

## THE BLOCK HOUSE

Going around in Tell el Eisa, obvious to those who know where to go, you can cross small areas where there are still many relics from the period of the battles of El Alamein.

Some of these areas are now incorporated and transfigured by more or less recent constructions that run with obsessive regularity along the coast.

Those are areas, or places, where the destructive action of time combined with that of man is not yet arrived or simply can not.

I'm talking about the strip of land that runs south along the coast road and the railway that starts from the quarry to the west shortly after the commemorative plaque to Bersaglieri up to Italian Shrine and that goes with regular course and with a sandy ground beyond Ras El Shakik.

From there began to mingle with the bottom of mixed gravel and sand of Tell El Aqaqir, most southern.

Along the imaginary line that runs east-west, following the course of the railroad tracks, just before and during the war period in June / November 1942 some hospitals were built by the English who were preparing since long time for the impact of German and Italian troops from the west.

Some of these hospitals were instead nothing more than already existing structures during their everyday life, away from the glory of battle, the pain of his wounds and horror of death, were part of the slow life of those places. Perfectly adapted to the rhythm of life, that has never changed, where time has a relative value.

A time where yesterday is not necessarily the day before today: but a past that no longer exists.

A time where tomorrow is not necessarily the day after today: but a time that does not exist yet and therefore will be.

This "interpretation of life," almost incomprehensible to Westerners, is of the desert as the sun is of the sky or the fish is of the sea ..... no other means are imaginable.

After this prologue, is perhaps easiest to understand the total and terrible upheaval that the inhabitants of those places and the places themselves have suffered during the war:

houses became makeshift forts, simple humps of the land have turned for few hours into a "line to be defended at any cost" and ..... "Roadhouses" as we call them in Italy, were turned into hospitals.



THE BLOCK HOUSE: Note The two poles from the time of the conflict that still stand on both sides of the building.

As I wrote, the British had begun the preparation of the area of El Alamein / Qattara since about 1940 when General Weygand advised, with British insistence, his fellow Wavell to equip the bottleneck of El Alamein as a last defense against the spread from west of German tanks and troops even if the war in Europe had not yet revealed the stupefying efficiency of the German blitzkrieg. (and the weakness of France ..... we want to say that?)

So began the work of preparation for a possible invasion of Egypt from the west, and between these (including the moat that was begun to enter water in the depression, a project abandoned after only 150 meters of excavation), the construction of some underground hospitals in the area of Tell El Alamein.

For the advancing troops, the situation was different, they had to adapt and recycle as much as possible what they found on their way.

With this intent and need , when the front stopped in El Alamein and the attackers began to reinforce the positions waiting to recover energy, men, equipment and fuel (wishful thinking ....), even a low building, long and gray that in times of peace had hosted the Egyptian workers involved in the maintenance of the railway Alexandria - Marsa Matruh, was revised and "recycled"

It was transformed into an efficient hospital that took care of the wounded of the 90th and 164<sup>th</sup> Germanic divisions and the Italian Trento.



View of the back and of the railway line Alexandria - Marsa Matruh, which runs within few meters from the building.

On the 30 of October 1942, Australians of the 2 / 32nd Battalion crossed the railroad after a long and exhausting series of battles, they found the building used as hospital with three doctors and nine nurses who were caring for the wounded, inside the 6 rooms as the building was divided.





Interior of a room where the injured were hospitalized. The reinforced concrete roof and the ceiling, as well as the walls are original.



Interior of a room of the building, with two typical windows and the small skylight up above the entrance door.



Rear entry (rail side ) with the wooden door (the only one left)



Room probably used as a reception or emergency room with different communicating entrances while all other have individual entrances.



Another room: under some layers of paint of different colors, has the original gray coloration of the whole building.





A window like all the other facing north, has the view on the plain of Tell el Eisa.

From that moment The Block House (the Hutt for the Germans) became an oasis of care and rest for the wounded of both sides. It was shot by mistake only once (by a bomb that not exploded), despite the bombing were continuing around with the usual intensity and anger.

German and English doctors, led by Captain Dr. Bill Campbell, have worked all together to treat the wounded arrived without any other flag or uniform different than that of pain and possible imminent death.

For a short time, the cavalry so often mentioned in the stories of war in the desert, has had in the days of epic Block House his brief consecration.

The 1st November 1942 eight British soldiers were overcome by German armored and infantry units, and made prisoners.

A German officer noted in the group of prisoners a young wounded gunner and he transferred him to the Block House (under British control) for necessary medical care instead of sending him to prison and almost to certain death.

The paradox and irony of situation that only in certain very special cases such as the Block House are created.

Australians, Germans and Italians who killed themselves with everything available immediately outside the Block House, while inside the men who wore the same uniforms, were wounded, treated by doctors of different and opposite sides without any distinction of nationality , rank or social position. They were no more soldiers in war those who were hospitalized, but just wounded men.



Is written the Arabic number 130, indicating the distance from the Block House and Alexandria.

The Block House is still there at Tell El Eisa, almost intact, with six rooms and the reception

Outside, at the two ends west and east, there are two wooden poles dating back to the time and the facts narrated above.

On these two poles were still attached, such as crutches of a empty hanger, the bars with the useless insulators on top.

Just as those of the most famous and noble palisade of El Alamein, now cut and reduced to a row of logs, burned by the sun and the wind.



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