

Excerpts from the Memoirs  
of  
Werner Mork

“Aus Meiner Sicht (From My View)”  
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The original German text can be found  
on the website of the German Historical Museum:  
[“Als LKW-Fahrer in Nordafrika 1942”](#)

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*In 1942 Werner Mork was a Gefreiter (Private First Class) in the signal corps. He had long had an interest in radios. He had extensive knowledge of radio technology and despite his young age, he had already made a living selling and installing radios in civilian life.*

*In the signal corps he also became qualified to drive the heavy trucks that carried equipment and supplies for building communications networks.*

*But, as Mork often points out, "Nothing is impossible in the army," so as his unit arrived in Naples in March 1942 destined for Africa he found himself serving as the chief cook for the field kitchen!*

*His regiment marked time in Naples for nearly five months waiting to ship out for Africa, but Germany had lost control of the skies and the British Navy was controlling the shipping lanes in the Mediterranean making it very difficult to get all but the most essential supplies to the Afrika Korps. The signal corps unit could not get priority to attempt the crossing.*

*At this time Werner Mork was keeping a diary that he refers to frequently.*

*Here is the story of his experience in North Africa in his words:*

\* \* \* \* \*

I was very comfortable in my hotel room, I enjoyed my life as a gentleman. My bed was even made for me! I slept in a real bed and no longer on a cot in a tent. In the wonderful hotel kitchen I wasn't just welcomed, I had the proud feeling that I was the boss there. Alas, it was soon over with the gentleman's life. I had to go back to my old outfit. There I heard that I, along with other comrades, were being sent to Africa! It was final and unchangeable!

They had included me in a detachment of truck drivers who had a Class 2 driver license for a coming deployment to Africa. This was a true transfer and it meant a final separation from my old company. In camp there was no longer any talk about a possible debarkation for the regiment. There was no longer any apparent interest in sending them over. What Feldmarschall Rommel needed foremost at the moment was truck drivers for the supply columns, right away and in large numbers. This meant that our signal corps unit was now understrength and no longer fit for action since truck drivers were being pulled out regardless of the position they held in the outfit.

All holders of a Class 2 driver license in any of the units located in Naples were to be immediately transported to Africa. The reason for this sudden deployment was the heavy losses among the supply columns in North Africa. Now they were scraping together every possible person to fill the positions without regard as to whether the units that the personnel were being pulled from would be rendered non-operational or not. The units in Italy were being combed through so that the qualified truck drivers could bring the under-staffed transport units in Africa back up to strength.

For the most part the men affected by this order were not terribly upset by the move, in fact most were pleased to finally have the chance to get to Africa. One of the ones who (so stupidly) thought that way was me, Private First Class Werner Mork, who now finally saw his dream draw near, the dream of following in the footsteps of [Gerhard Rohlfs](#). The notes in my little notebook speak volumes about my stupidity, although I did not see it as such at the time.

July 27, 1942: We are ready to march and wait on the things to come. No more routine duty.

July 29, 1942: Hopefully, the marching orders will come soon.

July 31, 1942: We are slowly becoming impatient, hopefully there will not be any more delays.

August 1, 1942: Hurra! The marching orders came through. We leave in the morning.

August 2, 1942: The Chief (that sleazeball) bid us farewell. We go by truck to the train and from there at 19:00 hours depart in the direction of Brindisi.

August 3, 1942: 13:00 hours arrival in Brindisi. We have to go back and this time in the direction of Taranto. 19:00 hours arrival in Taranto. Quartered in the army billets, real pig pins.

August 4, 1942: Mother's birthday. When will we ever have the chance to celebrate together again?

August 5, 1942: We are waiting for transport on a flying boat and during the waiting period perform routine work duty like cleaning and polishing and other such nonsense.



*BV 222 Flying Boat*

The flying boat that would take us from Taranto to our destination was one of only three such sea planes on all of the front lines! It was a huge machine built by Blohm & Voss in Hamburg known as the [BV 222](#). Of the three one was operating in Greece, one in Norway and the other here in Taranto. It was a double-decker machine with an under deck loaded with gasoline drums and the upper deck having room for 92 soldiers. If there was an accident everyone was guaranteed a direct path to Heaven, or to the waters of the Mediterranean as the case might be, as a totally shredded corpse. It was flown by a crew of seven and equipped with machine guns on all sides, above and below. It was reportedly much feared by the Tommies and not considered attackable due to the heavy armament.

August 6, 1942: I report myself sick, because I simply do not care to squander my energy before departure.

I actually wrote this nonsense. I just wanted to get out of the stupid work details.

August 7, 1942: For the moment there is no sign of departure, because only Luftwaffe troops are being flown over there, so they are telling us.

August 8, 1942: Life here is modest. The housing is miserable, the food is fit for pigs.

August 9, 1942: Everything expendable is sold to make money. The Itaker [Slang for Italians; Itaker] buy it all. We took a walk around Taranto. Nothing here for us, the Italian navy controls the fields and the city. Instead of protecting escort ships, they strut around here as though they were still the rulers of the Mediterranean.

August 10, 1942: When are we finally going to get out of here? This questions aggravates everyone anew every day.

August 11, 1942: Payday! We can paint the town!

August 12, 1942: I am becoming really sick, I've got the runs again.

August 13, 1942: If this keeps up in Africa, that will be just great!

August 14, 1942: The runs just keep coming and coming.

August 15, 1942: I am living off of charcoal tablets, eating is out of the question.

August 16, 1942: I went to the doctor, now just more bed rest and charcoal.

August 17, 1942: Hopefully, I have to go back in the hospital.

August 18, 1942: I should have gone back to the doctor, but I didn't. It is slowly getting better. Erich Geppert, a comrade from my old unit has flown out, with him goes the 32 Lire I loaned him.

32 Lire was a lot of money in those days.

August 19, 1942: I think I am over the hump!

August 20, 1942: I am truly back to full health now. I am incredibly hungry. Hopefully all is going well.

August 24, 1942: Life goes on.

August 25, 1942: For as long as I can duck it, I am not going to do work details.

August 26, 1942: A thousand new rumors spring up every day, but none have any truth to them.

August 27, 1942: By my measure we are 2000 km away from home.

August 28, 1942: According to the latest rumor; on Monday the aircraft will return to Germany for 14 days for an overhaul – and when will we finally fly?

August 29, 1942: We are slowly growing exasperated.

August 30, 1942: Read, sleep and write from time to time, that is our life!

August 31, 1942: Here I trip over an entry that has me confused. It contradicts what I first wrote about Anita Adler. It states here: Everything is over! There must have been another exchange of letters that I supposed was broken off because of Africa. It was later that Anita was not reachable in Hanover, and my letters to her were returned. It occurs to me that Ilse [my fiancé] also had the chance to read this. What must she have thought?

September 1, 1942: Note on the calendar: 1939 German counterattack in Poland! That is what we called it in that time, “counterattack.” That makes everything clear, right? I noted it on this day: It marks the beginning of the fourth year of war. How many will follow? When will this misery find an end? (Here I was speaking of misery that I had not yet experienced.)

September 3, 1942: On 9/3/1939 England and France declares war. Today I am detailed to duty in the gasoline dump in Taranto on both day and night shifts.

## A F R I K A

September 4, 1942: I see nothing but gasoline barrels!

September 5, 1942: Finally it is here, the big moment. I step into the place of a Luftwaffe passenger who was delayed, and I fly to Africa tomorrow. And in spite of all of the "misery" once again I freely volunteer. The war depends upon a good supply of idiots who are always and at any time ready to do stupid things in the name of Duty. It is an astonishing thing about soldiers and their 'inner life' that they seem so schizophrenic. Today they gripe, tomorrow they are completely fed up, then the next day they cry 'Hurra' and are off to new (mis)deeds.

September 6, 1942: Once again the joy gets pushed aside. From the quay we watch the seaplane leave without us and take off in the direction of Africa. We aren't going with it because it was overloaded with gasoline drums. Gasoline has precedence over personnel.

September 7, 1942: Today we celebrate. The note reads: This morning it happened, at 6:30 we took off. My first flight! A wonderful experience! Arrival in Tobruk at 11:30. We are on African soil! My long-held wish has been fulfilled! From the Wehrmacht control center we move with the A4 column in the direction of Marsa Matruk [[Mersa Matruh](#)]. Arrival in Mersa Matruh on 9/9/1942 around 14:00 hours. After reporting to the Army Supply Commander, I was attached to the 686<sup>th</sup> Supply Detachment [Nachschub – Abteilung 686]. My welcome in the Detachment was very congenial.

There is more to add to the wonderful experience of this flight. It could have ended very unceremoniously in the water. Suddenly there appeared some aircraft, and they were not German comrades, but British Spitfire fighters. An alarm sounded in my plane and the machine guns were manned. We 'passengers' were somewhat calmed by the thought that the fighters would not attack us because of the heavy armament of machine guns and the 2 cm. cannons. However, we were not entirely comfortable. It was not a nice feeling to be so high over the sea with the ship's belly full of gasoline drums. Every flight carried gasoline supplies. Nothing happened, the fighters kept a respectful distance and we arrived safely in Tobruk. Then came the not so pleasant water landing. That was the first time I remarked how hard water was. The entire craft shook and shuttered on landing, but it passed and we were on solid ground in Africa!

Now the great adventure could begin, or so I thought then. Now I look back on this experience and can find no trace of the romantic images of adventure. In fact it was quite the contrary and I would soon be living it: War is not an adventure!

I reported to the 686<sup>th</sup> Supply Detachment where they told me to be patient until my assignment was clarified.

September 9, 1942: My first job. Build shit houses in the English manor. Apparently, there was a proven construction technique for African latrines that we took over from the British. I have no idea how they differed from German latrines.

Whether I am going to remain assigned to Staff is uncertain. I put no value on being assigned to Staff.

September 11, 1942: I have been assigned to Staff and am temporarily assigned a [Mercedes 170 VKW](#) as driver for the chief of the medical staff.

A few remarks about this job: A few kilometers from Mersa Matruh, right on the beach of the Mediterranean, I was given a one-man tent. The doctor's tent was only a few meters away. During the first night in these quarters I awoke in the early morning hours with a sharp pain in my chest. The pain and cramps were intense. I could hardly breathe, and could only move slowly. I withstood it as best I could until time to go on duty. Then I went to the doctor's tent and in spite of the pain, I reported for duty. Then I made his bed and polished his boots, since as chauffeur I was also butler, although that part was really not my job. I could hardly work because of the pain, but I gritted my teeth and tried get the doctor to the local infirmary in Mersa Matruh with his Mercedes.

But along the way I gave out, drenched in sweat I collapsed on the steering wheel. In the infirmary the doctor examined me but could find nothing wrong. He began to think I was a malingerer, although he hoped that was not the case, because of the trouble I would be in. However, it could also be that I needed to acclimatize to Africa and then the trouble would pass. Suddenly, the pain left me, although I still felt drained and exhausted.

I still don't know what caused this attack. It could have been a heart attack, but I have never had a heart problem. Most likely it was bronchitis caused by the salt air during the night by the sea that got into my lungs. As a child I had frequent bronchitis episodes. The change in climate must have been the cause. Add to that the wide temperature changes between day and night in the desert that I was not used to.

The pain was gone, it was late morning and I got the order to take the doctor to visit the individual supply columns. The camps for these columns were scattered around the outskirts of Mersa Matruh in the desert. This presented a whole new problem for me. I had to first, get acquainted with a vehicle that was totally unknown to me, then get used to driving in the desert, and then somehow figure out how to find these camps in a land that was also totally unknown to me.

The Identification Points that marked the dirt roads were also a mystery to me. The end points, that is to say the way to reach the camps, were marked with tactical symbols that I had never seen before. I was truly a foreigner in the wastelands, but that did not seem to bother the doctor who simply expected me to drive him as though I had always lived there in the desert.

Of course this wasn't going to happen the way he wanted it to and he poured his obvious displeasure out over the head of this rookie driver who truly did not have a clue. He criticized my lack of ability and cursed the powers that be who sent this incompetent to him.

As though all this wasn't enough, it also happened that in the middle of the desert we got a flat tire that rendered us totally helpless. I stood in total despair in front of the car with no idea how to fix this breakdown. I had never even seen this type of car before and had never had the occasion to change a tire before. My vehicles in France never had a problem like this. Swearing non-stop the Chief Doctor had to call for assistance while continually heaping curses on my head. He made it clear that he wanted me anywhere but as his driver and butler.

This 'post' was a temporary one and would only run until the regular driver came back to duty, so I knew it would end someday. The driver's return was some time off, but in any case I knew I would not have to drive the doctor forever. Without that thought I could not have stood it. My entries in the diary

confirm my state of mind then.

In the time frame from September 13 to September 17, 1942 the diary states, "I have now become just a lackey for the "Gods of Creation." I am not made for such work, it goes against my grain. This type and variety of employment does not sit well. There may be men who are born to it, but not me! Thank God it is only a temporary detail. My goal is to be a driver in a supply column and go on a regular mission.

Joyfully on 9/18/1942 I was able to write: Rademacher took over his old duties with the doctor, I have been released from Hell.

Rademacher had been commandeered by HQ when the commander's driver was wounded. That driver was able to return to duty. Rademacher was none too pleased about the situation. He was getting very comfortable driving the commander. It is no wonder that Rademacher did not have any good words for me since, due to my dimwittedness, he now had to go back to the doctor who he couldn't stand either. But I didn't care and reported back to the supply camp looking to be assigned to a mission. Things did not move very quickly. I had to be patient because for the moment there was not a vehicle available that needed a co-driver. At least none that I could drive.

During this period of waiting I had an important assignment to fill.

On September 14, 1942 the Tommies attempted an invasion in the area near Tobruk that went totally awry. The attackers were nearly wiped out, the rest taken prisoner and the landing ships almost totally destroyed.

This excursion by the British led to a heightened state of alarm and preparedness along the entire length of the coast covered by our armored division. Positions had to be dug in all along the coast in the desolate desert terrain.

The work of entrenchment was beastly, and I was stuck with it. I was neither an engineer nor a member of a chain-gang. I was pissed off!

As my entries on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> September 1942 show I was nevertheless on this 'Assignment.' I wrote: "After the attempted invasion by the Tommies before Tobruk, everyone had a great fear of another invasion, and because of that foxholes and machine gun nests had to be dug."

Naturally, the fear was not without grounds. The long and not completely secured coast was a sensitive point. It was a long, exposed flank that ran from Tobruk to the Egyptian border. The Italian and German troops were at considerable risk even though the entire coast was not accessible. However, the Tommies had undiminished strength on the sea, they could be a danger anywhere, even if it only was a matter of commando raids. The German and Italian air forces were no great danger for the British. They had enough to do over the desert attacking ground targets and defending themselves from the English fighter-bombers, the Jabos [short for Jagdbomber], who were very aggressive in their attacks.

We had our air heroes like the legendary fighter pilot [Hans-Joachim Marseille](#), who I actually got to see in an aerial combat over Mersa Matruh, but nevertheless we did not by any means have air superiority. Much later in 1963 when I was staying in Schwartzwald, I met the wife and son of a comrade of Marseille, Lt. Baudendistel. Only a few days after Marseille was shot down, Baudendistel was also downed.



Now there was nothing for it but to start the work on the defense system, and that meant shoveling in the stony desert. It was hard and difficult work to make holes in the rocky desert earth. In most cases it was not possible to do anything but pile up stones into a wall that could become cover for a machine gun. In addition to the back-breaking work, we had to stand extra guard duty both day and night. There were frequent alarms sounded, but nothing came of them. They were a result of the tension and nervousness at army headquarters, primarily over concern for their own safety. The HQ staff had mostly set their tents up near the beach so that they could easily go swimming. Swimming was forbidden, but no one paid much attention to the order. The reason for the prohibition was the supposedly high salt content of the ocean that could cause health problems, or so they said. The Tommies never showed themselves. Their attempt to invade the coast at Tobruk had already cost them too much in lost men and materiel.

Under the dates September 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> I note with a certain bitterness that here, at Staff HQ for the 686 Supply Detachment, I have become everybody's maid. That is to say that personnel are scarce in Africa and I am running around without any useful purpose.

However, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> it comes to be that I can once again be 'happy.' I am assigned to Column 2 of the 686<sup>th</sup>. They are provisioned with Hanomag 7.5 ton tractors! Hitched to such vehicles are two trailers.

September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1942: Today I go on my first mission as a co-driver. Probable direction is Tobruk.

So began the 'foolhardy travels' of Private First Class Werner Mork, who once believed himself to be taking part in a great adventure that could only be found in the wastelands of North Africa. I can quickly describe to you how wrong I was. I might first mention, though, that it had been over a year since I first volunteered for the Afrika Korps, before I arrived as a loner in Africa. There was no longer any talk of my old signal corps regiment coming to Africa. A long waiting period had gone by that no one could understand. The military system had a lot of deficiencies to work through. There were a large number of soldiers that waited for deployment that never had their longing to experience war fulfilled. Elsewhere the half-recuperated wounded would be chased back to the front without any consideration of their real condition. Many other healthy young men lived happy and care-free, as was our case during our waiting time in Naples. Even at the time it seemed ridiculous. However, for me the earlier, beautiful days were at an end. I would now have my new life experiences in the wastes of Libya.



*Hanomag 7.5 Ton Truck*

And these were, indeed, foolhardy travels that I would have as the co-driver of a Hanomag 7.5 ton half-track. First I needed to get used to the monster before I would be allowed to take the wheel of this powerful vehicle in my hands.

Our runs went straight through the desert over the "Grand Highway" of Libya, the [Balbo Road](#). This coast road was named after the Italian Air Force [General Italo Balbo](#), the onetime governor of the Italian colony who commissioned the building of the road. This path stretched over 1,000 kilometers from Tripoli to the Egyptian border. This 'Road' was built, but not in our usual sense of the word, and often we could hardly tell the difference between it and the open desert. However, it was a masterly



achievement of the Italian engineers and work crews who toiled in the years prior to the war.

That the road was no longer in good shape was not the fault of the builders, it was the fault of the war, that caused the road to be heavily used by both friend and foe. Sometimes by the Axis sometimes by the units of the English, depending upon how things were going. The path of this highway was marked with empty gasoline barrels whenever they were available. Due to some of the destruction there were many detours. Often they went through recently dried salt lakes that had a very shaky under-surface. The detours were poorly marked, not marked at all or with such long stretches between markings that you were always asking yourself where you were. The detours were necessary due to the bombing and often long stretches of the Balbo Road were simply not usable. That was now usually the case since the English were flying such missions regularly.

The Balbo Road was the sole supply route, when it could be used. When it couldn't, then we had to use detours that could become a hellish drive during the rainy season. During those times the dry salt lakes could become real lakes and totally impassible. Though even in the dry periods there were critical moments in these areas when many vehicles did not get out unscathed. Many drivers found their death in the salt lakes. But also the main supply route on the Balbo Road demanded many dead and wounded and destroyed vehicles. This route was an open invitation to the British Air Force that presented an unending procession of supply columns on a platter. The fighter bombers had a regular turkey-shoot of low-altitude dive bombings and strafing.

There was another desert route that went straight through the wastes and that was a caravan route used by the Bedouins. It saw very little use not only due to the poor state it was in but more so due to the British commando troops who harried the rear of the columns. This route was also much longer and very difficult to negotiate. A minor engine failure on this route would end up being a total loss. Due to the danger of sand storms and the difficulty in orienting ones self even with the help of a compass, loss of men and material was unavoidable.

For better or worse the supply columns had to get through wherever there were usable roads and that meant the Balbo Road. We had to use it in spite of the growing danger from British air attacks. On the supply missions the co-driver would ride outside of the cab on the front fender of the vehicle so that he could act as a plane spotter. He had the job of watching the sky for incoming fighters. I had this doubtful pleasure as co-driver of the Hanomag. The fender was the best spot for this lookout, but it was damned uncomfortable to perch out there trying not to fall off while watching the sky.

The destination supply dumps all lay near the road, regardless of what sort of goods you were transporting. From the harbor or the seaport the supplies would be carried to the dumps, or from the airport where the transport planes landed. From there we almost always moved over the Balbo Road to the vicinity of the front and there was always a risk of air attack from the British. We were always thankful when the weather conditions prevented the Tommies from making a visit. In those times we would make every effort to move as much material as possible using every available vehicle. It was damned hard work done at a murderous pace in the short time that the bad weather held out.

My diary holds several mentions of the travel in the land of stone and rubble deserts in Libya. There are also photos of the Hanomag and its 'fabulous' driver.

September 25, 1942: "In Tobruk we received marching orders to Barca. Very soon we will be moving out to Derna [Darnah, Libya].

September 29, 1942: "25 km from "Torre de Annunzio" coupling failure. The vehicle dropped out, will stay the night in Annunzio.



*Torre de Annunzio (Photo from the collection of Werner Mork)*

We spent the night in the Hanomag which was most convenient for the purpose. It is very roomy, the rear seat folds back to make a great bed. Above this bank seat is another couch that can be folded down. Thus, the Hanomag can sleep two or even three men.

This monstrous vehicle is extremely difficult to drive when you are first introduced to it as a newcomer. Once you get used to it though, it is a pleasure to drive it, although that pleasure is always interrupted because war is not a pleasure. The several shift-change possibilities due to the seven-speed transmission makes it possible to travel any terrain. True, the speed is hardly impressive, but it gets through where others get stuck. If I remember correctly the speed could average 75 Km, that was good performance that was hardly ever reached. Usually, the speed stayed around 50 Km.

This, in consideration of the weight of the tractor and the trailers, which were always overloaded, was no mean feat.

If the trips were risky due to the "Comrades in the next postal zone," there were also breakdowns and failures with the tractor, including big problems with the springs on the trailers. The leaf springs would often break due to the rough roads, but also due to them being overloaded. It was normal when the vehicles came into the loading terminals for them to be loaded far beyond the recommended specifications. It did not matter what the load was, food, ammunition or gasoline. It was done in the hope that somehow it would work out okay and the desperately needed supplies would make it to the front.

Shortly after the forceful British attacks on the El Alamein front, supply became paramount, especially gasoline and ammunition. The British attacks were brought to a standstill and they dug in, as much as anyone can dig into the rock-hard desert floor. Rommel was now planning a renewed major attack by the combined German and Italian armored divisions that would push the British back and finally open the road to Cairo. Getting that done would require a huge amount of men and material. The long awaited offensive began August 31, 1942 but had to be broken off on September 2, 1942. Once again we had fallen short and Alexandria and Cairo lay even farther away. Nevertheless, in spite of , or rather because of that setback we had to attempt to bring even more supply to the front. Rommel still wanted

to beat the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army so that the way to Egypt would be wide open for our combined forces.

Like before, the plan was to reach the Suez Canal, then roll over Palestine and push toward Iran. There the forces would be united with the German armies on the Eastern Front. From there they would cross the Caucasus and move into India where they would finally defeat the English! This was not a brainless phantasy of army privates or mental patients, these were the real projections of the German Army leadership under the direction of their Chief, Adolf Hitler.

The drive and will to accomplish this task would depend upon a powerful effort from the supply columns of all types. It would be necessary to use all available vehicles and men and that the goods could reach Africa then that they could be brought up to the front. The need for manpower for the transports in Africa was the reason for the requisitioning of all qualified drivers by Rommel's headquarters.

Everything that could be scratched up to drive was commandeered, and when the desperately needed vehicles, that were no longer able to be delivered by sea, were not forthcoming, then they seized captured vehicles. The English trucks weren't bad.

There were many recent losses among the German drivers, victims of the merciless attacks by the English Royal Air Force. Many, many drivers found their graves along the Balbo Road. The grave was only a pile of stones that covered the corpse. More than a cumbersome heap of stones for a 'grave' was not possible. Such a stone heap only protected the corpse until the jackals and vultures arrived, then there was nothing left of the erstwhile brave, German soldier who died in Africa for "Führer, Folk and Fatherland," but a few scattered bones. Bones that lay scattered on the ground. It was macabre that so many of these stone heaps served as cover for the other soldiers when the fighter planes attacked and possibly served as a life saver for other soldiers.

If there was a shortage of drivers, there was also a shortage of vehicles. In order to return vehicles to service, we were often on our own and had to work things out for ourselves. We had designated repair trucks that could take vehicles that were ready for the scrap heap and reassemble them into road-worthy transports. More often though, they would take captured English trucks and get them running again. The men in these repair crews did an unbelievable job, they were incredibly inventive and were able to take scrap and junk and somehow make it into a usable vehicle. They were amazing at improvisation. Tirelessly, and on their own, under unimaginable conditions they made the impossible possible. When I think these men for their labors it has nothing to do with glorifying the military and war. That means nothing to me. It is rather thanks that the work these men did not only helped their comrades but it also has the effect of saving lives, because a working vehicle was often a life saver. These men were not world conquering storm troopers, they were simply good men who did a difficult job and thought of nothing more than doing their duty. They were no wild Nazis, no "Sieg Heil" screaming, rampaging fanatics. They were helpers who had to work under the most difficult of circumstances and who also helped me.

I first got to know them when I had to take my truck to a repair garage in Derna, where the broken coupling had to be repaired. That is where I gained my great respect for them.

I would have liked to have stayed a few days in Derna, but I had to rejoin the supply column headed back to Tobruk. That occurred on September 28, 1942. In my little notebook I wrote, "Unloaded at the train station."

On September 29, 1942 we were loaded with provisions that were to go back to Mersa Matruh. We arrived there on the evening of September 29, 1942 and obtained quarters in the new camp.

Now my soldier's life was to become acquainted with the real war. Up until now my life as a soldier was still fresh, happy and free. Now I would experience the war in all its brutal reality.

On the trip from Tobruk to Mersa Matruh I lived through my first low-level air attack. We were driving near Fort Capuzzo over the border toward Egypt. I might mention that the fort wasn't much of a fort any more. There was nothing left but some doorway arches as remains of what was once an Italian border fort. The name Fort Capuzzo, however, had become legendary for the old Afrikaners in the Afrika Korps. This was the site of a hard, costly battle, that was not a legend but a bloody reality, with many, many casualties on both sides.

[...to be continued...]