

On October 23, 1942, six months and a week after the 38th began training at Fort Bragg, the unit went aboard H.M.S. *Malta* in the harbor at Bristol, at the head of Bristol Channel on England's western coast about a hundred miles from London.

When the 38th sailed from the harbor it was headed for the battle lines.

Captain H. Stokes Munroe in his reminiscences takes up the story of the 38th as the unit was leaving Bristol:

"On departing Norton Manor on October 23, 1942, the organization entrained for Bristol, where we embarked on H.M.S. *Malta* (New Zealand) at Port of Embarkation. Several of the officers had been ordered to Greenock, Scotland, a few days before to become ship surgeons on convoy ships. This group consisted of Lt. Colin A. Munroe, Lt. Olin Perryman, Capt. William Kavanagh, Capt. William Evans, Capt. Glen Perry, Lt. Claud Perry.

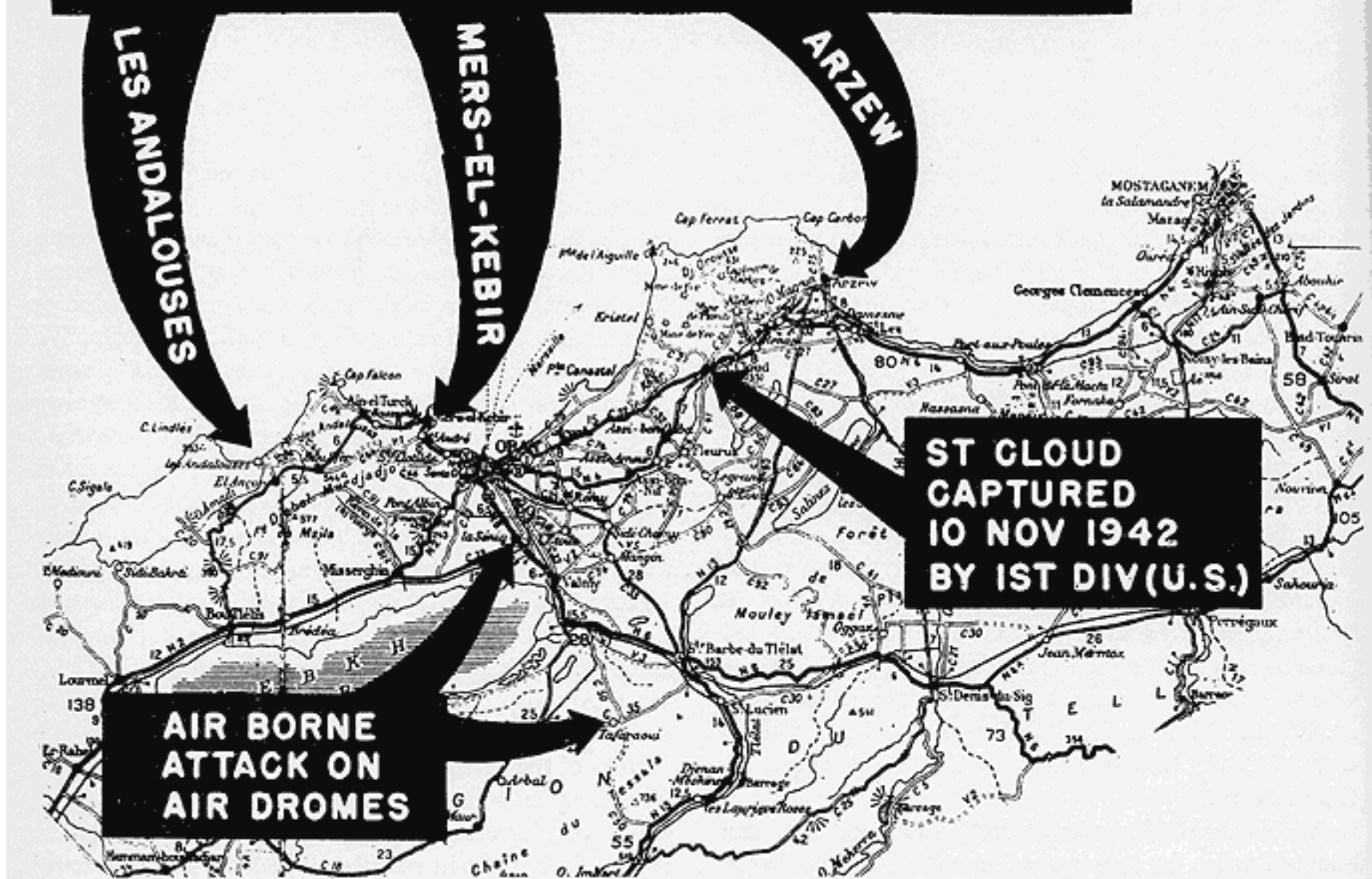
"We had no idea of our destination and you can imagine what bizarre speculation took place—India, Spain, Gold Coast of Africa, etc. We first sailed out of Bristol Channel, up the Irish Sea, to the Firth of Clyde. The Firth was a large bay that seemed completely enclosed by arms of Scottish land. We were anchored in this bay off Greenock. The view was of bleak cold country, the ocean winds wet and penetrating and the bay always choppy. Many small motor craft hurried to and from the many ships in the bay. One fast motor craft delivered Captain William P. Kavanagh to the welcoming arms of the unit. He was one of our officers who had gone to Scotland to become ship surgeon on one of the many American supply ships. He had gone, however, only on verbal orders. His intended ship had left the bay, leaving him stranded in the cold Scottish town without written orders and with a very thin wallet. After being told time and again that our ship was not in the harbor, he was joyous over finding us himself. He spent his last shilling on a 'bit of Scotch mist' to share toast with us over his joy in returning and our happiness in having him back."

Captain Munroe continues with interesting detail his narration of the unit's further travels on its way to its first action assignment:

"The large convoy formed at open sea where nothing of great consequence happened during the early portion of our sea travel. No one knew where we were or where we were going. Again speculation was rife. We joined another huge convoy in mid-ocean at a point that we later learned was near the Azores. Although we did not know it at the time, the convoy had come directly from the United States. For a while we were in the largest single ocean convoy in all history. The large convoy that formed near the Azores consisted of the Western Task Force, which sailed directly from the United States to strike at Casablanca, French Morocco. Our convoy consisted of the Center Task Force (II Corps) to which we were assigned, and was to strike at Oran, Algeria. The Eastern Task Force, largely British, was to storm the Port of Algiers. Unknown to us, the history of the Fifth Army was soon to be in the making. The many cruisers, battleships, liberty ships, and other types of ships zigzagged continuously. During the foggy, dark night in complete blackout, nothing could be seen and only the occasional fog horns were heard. There was no radio communication for fear that enemy submarines would locate us. It will always seem a mystery, even with radar, how so many ships zigged and zagged constantly during dark nights without mishap.

"Some of the convoy broke up just before we reached the Straits of Gibraltar, which our convoy portion entered. Here the Western Task Force convoy left us. For the first time since leaving the States we saw the bright lights of a city, those of the city of Tangiers, Spanish Morocco. The Rock of Gibraltar was recognizable, but there were only scattered lights in the village at its base during those late night and early morning hours. We were in the Mediterranean Sea, but we still did not know of our destination until the officers were called in conference by Colonel Bauchspies. It was then that we first learned that we were a part of II Corps, Center Task Force, and were to land at Arzew, North Africa. We were briefed regarding the unknown amount of French hostility that was to be met, and could hope that only token resistance would be encountered.

**ATTACK OF CENTER TASK FORCE (II  
U. S. CORPS) ON ORAN IN OPERATION  
"TORCH" 0100 HOURS 8 NOVEMBER 1942**



The 38th Evacuation Hospital unit landed at Arzew, North Africa, following the brief training period in England, as shown in this drawing revealing the targets at the Center Task Force's attack upon Oran on November 8, 1942.

"There were many unknown quantities," the captain's account of this period in the unit's history points out. "It was hoped that the increased activity about Gibraltar would lead the German and French forces to believe that an ambitious attempt toward reinforcement of Malta was in the process. In addition to the amount of resistance that might be expected from French troops, there was fear that Spain and its troops in Spanish Morocco might decide to declare war on Allied troops. The fear that German submarine activity and airplane activity might be alerted to await our arrival due to some break in secrecy plans was present. We were briefed in these uncertainties, and in such a state neared our destination."

As Captain Munroe's account nears the 38th's appointed landing date it becomes more exciting:

"During the night of November 7, 1942, we were given orders to remain dressed and to be prepared for immediate ship departure.

"Many of us remained on deck, and when the motion of the ship ceased, nothing was discernible in the blackness of the night—no other ship and no land. In the unseeing dark, Center Task Force had imperceptibly peeled off from the remaining convoy while the Eastern Task Force portion of the main convoy continued eastward. For many hours we knew that our ship had reduced speed.

"In the early morning hours, precisely at 0100 hours, the flash and noise of battleship cannon suddenly disturbed the quiet of the silent night and these were soon answered by the guns of the French shore installations. Shortly thereafter the landing task force went into action on the shore that was softened by the heavy artillery of our ship. During the heavy ship firing L.S.T.s were already enroute to strike the shore installations. Three groups of landing forces of Center Task Force (II U.S. Corps) took part in the Oran area in operation 'TORCH' at 0100 hours, 8 Nov., 1942. One group that

we followed landed at Mers-El-Kebir close by the Oran harbor, and the other group landed farther west at Les Andalouses, while the Airborne Rangers parachuted to the more inland French airdromes to the south of the area, La Senig and Tafaraoui, Algeria. These Rangers were our friends and protectors during our Arzew stay. Soon dawn came and everything seemed quiet at the Port of Arzew, Algeria. Everything seemed to happen so quickly and it was comforting to see the fellowship about us. A French passenger liner and its French passengers, captured while departing North Africa for its trip to a French port, lay anchored in the bay.

"During the mid portion of the day we disembarked. The enlisted personnel and some of the officers climbed down the netted ladder; most of the officers and nurses descended the unsteady appearing steps that were let down the ship's side into the landing ship craft of the choppy sea. It was a problem to judge the jump into the small craft that was constantly bobbing up and down, especially after seeing some in full pack and helmet meet the impacts of the upjumping craft in their midair leap.

"The good but foreign soil felt fine. It was North Africa. We felt the unrevealing stares of the strange inhabitants as we marched through the village of Arzew into the fenced, recently deserted French military garrison. In the distance the white stuccoed houses of North Africa appeared so neat and clean in the sun; it never ceased to be disappointments when they were neared and the obvious uncleanliness met the eye, and sometimes the nostrils. But the French garrison was to be our temporary home, even though we hoped that it would not be for long. It was the filthiest place imaginable. We immediately burned all fixtures, including the beds and other furniture. After the floors were cleansed as thoroughly as possible the concrete floor became our beds. Our bedding rolls were not available and we didn't know where they were. We spent cold, fireless nights at the garrison without blankets, bedding, and without any feeling of security."

The 38th, even more than it had during its stay in heavily besieged Britain, was beginning to realize that it was indeed in a war. Captain Munroe reveals further:

"The evenings were punctuated by the strange outside noise of the Arab sniper rifles, followed by the more familiar sound of the few scattered American Rangers' Tommy guns. We were constantly under sniper fire, and only felt security in the thickness of the walls of the buildings and in the knowledge that the Rangers were somewhere about the village.

"Our hospital equipment was unloaded and placed in a large field of the garrison, and several of us were checking the equipment when suddenly we were in-

errupted. Dirt kicked up all about us as the pings of Arab rifles continued. Paul Sanger beat me to a narrow space between two large crates, but their depth permitted our double-decked sense of more security. We were shortly peeping behind crated equipment at the church steeple, and were happy to see the Rangers soon put an end to the Arab rifles. At that time we were at an unarmed Army unit and we cherished our Ranger protectors.

"During our last night at the garrison we were awakened by a blood-curdling scream from somewhere amongst our midst. Several of us jumped off the floor and upon rounding the corner of our barracks toward the direction of the scream, we suddenly met a gun and were challenged. The Ranger, by the grace of God, had good control of his gun finger, so we all went out to investigate. Thinking of Arab and knives together, and since the scream sounded like a woman in terror, we felt that some Arab had climbed the fence and had knifed one of our nurses. The nurses were soon accounted for, however, and we were in ignorance of the cause of the disturbance until several days later, when we learned that one of the enlisted men of another unit had gone stark mad and had hidden during the night. He died several days later."

Major W. H. Pennington, writing to Mrs. Pennington in Lexington, Kentucky, from North Africa, also summarized the 38th's experiences upon landing in Africa:

"We slept in our clothes on the concrete floor. It was very cold at night and we had no covers except our trench coats. We had eaten canned meat and beans



On a short leave in Oran, North Africa, December 8, 1942, Lieutenants Elva Wells, left, and Charlotte Jean Webber get a respite from their coveralls by donning harem regalias.

for supper. The water supply was very limited. We arose at 5:30 a.m. after a miserable night, following which we were cold and stiff. Beans and meat for breakfast. Heated a cup of water over a bonfire and made coffee out of powdered stuff. No water to wash and shave.

"After our equipment had been set up, snipers in the hills and in various buildings in the town began shooting at us. We dropped flat on the ground and bullets would kick up dust around us.

"American soldiers who had been patrolling the town came advancing across the fields with tommy guns. More firing by both sides. One of the soldiers got down beside the truck I was lying under and began picking off snipers in the hills. I was afraid to stay beside him and also afraid to move. I thought every minute might be my last one. After a while, we got used to the shooting and would watch the soldiers go into some of the hillside homes and bring out natives at point of gun.

"The shooting stopped and we went back to work. Every fifteen or twenty minutes it would break out again and we would dive for cover. We began stacking mattresses, bales and towels around so we would have some protection.

"All through the day the sniping continued and we were kept busy dropping on our bellies and burying our heads. I looked like I'd been dragged in the dirt and no water to wash.

"Everybody very jittery and the firing continuing . . . there was a double ring of guards around the enclosure . . . I saw about 500 prisoners . . . they were quartered in a building just outside the wires . . .

"Two German planes over here just now. At 8:30 a.m. they strafed the beach. Our guns brought one down . . ."

Three days after arriving at the bivouac area at Arzew, Algeria, the 38th received new orders sending them on November 12, 1942, to a station a mile and a half southeast of St. Cloud, Algeria.



Sometimes, though not often or for a long time, members of the 38th were able to do a little sun-bathing. Left to right, Dick Query, Paul Sanger, Pat Imes, Bill Pennington.

Captain Munroe, happily, recorded in considerable detail the moving to St. Cloud and interesting and revealing details of the unit's setting up its field hospital. He wrote:

"With the further eastward move of the fighting line, we received orders to move to a new location. Feeling that the next place would be better, we climbed aboard Army trucks on November 12, 1942, to our new hospital site, a large oat field of approximately 1,000 yards square that was about one and a half miles southeast of St. Cloud, Algeria, and about ten miles northeast of Oran, Algeria. St. Cloud was captured by the First Division (U.S.) on November 10, 1942. On the previous day a detachment of officers and enlisted men surveyed the field and planned a set-up of our 200-tent hospital. We reached the area in the late afternoon of November 12 and several of the essential tents were up, but not completely or securely pegged down. Unsuspectingly, we bedded in our new quarters for a sleepless night, for our first education of what a tent can and cannot withstand soon presented itself. We had hardly fallen asleep when all hell broke loose in the face of the powerful North African wind. Practically all tents were down while we were frantically striving to save tents and personal belongings. Dawn found us still driving tent pegs, while Colonel Bauchspies was still raising Cain and profaning the entire unit because of the seeming disaster. Fortunately, the rain was light enough to spare our personal belongings. On the following day, November 13, eight patients were admitted during the course of our setting up and uncrating of unseen hospital equipment."

Dr. Munroe continues his narration with a recital of the hospital's treating of the unit's first battle casualties:

"During the first week of operations 300 patients were admitted, and admissions rapidly increased so that on the twentieth day the capacity of the hospital was exceeded. All types of patients, including American, French, and British personnel, as well as native Arab and French casualties, were admitted. The hospital facilities were enlarged by the addition of further tents until at midnight of December 31, 1942, patient census was 617."

He describes the hospital layout and its operation during these early days at St. Cloud:

"Each ward tent contained 20 beds (cots) and was under control of an officer, a nurse, and corpsmen. They were all arranged in a symmetrical manner down to each tent pole and each tent pin. The nurses did a grand job on readying the hospital ward tents and the operating room tents for the care of the patients. It requires an abundance of sterile supplies for the ward tents and innumerable and repeated sterilization of the

operating room equipment. Much ingenuity was in full sway in the sterile management of operating equipment in such a way that this material was always in readiness during the almost constant care and preparations of instruments for further and repeated use. Miss Rosamond Shipp and her assisting nurses deserve much praise for their truly remarkable ingenuity and capability in their enterprise, their first running of an operating room tent. The many nurses who supervised their ward tents, and who were aided by the corpsmen, did a memorable job."

Captain Munroe's account of the St. Cloud hospital further describes the physical layout:

"The roadways between the tents were all named: The Parade, Carolina Avenue, New York Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, Kentucky Avenue, Indiana Avenue, First Street, Second Street, etc. The name of each street or avenue was expertly painted on a white spick-and-span sign post by one of our recuperating patients who was a sign painter in civilian life. The U-shaped driveway into the receiving section, situated at the hospital front, was lined with whitewashed stones, which also lined the other hospital thoroughfares. The officers and nurses were quartered on one side of the hospital area, the officers on one side and the nurses on the other side of Carolina Avenue. Each of the tents had a number. These officer and nurse personnel tents, so-called wall tents, although not large, comfortably accommodated two persons. There were fifty of these tents along Carolina Avenue. Then just beyond were 160 shelter half tents (pup tents) which quartered the enlisted personnel. There was a line between the officers' area and the enlisted men's area, made of whitewashed stone and labeled the Mason-Dixon line by the enlisted men. Since nearly all of the officers were southerners and nearly all the enlisted personnel were northerners, it was quite appropriate, although in good fun. In addition to this, we had several large kitchens and mess

halls for officers and nurses, enlisted personnel, and patients. We also constructed latrines of the family size, minus the air-conditioned unit of the previous French garrison latrine.

"These things came by degrees and hard work. At last we were getting our meals served on enamel plates and at tables, which was quite a jump from C rations. Our food for days in North Africa came in small rationed tin cans of two types: one contained hard biscuits, hard blocks of sugar, some powdered coffee, and four small pieces of hard candy; the other contained a conglomeration of meat and vegetables. All were eaten cold and out of cans, except during our bizarre methods of heating hot water in one of the cans with matches or cigarette lighters for coffee. We were limited to about one pint of chemically treated water a day for drinking and washing purposes for some time, but soon graduated to water luxury. For a while all water for our new tent hospital was transported from a water point in Arzew, 22 kilometers distance. Canvas reservoirs were erected in the hospital area, and the Engineer Corps assisted in the transportation of the water and its chemical treatment. A detachment of one officer and 30 enlisted men from the 708th Sanitary Company and an Engineering detachment of one officer and twelve enlisted men aided materially in the construction of the utilities for the hospital. It was the rainy season and many adverse conditions due to the water were encountered. The mud was at times almost unsurmountable and everything, as well as everybody, was mud covered. However, the operation of the hospital was not interrupted and the physical welfare and the morale of the personnel continued to be excellent. We were proud of our hospital, we knew that it was a show place, and we felt good. We had graduated from our previous Army feeling of uselessness and now we were doing things."

Progress in developing the hospital had been rapid,



The enlisted personnel's tents were sometimes all above ground, sometimes dug in for protection against bombing.



Preparing for—or just finished with—a bath, Major George Snyder is caught at Paestum by camera between Captain William Evans and Captain Frank (Shorty) McGrath.

Captain Munroe's narrative of these early days in North Africa discloses:

"In the beginning we had only one flashlight, advanced to kerosene lamp, then began generating our own electricity with small gasoline engines. Finally the Engineering Corps was bringing electricity from a nearby power line. From the water paucity stage of the hospital the Engineer Corps was soon pumping us water from a not too distant uncontaminated well. Soon there were available showers for the more hardy to graduate from the helmet bath stage. After one experience in the cold water shower, that offered small protection from the cold North African wind, many went back to the helmet stage. We can still visualize Aubrey Hawes' daily trips to that torture tent shower. Few seemed to feel that much in need of a shower."

He speaks of other methods they devised to obtain baths:

"The water was hard and defied the lathering of soap. Many of us, by hook or crook, availed ourselves of Arab stoves, which burned either kerosene or gasoline through a needlepoint valve that was constantly on the blink. We always felt that it took two men and several small boys, with a blend of profanity and patience added, to run the small Arab stove, but it was better than nothing. It was our only method of getting hot water for helmet bathing, and it also partially took

some of the chill from the air. We either hovered over the small stove or immediately removed our shoes or boots and climbed into our million-dollar sleeping bags. As so many others had, we had always pictured Africa as hot desert desolation that immediately ran into hot jungles, but we soon learned that North Africa, in the Oran, Algeria, area, was an undeveloped strip of land in which trees, except for the occasional date palms and olive trees, refused to thrive in the face of such filth and such horribly cold wintry and rainy weather.

"There seemed to be no trees for lumber or burning, as practically all wood for burning consisted of roots from burnt out grape orchards. Those first cold dreary nights were a reality of desolation. Our operating room tents and ward tents contained pot-bellied stoves, but due to the coal shortage, the coal was rationed severely. When not at work we all jumped into our sleeping bags and lay in darkness for warmth's sake. When electric lights and reading material came into being for our living quarters, we felt that we were getting up in the world.

"The most interesting part of it all," Captain Munroe concludes his summary of the early experience of the 38th in North Africa, "the organization and running of our hospital inspired us constantly and always gave some surcease from our many discomforts."

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On November 16, 1942, four days after the 38th left Arzew and arrived at St. Cloud, Captain Pickens wrote the folk at home a long letter in which he sought to tell of his feelings in leaving England three weeks before and of the subsequent experiences of the unit as it began its tour of duty in northwest Africa.

"There was a definite feeling of poignancy upon leaving England. The time spent in the British Isles made a profound impression upon me. As most of my letters expressed, I liked the British people. They were exceedingly good to the Americans in their midst. I like the countryside. It is very pretty."

He had reflected upon his stay in England, he revealed, as he was leaving the beleaguered little island. "Riding along the other night in the back end of a truck, I had time to reflect about some of the things I

had seen in England," he wrote. And then he went on to relate details of their leaving and the thoughts that had come to him as they drove toward the embarkation point:

"We had been awakened in the middle of the night, literally, and were being trucked off to the nearest railway station. We were packed in like the proverbial sardines, but I got in last and had a seat on the rear where I could see. The moon was up and the many chimneys, of which England has plenty, made long shadows. England has been good to me and I was grateful. I began to think about some of the little things I could remember. The hedge-lined fields and the lanes and the country roads; we had practiced running for cover along these hedge-lines and had studied camouflage and reflections along them. The friendly public