VARIOUS

HISTORY OF AMBULANCE COMPANY NUMBER 139

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Содержание

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Foreword

THIS BOOK IS AN ATTEMPT TO GIVE A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF THE MEN OF AMBULANCE COMPANY NUMBER 139 DURING THEIR SERVICES IN THE GREAT WAR. IT WAS WRITTEN BY THE MEN WHILE THEY WERE AWAITING SAILING ORDERS FOR HOME, IN BARN-LOFT BILLETS OF THE VILLAGE OF AULNOIS-SOUS-VERTUZEY, FRANCE, WHILE THE MEMORIES OF OUR EXPERIENCES WERE STILL FRESH IN OUR MINDS.

ORGANIZATION OF AMBULANCE COMPANY 139

When war was declared on Germany April 5th, 1917, the government sent out calls for volunteers. The auxiliary organizations were to be the first ones to go across, and it looked as if ambulance companies would be among the first to get into action. Many of the universities and colleges in the east started at once to organize ambulance companies. These companies were quickly filled, and the enthusiasm spread quickly to the west.

Early in April Dr. Edwin R. Tenney of Kansas City, Kansas, was appointed by the adjutant general of the State of Kansas to organize a national guard ambulance company in that city. Until this time there had never been a national guard ambulance company in the State of Kansas. Dr. Tenney had been a practicing physician in Kansas City for a number of years and before coming to the city he served as a physician during the Spanish-American war. For the past five years he had held a lieutenant's commission in the U. S. Army Reserve Corps. It was through his efficient work that this company was recruited to full strength within a month after he received his appointment.

The recruiting office in the press room at the city hall was a very busy place during the month of April. Every one was anxious to join some branch of the army. By April 25th the

company was recruited to its full strength of sixty-four men and the office was closed. However, orders were received the next day to recruit the company to eighty-four men, so again the office was opened for business with a sign which read, "Join a motor ambulance company and *ride*." It was in this office that so many of the men held up their right hand and said that fatal "I do."

About this time Dr. Richard T. Speck, of Kansas City, Kansas, received a lieutenant's commission in the Kansas National Guard and was assigned to this company. A few days later Drs. A. J. Bondurant, of St. Margaret's Hospital, Kansas City, Kansas, and A. H. Adamson, of the General Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri, also received commissions and were assigned to this company.

On April 30th Major Seth A. Hammell, of Topeka, Kansas, mustered the company into the state guard as Kansas Ambulance Company No. 2. Another ambulance company, known as Kansas Ambulance Company No. 1, was organized by Lieutenant W. L. Rhodes, of Argentine, Kansas.

After the state muster the company had two drill nights a week. These drills often interfered with some of the men's plans, but that made no difference as they now belonged to "Uncle Sam" and duty came before pleasure. It was at these semi-weekly drills that the men learned the first principles of soldiering under the leadership of Lieutenant R. T. Speck and Sergeant Roscoe Leady. They were unaccustomed to regular drilling, especially on paved streets, and many times they went home with sore feet

from doing "fours right and left" and "to the rear, march."

On June 14th the company was called out for federal inspection and was formally recognized by the federal authorities. This was the first formation in which every one was present, as many of the men lived out of the city and could not come to the drills. After this inspection the men were told to be ready to leave at any time, as it wouldn't be over two weeks at the most before they would be called out. The days dragged slowly, and it seemed that the company would never be called into service. The men were all anxious to start for France and many of them had already given up their positions, thinking that it would be but a short time until they would leave.

On Decoration Day the company was ordered out for a special formation to march to the cemetery and to pay tribute to the heroes of the past. However, it rained so hard that the march was called off and instead the men were assembled in the auditorium of the High School where they listened to an address by J. K. Cubbison.

For a number of years it had been customary for all national guard organizations to go into camp on the night of July 3rd and stay until the 4th, when they would put on an exhibition of some kind. Consequently this company, together with Company A, First infantry, K. N. G., and Battery E, First Field Artillery, K. N. G., went into camp on the night of July 3rd at the City Park. To most of the men this was their first experience in sleeping on the ground, and it will not be easily forgotten, for the next day found

every one with aching bones. In the afternoon of the 4th the men of Company A, Infantry, put on a sham battle, and this company followed them up, administering first aid to the "wounded."

LIFE AT CAMP HOEL

It was on the memorable day of August 5th, 1917, that the members of Kansas Ambulance Company No. 2 assembled at the corner of Ninth and Minnesota Avenue, Kansas City, Kansas. As the clock struck nine the order "Fall in" was given. After a few army formalities the company was marched out to Camp Hoel, which was situated at Twentieth Street and Washington Boulevard. It was a spectacular scene for the outsiders and for all the men in the company. It looked more like a parade of college chaps before a football game, as almost all of the fellows were dressed in their "Sunday best." There were a few boys dressed in the khaki, which gave the passerby the idea that we were a part of the great American Army which was being formed. When we reached camp a small white tent was pitched, which was to be our office, supply room and a place of shelter for those boys of the company who did not live in the city or who were not staying at the homes of some of their friends.

Our company was not the only one at this camp, as we had neighbors, who were later designated as follows: Company A, 137th Infantry; Companies B and C of the 110th Regiment of Engineers; Battery E, 130th Field Artillery, and Ambulance Company 140 of the 110th Sanitary Train. The majority of the members of these organizations were Kansas City boys.

In a few days the drills were started. Awkward squads were

formed and from all parts of the camp the command of "fours right," "to the rear, march," etc., could be heard. Hikes were numerous, and it was not long until our feet knew all the bumps on every street in Kansas City, Kansas.

The mess for the different companies at Camp Hoel was put in charge of the Central Boarding Company of Kansas City, Missouri. A large tent was erected for the kitchen and it was there that the men were initiated into the secrets of "kitchen police."

After wearing overalls, blue shirts or any other old article that was obtainable, the company was greatly shocked one morning when the news came that part of our equipment had arrived. Here again another dream was shattered, for it seemed that the good fits for the men must have been lost in transit. The large fellows received clothing too small for them, and the small fellows received clothes that would have looked well if they had had about fifty more pounds of muscle upon their skeletons. But as a matter of fact everyone was very proud of the new uniform.

A few days before the uniforms arrived a proposition was laid upon the table for the debate of the company. The great question was, "Shall each member buy leather leggins?" Nobody knew at that time about the uniform rules of the army. Leather leggins looked fine and seemed to be the fashion according to posters and magazine pictures. So the debate was closed and the whole bunch bit on the eight and ten dollar pairs. We used them several times, in fact we wore them in two parades, and were granted the permission to wear them to Doniphan, were we soon sold them

at the average price of $5.00 per pair.

On August 13th the boys received their physical examination. A few were disappointed at that time to find that they could not pass the examination and go along with the company. That afternoon Captain Arthur L. Donan of the 3rd Kentucky Infantry placed himself before the company and mumbled a few words. After the company was dismissed the main question was, "What did the captain have to say?" It was soon found out that he had mustered us into Federal Service.

On the Saturdays of the first two weeks at camp we were treated fine (just kidding us along). On the third Saturday we were lined up in formation and were sent to the infirmary. There we were told to get ready for the worst. Both arms were bared while iodine swabs, the medics' famous panacea, were thrown around freely. There were three doctors in one corner ready for action. Two of them were puncturing the right arms with needles and with a little push of a plunger our body was given some extra fluid so that we might be able to combat that great army disease of former years, typhoid fever. The other doctor was cutting a few nitches in the boys' left arms so that the smallpox vaccine could do its duty. Fainting was in order on that day, as well as on the following three Saturdays, when the puncturing process was repeated, and no member of the company was slighted.

The mothers of Kansas City made army life, while we were at Camp Hoel, as pleasant as possible. On different days we received a basket dinner, a watermelon feast and an ice cream

and cake festival from them. Those days were the frequent topics of conversation during the boys' stay in France and will never be forgotten. Shows were always at hand in Kansas City and on certain afternoons theatre parties were formed by the members of the company.

September 27th was the fatal day for Kansas Ambulance Company No. 2 in Kansas City, Kansas. On that day camp was broken and the company was formed. We left our camp and marched to the train behind the famous Kilties Scotch Band, which led us down Minnesota Avenue through the great crowds that had gathered along the street to cheer us on our way. We boarded the train at Third and Washington Boulevard, where the boys bid their dear ones "goodbye."

TRAINING AT CAMP DONIPHAN

When that Frisco troop train pulled out of Kansas City, Kansas, on September 27th, 1917, it cannot be said that it carried a very hilarious bunch of soldiers. The men, the majority of whom had never been away from home before for any length of time, had just spent a last few happy days with the home folks, sweethearts and friends and now they were going out into a new life, into new environments and with unknown problems and experiences ahead of them. They were quiet at first, no doubt wondering what was in store for them before they saw "home" again, but as they left Kansas City far behind their quietness disappeared and soon little groups were chattering at a lively rate.

After an uneventful trip the troop train carrying Kansas Ambulance Companies No. 1 and 2 and one field hospital company arrived at the Fort Sill railroad yards at about 4:30 P. M. on September 28th. After a short delay the companies started their march toward the area on the south side of the camp, designated for the Sanitary Train, and right then and there they were introduced to that for which Camp Doniphan is noted – DUST – five or six inches of it on every road. What a hot, dirty hike that was, unaccustomed as the men were to those ungainly, heavy packs! And when Kansas Ambulance Company No. 2 (later designated as Ambulance Company 139) reached camp did they find comfortable tents or barracks to step into? They did

not. True, tents were there, but they were in wooden crates, and there was a long, vacant space between a mess hall and a bath house on which those tents were to stand. Fate was with the men that night, for the moon was shining brightly, so after a supper of crackers and cheese they soon had twelve Sibley tents pitched on the allotted space. Tired from their trip and work litters made excellent bunks and the men slept the sleep of the weary, their first night under real army conditions.

Army life, as experienced in those first six weeks at Camp Doniphan, can scarcely be called a picnic. *If* there had been floors in the tents, and *if* you could have turned a switch instead of having to light a candle in order to have light, and *if* there had been an adequate supply of good water, and *if* "DUST," in vast quantities, had not been a "regular issue" – well, such was life at Doniphan for the first few weeks.

However, by Thanksgiving, many improvements had been made. Good water was piped from a lake some distance from the camp and no longer was moss and like substances found in the water that came through the pipes. Nor was it necessary to watch all the dust of Kansas blow by from the north in the morning, with a return trip in the afternoon. The tents were floored and sidings put on, and electric lights were installed; Sibley stoves were issued, together with an ample supply of wood – all of which made the life at Camp Doniphan a little more attractive. A large boiler and tank was installed in the bath house, giving the men plenty of hot water for bathing and washing clothes.

Military training continued, of course, consisting of drilling on the field and lectures in the mess hall by medical officers on subjects essential to the work of sanitary troops. This included practice in the use of bandages and splints and litter drill.

The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays brought many visitors to camp – mothers, brothers, sisters and friends, all anxious to see for themselves the Army life that the men had been writing about. If any of the mothers had been worrying about the "beans and hard-tack" which is supposed to be an unvarying part of a soldier's menu, they returned home with that worry eliminated, for on both Thanksgiving and Christmas, "John," the red-headed chef of the company, brought forth dinners that would make the "Plantation Grill" or the "Pompeien Room" sit up and take notice. Turkey, all you could eat and with all the trimmings, and the dessert of mince pie and fruit cake, made one think of "Home, Sweet Home" and Mother's incomparable cooking. As a whole, Army feed wasn't half as bad as it was supposed to be. How could it be, when flapjacks, sausage, steak and pie were regular issues?

The winter of 1917–18, according to the "natives," was the worst in Oklahoma for fifteen years, and those reports will never be questioned by the men who were at Doniphan that winter. More than once they awoke in the morning to find three or four inches of snow on the tent floor. However, unaccustomed as the men were to living in tents in cold weather, there was a comparatively small amount of sickness. True, a number of the

men were sent to the Base Hospital, with measles, influenza and pneumonia, and several times the company was quarantined, but very few of the cases proved serious, and sooner or later the men returned to duty.

For several months, both the Base Hospital and the Isolation Camp were in need of Medical men, and details from the Sanitary Train were sent to relieve the situation. The men were put to work at anything from nurse to Supply Sergeant, and this work gave them some good, practical experience along medical lines. Just before Christmas, the company received twelve G. M. C. Ambulances, and for the remainder of our stay at Doniphan these ambulances were used for evacuation work between the Base Hospital and the different units of the Division.

Not all of the training at Doniphan was along *medical* lines, however. At regular intervals you could expect to find your name on the Bulletin Board under the heading "Kitchen Police," and when it wasn't that, it was probably for a tour of guard duty, and if you were lucky enough to miss both of those details, it was seldom that you weren't picked for company fatigue.

The personnel of our officers changed somewhat at Doniphan. Lt. Adamson soon after getting there, received his honorable discharge. About February 1st, Lt. Tenney was transferred to a Machine Gun Battalion, and Lt. Speck was placed in command of the company. Lt. Paul R. "Daddy" Siberts, Lt. Bret V. Bates, and Lt. Colin C. Vardon were assigned to the company while at Doniphan, the latter in place of Lt. Bondurant, who was

transferred to the Casual Company at Camp Doniphan.

With the coming of warmer weather in the early spring, the outside drill turned to hikes, and many is the tale that can be told about the "strategic maneuvers" of the Sanitary Train. Ask any of the man about the night at Buffalo Springs, when J. Pluvius turned the faucet wide open, deluging the tent city. Ask them about "The Lost Sanitary Train," when, in returning from Sulphur Springs, they circled Scott Mountain before they finally bumped into Medicine Lake, and finally arrived back to camp at 3 A. M. But as a rule, the hikes were interesting and instructive, and furnished excellent training. Men who had always depended on Mother for their meals learned how to build a camp fire in the face of a high wind and to cook their dinner of bacon, potatoes and coffee. They learned that a great deal of territory can be covered without the use of a street car or "flivver," and incidentally their muscles became hardened, fitting them for the strenuous work ahead.

From the very first, nothing interested the men more than the thought of a furlough home, and almost as soon as they arrived at Doniphan, the arguments were many as to whether it would be nicer to be home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. But it was not until January that any leaves at all were granted. Then the furloughs were limited to five or seven days, and in that way almost all of the men were able to visit the home folks for a few days before leaving for overseas service. Putting their feet under Mother's table again, and seeing Her for a few days, invariably

put the men in a happier and more contented spirit, and they came back to camp with more "pep" for their work.

Tho the days were filled with the routine of drill and company duties, the social side of life at Doniphan must not be forgotten. Not far from camp was the city of Lawton, and while it was far from being an ideal town, it was at least a change from the monotony of camp life. Passes to town were liberal, and the men spent many pleasant evenings there, either at the picture shows or with friends whom they met after going to Doniphan.

The Y. M. C. A. deserves a great deal of credit for its work at Doniphan. "Y" Bldg. No. 59, used by the Sanitary Train and the 110th Engineers, was just a short distance from the train area, and in the evening immediately after Retreat a stream of men could be seen going in that direction. The "Y" furnished paper and envelopes, pen and ink, thus encouraging the men to write home oftener. Movies, at least twice a week, band concerts and boxing bouts were some of the means of entertaining the men, and there was always a full house. On Sundays the men were privileged to attend exceptionally interesting religious services, and the series of addresses given by Chaplain Reeder of the Engineers was well worth hearing.

Almost as soon as the company arrived at Doniphan, rumors filled the air about the Division leaving for overseas service, but nothing substantial developed until about the middle of March. Then orders were received that the Division was booked to leave, and the work preparatory to moving started in earnest.

Everything, from the kitchen range to the Pierce-Arrow trucks, had to be prepared for shipment. Lumber was furnished, and the company carpenters were kept busy almost to the day of departure building crates and boxes. After being crated, each article had to be stenciled with the company designation, together with the weight and cubical contents, and the Division Symbol. Packing lists were prepared, which was no small task, and the main work preparatory to leaving was completed.

Not all of the men of the company left Camp Doniphan with the Division, for as is always the case in a large body of men, there were a few who were physically unfit. These men, nine of them, were left at the Casual Camp at Camp Doniphan, and were later assigned to recruiting or military police duty in various parts of the United States.

DEPARTURE FROM CAMP DONIPHAN

The day of May 8th, 1918, dawned bright and fair. The morning was spent in finishing up little odds and ends of work, and in rolling packs. At 1 P. M. "Fall in," the last one at Doniphan, sounded, and soon afterwards the Sanitary Train started its march to the railroad yards. Again it was hot and dusty, just as it had been when the company marched into camp, and it was with a feeling of relief that the troop train came into view. Pullman cars? No, the Sanitary Train couldn't be as fortunate as that, so the men had to be content with chair cars.

With seven months training behind them, the men of Ambulance Company 139 left Camp Doniphan for "Somewhere in France" with great anticipation, feeling that they were ready for any part that they might have to play.

On board the train, which left Doniphan at 3 P. M., the men amused themselves in reading and card games. There were a few details, such as sweeping the cars, kitchen police or serving the meals "de luxe" to the boys, but the old beloved guard detail was not left to the privates. It was graciously wished on the non-coms, who were forced to carry a "45 smoke wagon" on their belts, according to some General Order in the "blue book." We never learned whether they were to keep the boys from getting out or

to keep the feminine sex from getting in.

At our first stop, El Reno, Okla., the four ambulance companies, which made up one train, "fell-out" for a little exercise, and after an hour or so of maneuvering, we climbed aboard again to journey nearer the Atlantic. We were by this time consulting time tables, watches and maps to decide over which route we must travel in order to pass through Kansas City, the home of most of the boys in the company. The first night of traveling passed slowly, and as the first tints of dawn were spreading over the eastern sky our train drew into Topeka. Shortly after daybreak the train left the Capitol city of Kansas, and headed down the Kaw Valley towards Kansas City. As the noon hour of May 9th was passing away the train pulled into the big Union Station, where mothers, fathers, wives, brothers, sisters, sweethearts and friends had been waiting for hours, with baskets overflowing with delicious meats, sandwiches, fruits and all the rarest and spiciest that a Mother's effort could put forth.

Again the "blue book" came into play, and we took a little sightseeing trip up Main Street. The bride of a certain Sergeant in the company tried to follow her "hero in hobs" but fell out after the first block. We did an about-face at 12th Street and double-timed back to the folks. After re-entering the coach, we leaned out of the window, pulled the Mother and sweetheart up to us, and for the time being were utterly unconscious of what went on around us or where we were. When the train slowly moved out of the station, we tried to smile as we said "Good-bye," and watched

the handkerchiefs still waving when we rounded the corner and were out of sight.

We arrived at St. Louis about 12:30 the next morning, and were switched onto a siding, where we stayed until daybreak, when we continued our journey, crossing Illinois and Indiana. At Huntington, Ind., we again stopped and had setting-up exercises. Upon reaching Peru, Ind., we found Pullman cars awaiting us, and from then on we rode in style. Our next stop was at Salamanca, N. Y., where exercise was again on the program. From there we traveled through some of the most picturesque country of the east.

While on the train a humorous incident occurred. The officers heard from some underground source that "Snowball," our dark-complexioned porter, had been passing "Old Evans" around to the boys in a promiscuous fashion. And at the same time "Snowball" heard in the same way that the officer of the guard was going to make a search of his possessions for this precious "fire-water." The search was made, with Snowball looking on wild-eyed, and the officer detective was about to give it up, when he noticed a string leading out the window, and upon investigating found the poor half-dead soldier (bottled in bond) tied by the neck to the other end of the string.

The last night of riding brought us near to the eastern coast, and soon after daybreak on May 12th the train stopped at Jersey City. We slung our packs and pushed our way through the station to a ferry boat. From this point many of us had our first view

of New York and the salt water. After loading on the ferry we were pulled out into the East River, where the boat remained for the greater part of the day. At last it moved on and we landed in Long Island City. Dragging our packs and barrack bags, we marched wearily to a Long Island train. A few hours' ride brought us to Garden City, and truly it was well named, for with its low, well kept hedges, its English gardens and its wild flowers growing everywhere, it looked like a garden city. From Garden City to Camp Mills was a weary hike but we finally reached there, and after eating supper, we crawled under our three O. D.s and slept.

During our five days stay at Camp Mills, some of the men were granted passes to New York City, but we left before all the men had a chance to visit that city of bright lights. The day before we departed we were given the last of our overseas equipment, including the pan-shaped steel helmet.

THE TRIP ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

After spending five chilly nights at Camp Mills, Long Island, and awaiting anxiously the orders to leave for France, we did not seem to mind the coolness of the night on May the 17th, for we were to leave the following day on the long expected trip across the Atlantic. Bright and early the next morning a passer-by could plainly see that something was about to happen. All were in gay spirits as they hurried here and there, gathering together the miscellaneous articles and other things, which make up a soldier's equipment. Packs were rolled, the camp tidied up, and our overseas boxes loaded on trucks. At last after everything was ready we fell in line and marched across the camp, to the train that would carry us to the ferry. The old world seemed to hold a different meaning for everyone that morning. We were about to step into the greatest adventure of our lives, and one that would never be forgotten. Groups of soldiers cheered us on all sides, and yelled that they would be with us soon. Some were from our own division, and we recognized many of our friends.

On arriving at the ferry, we took our place as close to the rail as possible, and waved to the passengers on passing boats. The ferry, filled to its full capacity, chugged down the East River to one of the many docks where, quietly waiting, was the big

camouflaged boat that would complete for us the trip from our training camp in Doniphan to England.

The moment that we had been looking forward to for so long a time had at last arrived. We wound our way to the big warehouse and stopped in front of an iron door. Stacked on the floor were life-saving jackets and as each one passed through the door, he received a colored tag, and one of the life-preservers. The tag assured him a bunk and meals.

Our expectations were fully realized as we filed by one by one up the gang-plank and onto the boat that was to be our home for the coming fourteen days. We were divided up and led down stairs to our quarters. They looked more like a steam-room than a place to sleep. It was all a jumbled-up puzzle. Water pipes seemed to be running in all directions, and arguments could be heard on all sides as to how we were to sleep. In the midst of it all an officer appeared, and he told us to let down the rectangular shaped frame, also made of water-pipe, which rested in sockets on two other upright pipes like hinged shelves. Then he told us to unwrap the small piece of canvas, which was wrapped to the rectangular frame. After doing this, things began to seem clearer, for the canvas was also rectangular in shape, and had grummets all around it. By means of the rope it was securely laced to the framework. This composed our bunk, and there were three of these in a tier, and a tier on each side of the two perpendicular pipes. The aisle between the bunks was very narrow and we crowded and pushed in making up our beds, for everyone was

more than anxious to learn more about our boat.

In the meantime several sailors came in from the engine room and we began making friends, although they had many a laugh while watching us prepare our bunks. They were asked for every bit of information we could think of about the boat – "How fast it could go," "How long it was" – and many other questions about the sea, and their experiences. We found out that the name of the boat was the "S. S. Louisville," formerly the "St. Louis," that it was 564 ft. long, and carried 3500 men. On asking how many miles the boat could make in an hour, we were assured that "it was the speediest ship in the convoy."

By this time we heard mess-call, and began to look for a line. Men were running upstairs and down, and hurried questions flew from everyone as to when and where the men with his color of tag were eating. Each color had a certain time to eat. There were four colors, two eating at one time. The men filed in to the dining room from each side of the main deck through two large double doors. There were four long tables and we stood up to eat, moving along the table as the men ahead finished eating and moved out to wash their mess-kits in large sinks, just before leaving the room. It was very interesting to see the systematic way in which the men moved along, taking a mouth-full as they pushed their mess-kits up the table.

As we were strolling on deck that afternoon, a low grumbling sound met our ears, as if it came from some place far below. Then it turned into a rythmatical chug of a large engine, and we

knew that the boat was getting up steam preparatory for the trip. The sailor-boys, too, were making preparations for "Jerry." They carried large shells and deposited them in cases behind the guns, and as we watched them work, we wondered if there would ever be a real necessity to use them during the trip.

Evening found everyone knowing the boat almost by heart, and we began to gather in groups on deck and look about. To the rear lay New York, the tall buildings outlined against the sky. Numerous tug-boats were slowly winding their way in and out of the docks. One of the sailors leaning against the rail pointed out to us the former German ship "Vaterland," in a dock across the river. We were entertained for awhile by watching a bunch of negro waiters for the officers mess shooting dice, and a quartet gave us a few songs. But night soon came, and we went below to try our new bunks. One of the boys no sooner found the trick that one could play, than he immediately dislodged the man above him, by putting his feet on the bottom of the bunk above, pushing it out of its socket, and bringing the fellow down into the aisle below.

All night the engines kept up their continuous running, and the next morning two little tug-boats came up along side and pulled us out and down the river. We were ordered "below decks," out of sight, but a few borrowed sailor caps and stood on the lower deck to get a last long look at old New York and the Statue of Liberty. As we neared the open water, and the tall buildings began to fade away behind us, the cold facts of the situation

began to present themselves. We were leaving a land, the only one we had ever known, to cross the fathomless ocean to another land, and to battle-fields with horrors unknown. But we soon put such thoughts aside when we were permitted to go on deck. The convoy was slowly spreading out into formation, the battle-ship that accompanied us going ahead as our protector. As soon as we reached the ocean, orders were given not to go on deck without our life-preservers, and to stay on the side of the boat which our color of tag designated. By night we were using "sailor-terms" for every part of the boat. A detail was called for, to stand watch in the "crows-nest" and other look-out stations. One of the boys in the "crows-nest" said that "when we hit the rough sea, he knew the top of that main mast touched the water when the boat made a big heave to one side."

A few days passed, uneventful except that we went through the usual drill necessary in case there should be a fire or an attack by submarines. Every man had his place to go in case of danger. At the gong of a bell, every man would grab his life-preserver, and hurry, supposedly in an orderly manner, to his portion of the deck. One of the fellows asked John, the cook, if he expected one little life-preserver to hold him up. Well, John didn't say anything, but that night he had a couple of extras – "I might have to use them," was the only excuse he would give.

After a few days out the ocean began to get rough, and the boat would heave from side to side, and at the same time pitch forward and backward. However, we soon got used to it, and

did not mind it so much. Some time that night one of the boys who had been on deck ran in, saying "the rudder has broken" – and apparently something *was* broken, for the boat seemed to heave all the more, and to take a zig-zag course. Once or twice it made a complete circle, and we began to think that they had lost all control of it, but three sturdy sailors were sent up in the stern to handle it by means of large pilot wheels. Our company was quartered just beneath the officers kitchen, and during the roughest part, the plates and other dishes began to roll from their places on the shelves, breaking upon the floor. This made a very unpleasant sound, above the uproar of a thousand other noises. During the rough sea, the mess line began to thin out somewhat. Some would come into the mess hall, but at the sight of food, they would turn pale and make a hurried exit.

Soon we ran into comparatively smooth water again, and one day our boat's turn came for target practice. We drew away from the convoy, and a buoy with a small flag on was dropped overboard. The gunners took their turn shooting as the boat swung around, and once or twice they came so close that we felt sure they had made a direct hit. The buoy was knocked under the water, but the little thing soon appeared again. The boys were naturally anxious to see them handle the guns, and they crowded around as closely as possible, but after the first shot they gave them more room. One fellow was standing directly behind the gun, but upon the super-deck. He was so intent upon watching the operations that when the gun fired its concussion knocked him

off his feet. He got up, took a wild look around and immediately left. Finally the big six-inch gun in the stern sank the buoy. After cruising around all day, and just as night was hovering over the sea, we again caught sight of the convoy. We were certainly glad, too, for of course we felt more comfortable with the other ships.

It was on board the ship that we first became acquainted with the censorship rules. The officers did a slashing business on our first letters, and only a few unconnected lines ever reached the folks back home.

It was on the morning of May 29 that the news flew over the boat that land was in sight. Although only 2 o'clock, day was breaking, and many went on deck to see that which we had not seen for fourteen long days. Upon reaching the deck, we could also see a number of little torpedo destroyers darting here and there – small in size but powerful little "watchdogs" of the sea. The "Mosquito Fleet" had arrived, and was tearing through the water in all directions. We were thus escorted through the danger zone, and had little fear of submarines. But we could now understand why old "Chris Columbus" felt so glad upon seeing land. As the day grew on we drew into the Irish Sea. The water was as smooth as glass, with only little ripples disturbing its peacefulness. Jelly fish of every shape and size could be seen through its clearness. Two large dirigibles, and several aeroplanes came out to greet our convoy and protect us in the dangerous waters. At one time we could see both Bonnie Scotland and Ireland, where the channel was very narrow.

About 10 o'clock that morning five long blasts from one of the ships was heard – the signal for a submarine. The little sub chasers raced around to our right and immediately began to fire upon an object. The big dirigibles also made a nose dive, and turned loose with its machine guns. Aroused by the shooting, we ran up on deck to see the action, but were ordered below to await the outcome, and if there was ever a time when we could have used an "island," it was then. However, nothing serious developed, and afterwards we were told that it was a broken life buoy which had been mistaken for a periscope.

We were moving slowly, so very slowly that one could hardly feel the throbbing of the tired engines that for twelve long days had worked untiringly. From the officers' deck we could see the green and red guide lights, welcoming our convoy of fifteen ships into the sheltered harbor of Liverpool, England.

OUR FLYING TRIP THROUGH ENGLAND

We crawled out of our bunks just as dawn was breaking upon a new world for us, and went on deck, where we saw, on a cliff, "Spratt's Dog Food" printed in large white letters on a black background. Unpoetic and unromantic indeed was this first sight of England.

Here was where the "weary waiting" began, as we waited for the first transport to unload its human cargo. Old man "bon chance" was with us for the time being, for we were the second to dock. We stood on the deck, complying with the English boys request "'ave you any coins" by tossing them all the pennies we had. The men on the port side were first ordered to fall in, and then those on the starboard side, for the purpose of finding out if any of us had fallen overboard during our journey. Finally, half walking and half sliding, down the gang-plank, we stood on what was to us real land, only it was but one of the many floating docks of England.

On the side of the main street, Y. M. C. A. signs were seen, and incidentally three live American girls, who were soon serving the "to-be-heroes" with hot coffee, buns and cookies. Although they were war buns and war cookies, without sugar, we enjoyed them to the utmost.

A large, stately policeman stood guarding the gates to the street and the docks. Some of us, wondering what was on the other side of the gate, climbed up and peered over on a large, beautifully designed square, which was crowded with women and children. But, alas, we were in a big hurry, and did not get to parade before them, or to receive the embraces and kisses which we were told awaited us. The R. T. O.'s (Railway Transportation Officers) crowded us into a "miniature train," like the ones seen in the parks in "God's Country," and we were soon on our way.

We rode across streets and through buildings just like a runaway engine might do. All the time pretty girls, dressed in overalls, waved at us from factory windows. After numerous stops, and more tunnels, we passed through the suburbs, traveling at a speed which did not seem possible from the looks of the engine.

We will never forget the beauty of the English villages, nestled snugly between green hills, or the soothing effect of the winding brooks which spread their cool waters over the well kept gardens.

Three or four times the train stopped to take on water (or perhaps at the command of the "top-cutter" in order to give the boys a chance to open another can of "bully beef"). About midnight we grew weary of sitting in our little compartments, and having cosmopolitan ideas, we proceeded to make ourselves "at home." Some were packed upon the baggage racks and managed to get a little sleep, – being used to the bunks on the boat, it was not difficult to adjust ourselves to this situation.

Sometime early in the morning we were awakened by a pounding at the door, and thinking it was a fire call, or submarine drill, one chap immediately began to feel around for his life-belt. He stuck his fist in somebody's eye, and was soon told by that unfortunate person just where he was. We fell in at the side of our "vest pocket edition of a train" and marched off, and just as the sun was about to show his face, we arrived at Camp Woodley, Romsey, England. After waiting for sometime to be assigned to tents, which resembled a miniature Billy Sunday tabernacle, we stretched our tired bodies on the soft pine boards and listened intently for the "roar of cannon." Hearing nothing but the songs of the birds, we decided that an armistice had been declared and proceeded to make up for all the "couchey" we had lost.

We had always been told that England was famous for her bounteous feeds, and after all the bully beef we had consumed for our "Uncle," we thought we were entitled to one of those dinners of roast suckling pig and plum pudding. But alas, we were badly disappointed, because in place of the former we had a piece of cheese, the size of which wouldn't be an inducement even to a starved rat, and in place of the latter, we ate a bit of salt pork.

During our brief stay at Camp Woodley, we visited many historical buildings and places. Among these was the old Abbey at Romsey, built in the eleventh century, the walls of which plainly showed the ball marks of Oliver Cromwell's siege against it. The pews in the Abbey were the same old benches of old, and the altar was the work of an ancient artist. Around the walls

were carved the epitaphs and names of those who were buried in its stately walls. Along with the tombs of the old forefathers who had fought with the armor and lance were the tombs of the late heroes, who fought with the methods of modern times. We signed our names in the visitors book, along with King George and Ex-Kaiser Wilhelm.

Our hikes in the morning were enjoyed by everyone, over well kept roads shaded from the hot sun by large over-hanging trees, the same old trees and the same old Sherwood forest that Robin Hood knew so well. But as Roger Knight says, "You can't *eat* scenery!"

After an enjoyable five days, spent in doing nothing much, we donned our packs again and started for the Channel, a distance of twelve miles. While walking thru the streets of Southampton, our throats parched and our feet sore, we were cheered time and again by the women and children, and many ran alongside of the marching column serving us cool water. We sighed as we had to pass Ale Shops just as if they weren't there. About noon we stopped at a Base Hospital to eat our picnic luncheon – (Bully beef).

Our first big thrill of "La Guerre" came when we saw some real live Boche prisoners working on the roads. We watched them as a little boy watches the elephant at the circus. One of the boys asked them, in German, how they liked England, and they said they liked it much better than fighting.

After our slight repast, we again took up our yoke, and did

one hundred and twenty per until we reached the docks at Southampton.

FROM SOUTHAMPTON TO LE HAVRE

On the dock at Southampton, the British Y. M. C. A. operated a canteen, selling hot coffee, cakes without sugar, and ginger bread made of ginger and water. The supply lasted about fifteen minutes, as we were one hungry bunch.

We boarded the "Archangel," a small passenger boat, about 9 P. M. on the sixth of June. In peace times the "Archangel" was used as a pleasure steamer, but was converted into a troop ship to ply between Southampton and Le Havre. It had three decks, which accommodated about 325 men each. We donned our life-belts, as usual, and tried to make ourselves comfortable, but like all troop ships, that was impossible. The men tried sleeping on deck, but it turned too cold, and they tried below deck. Some were sleeping in the once "state-rooms," but they were too small to accommodate all, so the rest slept in gang-ways, on chairs, benches and barrack bags. We were tired in body but our spirits were high, and we wanted to see the front, so we lay down where we happened to be, using our life-belts as pillows. While pulling out into the harbor, we saw ships in dry dock with large holes in their hulls, others with nothing above water but the masts, all caused by the submarines. And when the little speed demon raised anchor and slipped out of the harbor, we were all fast

asleep, never dreaming of what lay before us in France, and not caring a great deal either. We waited in the outside harbor until dark, or about 10 o'clock, and then started our trip across the channel. The boat made very good time, and the trip was uneventful.

At about 7 A. M. we were called to breakfast, which consisted of the customary bully-beef, coffee and hard-tack, and upon coming on deck, we discovered that we were resting safely at one of the big docks of Le Havre. The sun was shining bright and hot, and after unloading and having our pictures taken by a moving picture camera, we were lined up and marched toward the city proper of Le Havre. We were a tired, disappointed bunch of men, for instead of the beautiful country we had expected, we saw a factory infested city. The docks looked more like an arsenal, with cases of ammunition everywhere, and it looked as if the whole French and English armies were working there.

On our march to the rest camp, we passed large bodies of French and Indo-Chinese laborers unloading cars, and conveying merchandise to the warehouses. It was a common sight to see two or three of them pulling a large, two-wheeled cart full of ammunition. We also passed a number of German prisoners working on the roads, with the usual "Poilu" present, with his long rifle and bayonet. It was strange to see the French carrying their guns just opposite to the way the American troops do. We saw many large caliber guns and caissons, that were back from the front for repair, also blocks of salvaged motor trucks.

We marched about five miles to American Rest Camp No. 2, and were put into an old cow-shed to sleep. It was the first billet we had in France, and while it was not the most desirable place in the world to sleep, it looked mighty good to us, as we had not had much rest since leaving Romsey, England.

We were issued meal tickets, and had English tea, war bread and cheese for breakfast, "slum" and war bread for dinner, and English tea and cheese for supper. We had a good night's sleep, but the next morning we were hiked up on a mountain, where we were issued English gas-masks. We went through a gas chamber, to see that the masks were O. K., and to give us confidence in them. About noon trucks were brought up to take us back to camp, and upon arriving there, we were given orders to roll packs and be ready to move. Every one made a trip to the Y. M. C. A. where we could buy our first American cigarettes since coming from the States. We did not know where we were going, or when we could buy more.

OUR TRIP THROUGH FRANCE TO ELOYES

At three P. M. on June the eighth we rolled our packs and started on our first venture into the mysteries of France. It took us about forty-five minutes of steady hiking through hot and dusty streets to reach the depot where we were to entrain. We found a long string of second and third class coaches waiting for us. Our barrack bags and three days rations had been loaded on two box cars by a special detail sent ahead for that purpose.

We crowded into our cars and all was ready to go. A description of a French car might help one to get a better idea of our situation. The car is only about one-half as long as an American coach and it is divided into five separate compartments. Each compartment has a window and a door on each side. There is a step on the outside running the entire length of the car. It is just below the level of the floor and one can walk from one compartment to the other if he is not afraid of falling off the car. The compartment is about large enough for four persons to ride in any degree of comfort if they have cushions to sit on; but the Railway transport officer evidently thought that there would be more room if the cushions were removed. There were eight of us to each compartment.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.