

Peter Lewis

Water Rations in the Desert

Water was a half a gallon per man per day for all purposes. Two pints went into the company cookhouse, one pint stayed in our water bottle, one pint was for washing and shaving. The dirty washing water was filtered and used again. But, you know, to have a pint of water slopping around in your water bottle was a temptation. It was an awful thing actually. The worst thing about the desert actually was when you got thirsty, and quite often you did, and you knew very well that whatever you drunk that was it there was no more. And really it wasn't very much, just a pint a day. Tea, of course, was issued three times a day from the cookhouse and that helped. But there was nothing else you could do when you'd had your cup of tea and you'd drunk the water in your water bottle and you'd had a shave and a wash and everything really that was it. But when it got very bad, I think just before we broke out of Gazala, when we had been told that no more petrol was coming up to us and no more water was coming up and no more food some of the blokes got absolutely desperate and drank the water out of the radiator of knocked out trucks, rusty water, it got as bad as that. And there were, I can't remember any names or anything, but there were one or two isolated incidents of people trying to get at water which was kept in the fire trenches and was never to be touched. But it was an unwritten law that you just did not touch that, and ninety nine per cent of the battalion were well enough disciplined not to. But there was I think one occasion in all the weeks we were there where somebody tried to get at it ,and I can't remember what happened to him but he would have been sent back anyway. But people were pretty good actually.