol came for them telling them hopefully it would be by the end of the first week of April which was successfully achieved.

Stirling and his team returned with the LRDG until they reached Hatiet el Retem and went directly to El Adem.

Fraser and his team finally reached Siwa with a result of sorts but not was expected especially when you consider the great success of one of previous operations.

This was also to be Tom Chesworth's last outing.

Slonta also known as Suluntah 20/03/42.

R.G.W. Dodd.

C.G.G. Riley, J. DuVivier, W.G. Brough,

C.S. Cattell, A. Warburton, J. Storie.

Roy Dodd known as Bobby came from the Royal Army Service Corps and was granted the rank of Lieutenant by emergency commission in January of 1941 this was to be his first and only operation and to help with his obvious inexperience in these matters he had with him 6 experienced and extremely competent operators. Riley, DuVivier, Brough, Cattell and Jimmy Storie had all come through Squatter and although Arthur Warburton had missed that particular operation had become more than competent himself these then

would hopefully be able to guide Dodd through this exacting time.

They departed from Siwa with a patrol from T1 led by Captain Morris the day after Stirling and Mayne on the 16th and proceeded to what would be the SAS men's dropping off point there was a secondary role for the LRDG to play which was to pick up a party of the Middle East Commando under Captain Chapman. With the aid of help from some friendly Arabs they located the party and the following day Dodd and his team were in the area south east of Slonta and parted company with the transportation. The LRDG with their Commandos then returned to Siwa but not after a brief run in on the Trigh El Abd road by an enemy armoured car which was escorting an enemy column heading north. The LRDG were after a couple of miles of the chase able

to lose them and got back safely on the 23rd
March.

But what of Roy Dodd and his party how
where they to get back? Lieutenant Olivey's
patrol S2 would then act as the return ticket
after teaming up with Holliman's S1 patrol at
a pre arranged rendezvous between Charruba
(S)S.9468 and Cheda bu Maun (S)T.O575.

The whole plan seemed to be somewhat over
complicated and would not in the end work
out too well.

The proposed raid at Slonta never got going
and achieved nothing which left the group to
wait to be picked up. Once they had
approached the airfield and observed the
area they found that here at least the enemy
had finally wised up to their exploits, it was
far too well defended with more wire
machine gun posts and guards then they had

expected subsequently they found that they would be unable to gain access to their proposed target and unfortunately were forced to abort their plan which left them a time to try and lie up and remain undetected until they could be picked up but the general plan was going awry. Captain Holliman managed to get a message through to them at the proposed rendezvous at Hagfet Gelgaf (S) T. 5386 saying that they couldn't make the pickup and would have to remain there until another pickup could be arranged. What lay ahead for know was a long wait in the unforgiving desert and it would not until the R 2 patrol under 2nd Lieutenant Croucher was given the task. They would also take with them a party of 15 from the Middle East Commando under the command of Major Ian Glennie who had previously taken part in Operation Exporter with No.11 (Scottish)

Commando in June 1941 to an area known as Ghedir Bu Ascher (S) T. 4060 which some 6 miles north of Baltet ez Zelagh. By the 8th of April Glennie's party was dropped off and the LRDG headed off to pick up Dodd's party which they should hopefully find around 20 miles to their North.

The party had now grown at Dodd's hide away with the addition of Captain Chapman, a Corporal of the Royal Signals, an officer from the Libyan Arab Force and 6 RAF men who had been brought to the spot by some local Arabs. These additions greatly increased the load that the patrol was now expected to get back to Siwa which would mean that Glennie's Commandos would have to be left for the time being. Croucher and his expanded party headed back for Siwa immediately and arrived home on the 10th April, they'd spent a period of just under a

month within the desert with nothing to show for it. Glennie's men were successfully picked up by Croucher after they had set back out for them the following day.

The Outcome.

The operations in March was not the success that they all had hoped but again they had had proved the adaptability to ensure their ongoing future, loss's were only one man, Johnny Byrne who had become a prisoner of war. For the whole of the period from early December 1942 to the end of March they had lost only 3 men, Byrne, George White also a prisoner but the most keenly felt loss to them all was that of Jock Lewes who had made so much of what they had been able to achieve virtually impossible to replace but they were able to go on and with changes on the horizon they were able to go on to achieve greater success.

Roy Dodd known to many as Bobby transferred to the 10th Parachute Battalion of

the Parachute Regiment and took part in the capture of Castellaneta in Italy and later as part of 1st Airborne Division he took part in the Arnhem operation in Holland in September 1944, sadly he never returned being killed in action on the 20th of September aged 30 years old.

L Detachment Nominal Roll.

7th December 1941.

Officers.

STIRLING, Captain, 72647, the Scots Guards,

ARCHIBALD No.8 (Guards) Commando.

DAVID. Became a Prisoner of War, 27th
January 1943.

4255, Oflag IV-C, Colditz, Saxony.

Distinguished Service Order.

LEWES, Lieutenant, 65419, the Welsh
Guards,

JOHN 3 Troop, No.8 (Guards) Commando.

STEEL. "Jock". Killed in Action 30th December
1941.

MAYNE, Lieutenant, 87306, the Royal Ulster
Rifles,

ROBERT attached The Cameronians (The
Scottish Rifles),

BLAIR. "Paddy". 7 Troop, No.11 (Scottish)
Commando. Posted September 1941.

Distinguished Service Order and three Bars.

FRASER, Lieutenant, 132513, the Gordon
Highlanders, 8 Troop,

WILLIAM No.11 (Scottish) Commando. Posted
18th August 1941.

Military Cross.

Non Commissioned Officers.

SYDNEY GEORGE. 803879,

RILEY, Sergeant, 2656281, the Coldstream
Guards,

CHARLES No.8 (Guards) Commando.

GEORGE GIBSON. Distinguished Conduct Medal.

ALMONDS, Sergeant, 2655648, the Coldstream
Guards,

JOHN No.8 (Guards) Commando. Became
a Prisoner of War in September 1942.

EDWARD."Gentleman Jim". Escaped from an
Italian Prisoner of War Camp and rejoined
L Detachment.

Military Medal and Bar, Croix de Guerre.

McDONALD, Lance Sergeant, 2928608, the
Cameron Highlanders,

EDWARD. 10 Troop, No.11 (Scottish)
Commando. Posted 28th August 1941.

Distinguished Conduct Medal.

BADGER, Bombardier, 898919, No.7
Commando. Posted 30th August 1941. Royal
Artillery.

EDWARD, Military Medal.

AITCHISON. "Ted".

DuVIVIER, Corporal, 2885910, The London
Scottish (Gordon's) T.A. 8 Troop,

JEFFREY. No.11 (Scottish) Commando. Posted
28th August 1941. Military Medal.

KERSHAW, Corporal, 4121633, the Grenadier
Guards,

DAVID. "Honest". No.8 (Guards) Commando.
Military Medal.

Seconded to 4th Para D.D.E. H.Q. 1944.

TAIT, Corporal, 2888673, the Gordon
Highlanders, 8 Troop,

DUNCAN No.11 (Scottish) Commando. Posted
28th August 1941.

ROBERT "Bob". Military Medal and Bar.

BROUGH, Lance Corporal, 2695138, the Scots
Guards,

WILLIAM No.8 (Guards) Commando.

GORDON. "Jimmy". Military Medal.

ROSE, Lance Corporal, 2617725,

The Grenadier Guards.

GRAHAM. "Johnny". No.8 (Guards) Commando.
Military Medal and Bar.

WHITE, Lance Corporal. 3056528, the Royal
Scots. No.11 (Scottish) Commando.

GEORGE "Geordie" Posted 28th August 1941.

Became a Prisoner of War in December 1941.

31018, Stalag VIII-B, Cieszyn, Poland.

STORIE, Lance Corporal, 3133471, the
Seaforth Highlanders,

JAMES. 6 Troop, No.11 (Scottish)
Commando. Posted 28th August 1941.

Became a P.O.W. October 1942.

Other Ranks.

AUSTEN. Private, 214964, Royal Army Service
Corps.

EDWARD P. "Ted" No.7 Commando.

BAKER, Guardsman, 2615455, the Grenadier
Guards,

JAMES No.8 (Guards) Commando.

HENRY MALCOLM. "Lofty". Prisoner of War,
Operation Bulbasket. Executed 7th July 1944.

BENNETT, Guardsman, 2617533, the Grenadier
Guards,

ROBERT. No.8 (Guards) Commando. Military
Medal.

BYRNE, Private, 2060658, the Gordon
Highlanders, 8 Troop,

JOHN No.11 (Scottish) Commando.
Posted 28th August 1941. Became a Prisoner of
War in 1942. Escaped from

VINCENT."Jack". Stalag Luft III and returned to
England. Joined No.6 Commando.

Distinguished Conduct Medal.

CHESWORTH, Guardsman, the Scots Guards,
Thomas R. No.8 (Guards) Commando.

COOPER, Private, 2698113, the Scots Guards,
JOHN No.8 (Guards) Commando.
MURDOCH. Distinguished Conduct Medal.

CATTELL, Private, 6141548, the East Surrey
Regiment.

CHARLES No.7 Commando. Posted 30th August
1941. Military Medal.

SYDNEY.

HAWKINS, Private, 6343573, the Royal West
Kent Regiment, No.7 Commando.

Anthony. "Slipstream".

LILLEY, Guardsman, 2660913, the
Coldstream Guards,
ERNEST No.8 (Guards) Commando.

THOMAS. Military Medal.

McGUINN, Private.2888389, the Gordon
Highlanders, No.11 (Scottish) Commando.

CORNELLIUS."Maggie". Military Medal. Posted
1941.

PHILLIPS, Private. 5107891, the Royal
Warwickshire Regiment.

ARTHUR. "Phil". No.7 Commando. Posted 30th
August 1941. Military Medal.

RHODES, Guardsman, 2626982, the
Grenadier Guards,

FRANK. No.8 (Guards) Commando.

SEEKINGS, Private, 5933155, the
Cambridgeshire Regiment (TA).

ALBERT No.7 Commando. Posted 30th
August 1941.

REGINALD. Distinguished Conduct Medal,
Military Medal and Bar.

WHITE, Private. 154976, Royal Army
Service Corps,

HAROLD. No.7 Commando. Posted 30th
August 1941.

Mentioned in Dispatches.

WARBURTON, Guardsman, 2734482, the Welsh
Guards,

ARTHUR. No.8 (Guards) Commando.

Became a P.O.W. 13th of June 1942.

Sources.

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Michael Asher – Get Rommel.

J.V. Byrne – The General Salutes a Soldier.

Johnny Cooper – One of the Originals.

Virginia Cowles – The Phantom Major.

Martin Dillon and Roy Bradford – Rogue
Warrior of the SAS.

David Buxton – Mars and Minerva Article.

Malcolm James – Born of the Desert.

Tim Jones – Zero Hour The Secret Origins of
the Special Air Service.

Anthony Kemp – The SAS at War 1941-1945.

John Lewes – Jock Lewes Co-Founder of the
SAS.

David Lloyd Owen – The Long Range Desert
Group.

Ian McHarg – Litani River.

Gavin Mortimer – Stirling's Men.

Gavin Mortimer – The SAS in World War II.

John Orton – Personal Recollections.

Hamish Ross – Paddy Mayne.

Lorna Almonds Windmill – Gentleman Jim.

H.W. Wynter – Special Forces in the Desert
War 1941-1943.

