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Jesuit Rats

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Empire Essay Competition

1945

Class C

"The bravest Deed I know is the story of the overseas Empire."

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Subject: "The Defence of Tobruk."

The bravest deed I know is not a deed by a single soldier, but a deed by a whole army, the army being "The rats of Tobruk". Who were a combination of Australian, English and Indian fighting men. They were fighting the fascist monsters with a grim determination to wipe them out or perish. If they could hold on for six months or more (their) there was a possibility that the position might change in favor of the allies. In fact the allies were counting on the Rats to hold out so that Wavell could build up a substantial army. Then they could take advantage of any reduction in the enemies forces due to heavy demands on other fronts.

When the enemy shells, bullets and bombs were hurtling through the air these soldiers were sitting in shallow (as) trenches covered with bushes for camouflage. The fortifications were from eight to ten miles radius depending on the natural cover. This also included Tobruk harbour. Tobruk held the best

natural harbour between Alexandria and Bizerta, so it was very important to hold the bay because the holders of this harbour could bring in reinforcements by sea and land necessary supplies.

The "rats" were badly underarmed relying chiefly on their rifles, and what use were rifles against the tanks planes and machine guns of the enemy. One advantage they had over the enemy was that the latter had to drag their weapons over thousands of miles of desert sands while we could bring our supplies by sea guarded by the British navy. It was the command of the sea which enabled us to carry on.

The rats smashed every attempt to dislodge them, in spite of the conditions under which they were fighting. The other enemies beside the facetious terrors were, flies, heat, water and food shortage. The siege lasted eight months during which time the whole situation changed to our advantage.

The enemy gave them no rest bombing them day and night sometimes bombs would be screaming down half the night almost driving the "rats" mad. An incident about the worry that these soldiers had to undergo when the bombs whistling around was told like this: An Indian soldier had ^{been} badly frightened when a bomb had landed

so close that it had killed his best friend ten feet away. After that he was in continual fear of bombs. Two weeks later it was reported that an unexploded bomb lay fifty feet west of the trenches, he immediately volunteered to take out the fuse because he had decided to overcome this eternal fear. He walked out bravely and went up to the bomb, ~~where~~ he stood there looking at it for a moment then burst into fits of uncontrollable ~~laugh~~ laughter he was stark mad.

We Britishers owe a great vote of thanks to these brave soldiers, if they had not held on the enemy could have gone through to the oil wells of Iraq and Iran. Then they would have had fuel for their planes, and it would not have been out of their power to bomb India.

But they did hold on and then came the relief force driving the enemy back on all sides until they were in full retreat. Then out of their holes crawled the "Rats of Tobruk"