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THE ROUEN POST

A PAPER DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF ROUEN POST No. 242

WILLIAM STACK

Editor

SOMEWHERE IN AFRICA

by E. E. FROBIETER

2nd Lieut., A.N.C.

21st General Hospital



SHANGRA LA, JAN. 3, 1943—I am writing this letter in the main building. We all come over here to read, write, and play cards because this building is heated and our quarters are not, and though this is Africa and the bougainvillia are in full bloom, it is also the rainy season and the dead of winter and we freeze to the bone. Perhaps we just think we are supposed to be cold because this is January but at any rate you should see us dress for bed. I wear a pair of long woolen jockey pants, wool slip-on sweater, wool socks and a long-sleeved gown. Then I have a sheet and five layers of blankets over me and my overcoat and cape on top of that.*

I must tell you about our tent city where we lived for 13 days until we finally started for here. We stayed in large tents, 20 nurses to a tent. The first night we had no lights at all but later each tent had three candles. We slept on cots without mattresses, sheets or pillow cases and it was nearly as cold there as here. We were each allotted one canteen (about one quart) of water a day for all purposes . . . brushing teeth, bathing, washing clothes, and scrubbing the tangerine and oranges that we were able to buy from native peddlers. Never had any hot water.

We ate canned rations for eight days cafeteria style in a tent. One can contained hard biscuits, a tin of nescafe, and three pieces of hard candy; another can would be either hash, vegetable and meat stew or meat and beans. This was our menu three times a day with our canteen cup of hot water for the coffee and we ate from mess kits while sitting on the ground in a small area that had been rocked.

It rained so much that we usually wore our raincoats and helmets and always wore galoshes because of the awful red mud. Right after a rain the ground would be slicker than sleet or ice over thought of being, then a few hours later it would get so sticky we would be practically mired. After eating we would queue up to wash our dishes by scrubbing them through soapy water in two G. I. cans and rinsing them in a third. All this took place outside, too. The whole process of lining up for our food, eating, and waiting in line again to wash our dishes, would take from one to two hours, often the latter, and everyone, officers, nurses and enlisted men, ate the same food at the same table.

We bargained with the natives, who came as close to our quarters as they dared and always had to be kept in check by the guards, for tangerines, oranges, and al-

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monds, and believe me, they were some bargainers. We would trade them cigarettes and our G. I. candy for fruit and nuts. At first we would get a dozen oranges for a handful of candy but later we would get two or three.

After a few days we were allowed to go to the nearby town if we could find transportation. This was easy. We would just go down the road and hail the first U. S. Army truck and we got home the same way. Going to town was fun . . . at least it gave us something to do . . . but there was practically nothing for sale as everything had been bought by the army ahead of us. The few things that were left, such as purses and a few pieces of unattractive silver jewelry, were terribly expensive. Purses ranged from \$30 to \$120 and ordinary bracelets from \$15 to \$30. The scant supply of handmade lingerie we saw could not be bought without coupons . . . and we had no coupons. But there was one thing left to us and that was the beauty parlor. There must have been a hundred of them in that town. Antoine even has a shop there but we found a still ritzier one. About twice a week we would go in and have facials, which was one way of getting our faces clean, and they really gave us the works . . . it took over an hour for a facial. Girls always shampooed our hair but the men were the expert hairdressers. We rarely saw a natural brunette among the French women; they were either peroxidized to the extreme or hennaed. It so happened that during our stay at Tent City we had invitations to dances nearly every night, the whole group of us, and the fellows couldn't understand how we could keep our hair looking like it did while living in tents and mud. We never enlightened them.

Going to these parties was quite an experience. We'd brush our clothes as well as we could and managed to look fairly neat in spite of the mud outside, and the dust and straw indoors, but we'd have to wear our galoshes which were invariably covered with red mud from top to toe. Transportation was in open trucks supplied by the organization giving the dance. I can imagine myself getting all dressed in my best and setting out for a dance at the Jefferson Hotel in a two or three-ton open army truck.

You probably wonder how we get along in a place where everyone speaks only French. The people are clever and quick to catch on so we find it possible to get along by signs and a few French words. They have certainly kept up their appearances, too . . . one sees quite a number of well-dressed French women and some very richly dressed Arabs. However, the latter, for the most part, are quite filthy and are always begging for bonbons, cigarettes, and money.

Our last night in Tent City was the pay off. We had orders to be ready to depart by 7:30 in the morning, at which time it is still dark. During the night we had a cloud burst and the camp was flooded. Our tent had three inches of water over the floor and as several of the girls had their suitcases, musette bags, shoes and so forth on the ground, you can imagine the damage. Profiting by an earlier and lesser experience I had put my belongings on tin cans and boxes and nothing got wet except one shoe, which was filled with water from a tiny hole in the canvas roof. Having only one pair of shoes (we did not have access to our bedding rolls) I simply poured out the water, put it on and wore it the rest of the day.

Some of the girls who are unusually sound sleepers didn't hear the rain but everyone heard their wails of dismay when they put their feet out in that red, muddy water. We managed to finish our last minute packing by flashlight and when we finally gathered on the road between the rows of tents, we just laughed. You should have seen us. Wet, muddy, bedraggled, with the native woven baskets, which we had all acquired by this time, tied on us somewhere along with our musette bags, gas masks, canteens and belts, make-up bags, and other things. It was quite a contrast to our departure from St.

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Louis, gay with corsages; and the day we left Fort Benning with our uniforms clean and pressed and brass and shoes polished to the nth degree.

We arrived here on a moonlit night, and when we saw the pretty white buildings with palm trees all around and heard that we were going to have hot baths, and beds with sheets, it was nearly too much. We also heard that we were to have bread for breakfast for the first time since we disembarked. Is it any wonder that we called the place Shangra La? It's nothing like home as far as comfort and conveniences are concerned, but it is by far the best we have known since we left the United States.

We had a Christmas party, too, of sorts. The Christmas tree, an Australian pine, was decorated with geraniums, chrysanthemums, leaves and berries of the pepper trees, which we made into wreaths. Sheets of our stationery, rolled and striped with finger-nail polish, were hung on the tree and we pretended they were peppermint sticks. Other decorations were cut from tin cans and spirals . . . the funniest looking ornaments you ever saw. Christmas Eve we sang carols and went to midnight mass.

We had invited all the French families to visit on Christmas day and everyone received a present. We chipped in with our candy, cigarettes, chewing gum, powdered coffee, lipstick, and anything we could think of and no one went away empty handed. The French kids sang a lot of songs and I'm sure they had a good time. Even had a Santa Claus . . . but we didn't fool ourselves a bit. I didn't know that anybody could be as low in spirit as a lot of us were that day. You've no idea what it takes to set up a hospital. We've worked like beavers at times and we can't buy a thing. The realization that everything essential to a hospital has to be brought along or done without, really makes one thoughtful. We are making ash trays for the wards out of tin cans, temperature books out of wrapping paper and string, use wine bottles for solutions, and so far, have ruled all our own patients charts without having rulers. We save and use every scrap of everything. But we do have a new McKesson Metabolism machine.

We are isolated here. No radio or any other means of getting news promptly. While on the boat we heard that Bing Crosby and Deanna Durbin were dead; then sometime later we heard that Bing froze to death singing "White Christmas." So we wonder what is what. It's awful not knowing what is going on in the world. So far we haven't been off this place and don't know how long we will be confined.

ST. LOUIS BAR GROUP ELECTS DAVID L. MILLAR

Members of the St. Louis Bar Association have elected David L. Millar, former mayor of University City, to succeed William W. Crowds as president. He is a member of the firm of Neuhoff and Millar.

In accepting the presidency, Millar said he felt the association should have two primary objectives: First, making every possible contribution to the war effort, and second, looking to the welfare of the bar and the administration of justice.

He said that he expects to appoint a committee soon to offer assistance in connection with the forthcoming Missouri constitutional convention.

Among the pictures adorning the walls of your Editor's den is a profile view of "Pat" Byrns taken about six years ago. The other day a colored maid paused in her task of cleaning the room to gaze long and earnestly at the photograph of the venerable Red Cross Secretary. Then she set a new high for stupid queries that placed her at the top of our list of pet aversions by asking this question: "Is that a picture of Mr. Stack when he was young?"

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Arthur Melville, South Side printer, senior air raid warden, and a familiar figure at all Civilian Defense stag parties, made the front page of the St. Louis County Observer one day last week. The Observer announced that Comrade Melville is the new commander of St. Louis Hills Post, No. 3125, Veterans of Foreign Wars . . . Charles Jablonsky, portly Deputy Jury Commissioner has responded to the call for farm helpers. The former top-sergeant recently offered his services through Earl Hursey, Chairman of a Rouen Post Committee to recruit men to gather in the sheaves. "The Committee appreciates the spirit that prompts Jabby to stage a man-with-the-hoe act." said Hursey. "But we feel that the old sergeant has been estranged from honest toil so many years that his chances for a comeback are less than slim. He'd be about as useful as Shorty Wallace."

Photographs taken during the Reunion dinner at Hotel Coronado last May are still available at the following prices: 11 x 14 non-glazed, \$1.25; Glazed, \$1.00; 8 x 10 non-glazed, 85c; Glazed, 60c. Send request with the cash to Bill Engel, 1004 Federal Commerce Trust Building, St. Louis, Mo.

Naval Aviation Cadet Jules W. Silberberg, Jr., left St. Louis, May 12, for training at Murray Hill College, Murray, Ky. Young Silberberg, whose father served with Unit 21, was graduated from Christian Brothers College in June, 1942. He is nineteen years old . . . George Jordan, Past Commander of Rouen Post, 242, is back on the job at Premier Engraving Co., after a check-up at Veterans Hospital.

Your Editor was the guest of Dr. David Brock at the annual dinner of the St. Louis University Dental Alumni Association, April 7, at the Roosevelt Hotel. Dave, a member of the dinner and entertainment committee, is popular with his fellow dentists—and no wonder. The menu featured juicy, broiled sirloin steaks — thanks to astute maneuvering on the part of Comrade Brock.

MISS ECKHART IS MARRIED

Eleanor Eckhardt, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Clemens Eckhart, 3001 Keokuk Ave., was married to Corp. Richard A. Dust on Wednesday, May 12th, at St. Anthony's Church, St. Louis. Corp. Dust is stationed at Camp Butner, North Carolina.

Miss Eckhart, secretary in the office of Bill Engel, has served for the past five years as an unofficial adjutant of Rouen Post, 242, handling clerical details and the mailing of the monthly paper. Engel is pleased that she will continue in her position after a brief honeymoon.

EMMA HABENICHT WRITES

Dear Mr. Engel:

I have just received the beautiful flowers from Rouen Post, 242, and they made me so happy I had to weep. I love you boys; you have been so sweet and good to me, and I've been hoping that some of you would come out and visit me. Fornay Dickson always drove me to Post meetings because I was unable to walk. I suppose you know that I have left-side paralysis. My doctors are Dr. McCarthy and Dr. Bondurant. Dr. McCarthy comes to see me every morning and Dr. Bondurant comes in regularly, too. If I am asleep he doesn't disturb me. As he says, I need a rest more than medicine. He is in charge of the doctors here. Recently when I showed him how I could move my hand, he was quite pleased and predicted I would be able to use it again.

Emma Habenicht

Miss Habenicht has been a patient at the Veterans Hospital since April 10.