

the curfew club, as they called it, wasn't anything but a jail, though it wasn't a regular jail but a great big building with marble floors and marble walls and not a chair to sit on.

"And it was cold, and I didn't have an overcoat. I just sat on the floor until daylight, and I almost froze to death; and to make it worse, I ran out of cigarettes. When a sergeant came on duty and took off his overcoat, I asked him to let me borrow it a while, but he wouldn't let me have it. I asked him for a cigarette and he refused me. So just before he went off duty I said to him, 'Sergeant, I'm in the X-ray department in a hospital. I hope I see the day that you come in there for treatment. If you do, I'll turn that machine loose on you and, brother, you won't be any good from then

on, I'll promise you that.' But I never saw that sergeant again."

When another soldier came on duty, however, he lent the freezing Sergeant Davis his overcoat.

"And in the morning they took me to MP headquarters and questioned me a little and then they called the hospital. George Snyder was detachment commander at that time, and he told them he would have a truck pick me up. When I got back I told him the story. 'I just wasn't coming out of Oran in the night,' I said. 'I was sure that if I tried it those Arabs would have stuck a knife in me.' And I still figure they would have. I suppose Captain Snyder did too; at any rate, he didn't do anything about it and I went back to my job."

## 7

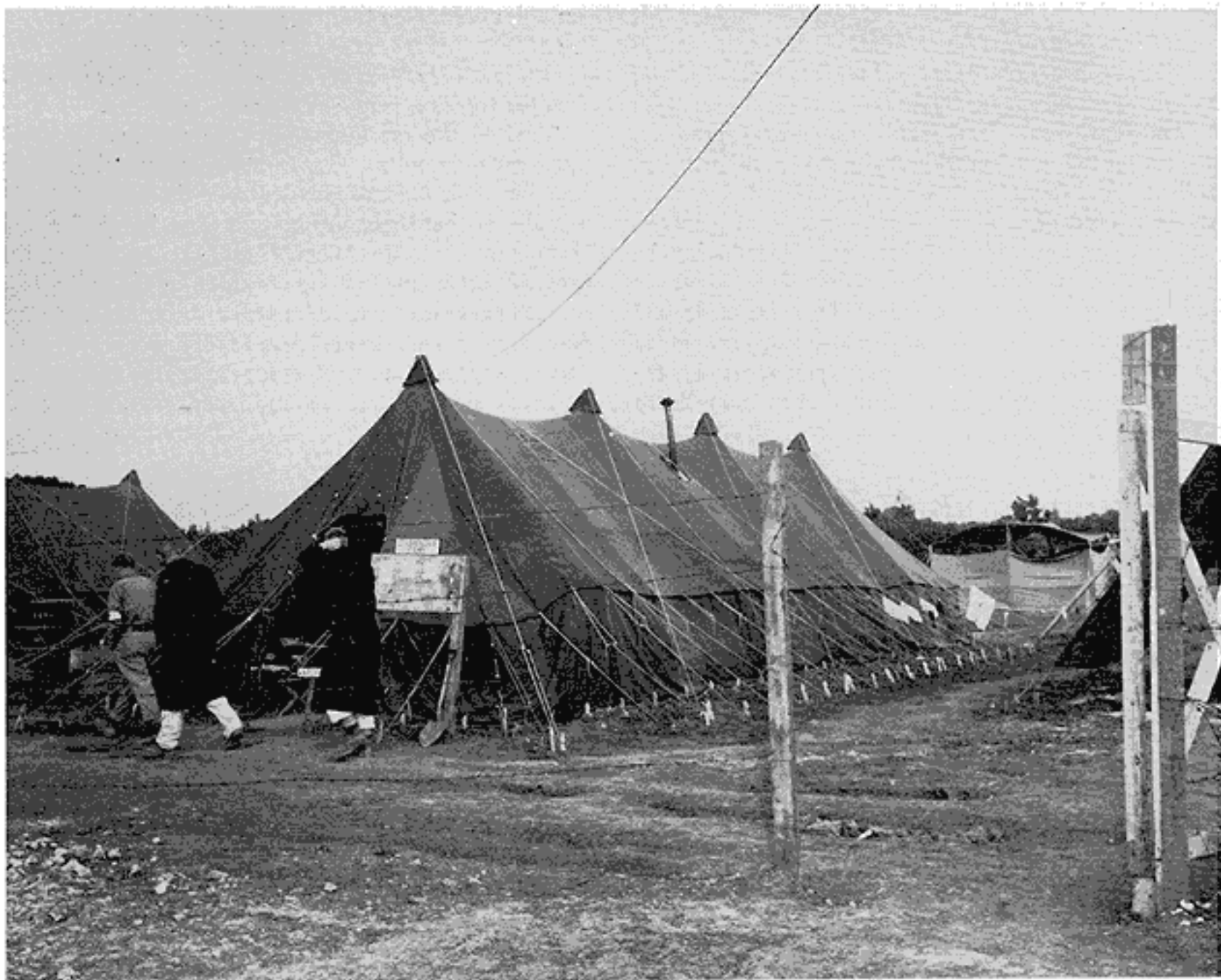
As the year 1943 began, the 38th was still encamped at St. Cloud, though letters home from members of the unit still carried the less identifying address of Northwest Africa. Many of these letters, along with snatches of diaries kept, usually with little regularity, by personnel of the 38th, provide interesting close looks at the routine daily life of an Army field hospital that none of the official records can reveal. They often disclose, too, how well or poorly the soldier on foreign duty is able to keep in communication with family and friends at home. Examples of these letters are five that Captain Pickens wrote to relatives and friends in the states. These letters, as were many others written by the men and women of the 38th—and, unfortunately, most of them have been lost or destroyed—reveal what the soldiers are doing, seeing, thinking, aside from their grim duties related directly to the war. They speak of the places and the people and of the soldiers' reactions to them, and since they are so intimately related to people, they are of the essence of historical documentation. They provide the flesh and clothing for the factual frame of events and thereby give life and warmth and color and movement to what without them would be little more than a recital of places and dates and cold statistics that for many persons makes the study of history somewhat forbidding.

Yet these letters often between the lines reveal also that the unit's business was going on at a pace that

would continue to gain the approval and admiration of the professional military men and the war correspondents as a highly efficient hospital providing a tremendous service to the nation's military effort. Perhaps the fact that the people of the 38th writing home were not permitted to say much of the unit's war activities caused them to write of the small, intimate, personal happenings and impressions. At any rate, the letters contribute happily to the recording of the 38th's lively and important story.

"I was over in the neighboring town the other day and went to see Ensign Henry Belk for a short visit," Captain Pickens disclosed in his letter of January 4, 1943. "He had called me a few days before and said he had tracked the 38th down and wanted to see a Charlotte face again. He had left the states only a few days before and had the latest news. He had seen Mr. Matthews in New York and had brought news to Stokes Munroe from his father-in-law. Henry was in good health and after a short stay on this side of the world appeared to like it. He had not been here long enough to get fed up on the sorry wine and see plenty of the hunger and filth that is scattered about the countryside. . . .

"George (Snyder) came in the other day with some Coca-Cola syrup from the plant. We have been busy trying to find some carbonated water but so far unsuccessfully. No 'Vichy' water available in the town.



Casanova Park was the unflattering but highly descriptive name given by Colonel Bauchspies to this area at St. Cloud in which patients with venereal disease were treated—behind barbed wire.

Charlie Gay is trying to figure out some way of manufacturing some in his laboratory. So far we have been forced to drink with just plain water, highly decorated. It still tastes good and I remember old man Candler used to take his that way. We are reverting to type. We did not think about catching some rainwater until it stopped. We have had two days of clear weather and it was a relief after a month of mud.

"Paul (Sanger) has just come into my tent, which is a supply tent, and is now stealing some tangerines. We were thrilled about his promotion, and also about George Woods'. Bill Leonard was promoted to major, since he had the longest record in the Army. That is one thing I won't have to worry about, since it is impossible for any of the MACs to move any further."

Captain Pickens began his next letter—of January 12, 1943—with the explanation that he had little he could write about, because of the watchful eyes of the censor

and also because "there has developed a monotonous calm over our place and no one seems to be inspired to do anything." He hinted at an impending moving of the hospital: "We are gradually letting our patients run out in preparation for closing and with nothing building up here there is no inspiration to do anything. Then there is so little to write about when you are afraid that the information might be of value to the enemy or strike the censor wrong. I am not interested in building up a good story to have some bright faced young chap cut it to pieces."

But, said he, he had two principal reasons for writing this particular letter. "Col. White had taken some pictures the other day and I got hold of the two negatives and had a set made with enlargements. I am preparing to send them on to you as soon as I get suitable mailing gear. They are mostly of Col. White, but there are enough of the others to give you some idea about our

way of life in the mud. You will also get to see Miss Russell, the dietitian, who works for me and does a lot of my work. She is from Presbyterian Hospital and if you get by there some time, you might show her picture to any of the group left there who are interested. She has done a good job for me and for the Army. . . . There is one picture of Paul cleaning out his tent after a particularly heavy rain. . . . The others are just ordinary scenes and folks around the camp with no military secrets being shown. . . ."

He went on to say what his second reason was for writing: "Today a lot of mail came in and with it some packages for me. The one with the blue Kodak and the films came in and I will try to give you back some real scenes when we get a dry day. . . . Then another package came with some additional outing pajamas and set of boot shoes from Mellon's. The shoes are the thing. George got some a few days ago and has bragged about them so much that I am doubly happy about mine. They fit. They are worn under the galoshes and make working and walking so much easier. It gets tiresome dragging the old G.I. shoes around under heavy galoshes with about ten pounds of mud on the outside."

Another package recently received, said he, was "light paper and some air mail envelopes which I was beginning to need. We get from two to four stamps a week and sometimes when I make copies of my letters and send them all over the country it takes more stamps and envelopes than it appears on the surface. Many thanks. . . . I will try to repay with good letters and some good pictures. Until we do some moving around I will not be able to get much description in what I say. . . ."

He thanked relatives and friends for other presents—a razor, an electric heater, and other gifts especially useful. "It so happens that my so-called office is a common meeting place for the whole camp. In the morning we have an extra pot of coffee on the stove here and most of the boys will stop by some time during the morning for an extra cup. Even Paul has developed into a coffee drinker and sits for an hour sometimes while it cools for him. Stokes usually gets by as well as Jack Montgomery, Preston, Bill Pennington and Bubber Fleming. It's a steady stream for most of the morning and interrupts the working in a most pleasant way, but it also keeps me from having any privacy. . . ."

". . . George and I have plenty of food, nic-nacs, candy, and we are overrun with cigarettes and pipe tobacco. Of course, it has all bunched up on us, including packages direct from home and those that went to England and then came down here. It appears that most of our things are coming thru in spite of the enemy claims about sinking our ships. But there I get off on the wrong subject. We are not supposed to talk

about any of the maneuvers of the war or to have any ideas on how to run it. Of course, we hear the radio from England every morning and at night a short wave broadcast from Boston and Pittsburgh. I guess we keep up fairly well. The *Charlotte Observers* have been pouring in. I got about ten yesterday and more today, so now I am reading about what we did when we came in, as well as many of the letters written by our folks that were published. I have even read my letter to you which the *Observer* printed. Many of the people have commented on it to me here. They seem to think that it was conservative enough and a fairly good picture of our experience without giving away any military information. . . ."

Heavy rains and high winds of early January added to the discomforts and problems of the 38th in its encampment at St. Cloud. In a long letter written January 15 Captain Pickens pictures the period just before he sat down to record life in the 38th:

"The rain has left for a few days and the wind has been taking its place. When I say wind, I mean real wind, not a gentle breeze. Did you ever try to get four pieces of thin paper and three pieces of carbon paper together in a flimsy tent in a high wind? Well, it's no easy job and if a part of this letter seems to run sidewise of the copy, blame it on the African wind.

"As I said, the rain has let up for a few days but for a while it looked as if we had arrived in the wrong service; we thought we should have been in the Navy. We literally swam and waded around the camp. Now if this wind keeps up we will wade around in dust a mile deep. However, you get used to all things in the Army and dust and mud make little difference."

Although he pointed out the difficulty of trying to tell much about the 38th's position because of the rules of censorship, he did manage to give an interesting and revealing report of the hospital's routine from the viewpoint of the mess officer.

"I have a set place to be most of the day and some parts of the night," he began this section of the letter. "It is a tent, called a ward tent, about 15 x 40 in size. It is set up right next to the main kitchen tent and two-thirds of it is taken up with the storage of food-stuffs. There are cans and boxes packed in as high as the tent will stand. In the rear is a large wooden ice refrigerator, which contains the various types of fruit juices. In the front is my so-called office. I have a small stove which sits directly in the dirt with the pipe running out the top of the tent. It will put out plenty of heat if you can find the fuel. We have had some coal in limited quantities, and we sometimes resort to burning our crating when it gets very cold and damp. Of course, there are no forests anywhere in this part of Africa. But, back to the office, I have a large table built



from our crates, with a stool for a chair. Next to me sits my dietitian, one of the older nurses in our organization. She does most of the work, since I have little knowledge of the difference between a soft, liquid, high-caloric, and bland diets. That is, she looks after the patients' food, but that still leaves me fifty officers, fifty nurses and over 300 men to feed. They keep me busy. We have a telephone sitting on the tent pole which connects with the rest of the hospital and the outside world. I could call Charlotte or Washington or Atlanta from my desk if I had the proper pull and the proper luck.

"The day starts officially at 8 AM, or, as the Army puts it, 0800 hours. It ends officially at 5:30 PM or 1730 hours. I find that I spend about three nights a week here at my so-called desk. At 0900 hours I have a meeting each day with my sergeants, of which I have three. We go over the menus for the next day, plan the meals and assign the cooks and cook's helpers for each kitchen. Then I see my corporal, who has the responsibility for getting the food in bulk into the camp. We get out requisitions for the number of people we expect to feed two days hence. All of this takes probably an hour and then the working boys get out and the doctors descend on our little office. I keep a pot of coffee on the stove (as he related in his previous letter) and a few cups, sugar and canned cream handy. They drop by for a cup whenever they have time in the morning. At the same time they talk diets of patients, location of wards, and other things that might come up. We combine business with pleasure. It takes the place of Coca-Cola time at home, and frankly, during the height of the rainy season, I welcomed it. Something hot when everything around was cold and wet was very comforting. I will never develop into the coffee drinker that mother is, since it tastes differently each time. By the way, I see in the papers that you are rationed on coffee now. . . .

"When the others have cleared out, then come the special diet slips that have to be filled out. There are some patients with jaundice who have to eat six and eight times a day and all of them different types of food with lots of candy and sweets thrown in for good measure."

And so, the mess officer's recital reveals, his morning's routine is completed. But this general schedule, he adds, "develops during the afternoon and with this the bulk food comes in by truck and has to be checked and stored. During the day we check food out to the various kitchens also. At one time we operated four separate kitchens. Now we have only three. With each kitchen there is a dishwashing problem and a department to take care of it. This causes more trouble than all of the rest of the work put together, since we have

the problem of water, getting it hot, and not the least of the problems is that of keeping men at work washing dishes. I can't fuss much at them myself when they complain, since I hate the job as much as they do.

"During the afternoon I make an inspection of all mess properties and personnel. That is a real job, keeping everything running smoothly. And when the day is thru and there has been only a minimum amount of complaint, I have the pleasant prospect of doing the same thing all over the next day. Truly, the mess officer's job is never done. I have stayed awake at night and thought of the times I have complained with Mary about how the coffee tastes or about the types of food she has had or say to her, 'if it were on a menu, I wouldn't order it.' Each time I think of my complaints to her, I turn over and try to kick myself in the pants. I pray that I may be forgiven for all that has passed and promise that it will never happen again. I also pray that I may never have to go near a kitchen again or think of a menu or listen to a complaint. Forgive the raving of a kitchen knave who smells of kitchen grease!"

Recent letters from the states, Captain Pickens observed, had revealed that to the coffee rationing had been added gasoline rationing. "I also learn that your gas rationing is getting to brass tacks. When I piece together the fragments from everyone and get the true picture, I have to laugh about your hardships," he added. "I laugh more heartily when I start from my tent to go to the latrine at night and wander around with a flashlight and think about the comforts of home in the same situation."

He returned to expressing how delightful to a member of the 38th would be the experience of a hot bath in the shower or tub at home:

"We had showers for a while with good, honest cold water, but the water gave out in spite of the rains, so now I resort to my old method of Saturday night bathing in my tent. When I think about hot and cold running water in a nice tile bathroom, well heated, I laugh again about your hardships in doing without gasoline and a little less coffee. When I stumble thru the mud or try to get the dust out of my hair I think about the paved streets and electric lights you have to put up with. When the planes pass overhead I think of the casual attention you pay to the same passing there. . . . When I think about being able to change clothes each day and the convenient laundries and dry cleaning service and the choice of colors to wear even down to the tie, I still laugh. When I think about the news being delivered to your door each morning and the radios without any interference and to your knowledge of what goes on all over the world, I smile, at least. Don't misunderstand me, I am not complaining; I am just laughing, and that is the way you must learn to

do. Oh, we do our share of griping and fussing. I don't take all these things lying down. I complain loud and hard but I come up laughing. We are getting the gasoline here and we have plenty of coffee, but I'll exchange all of my day's supply for one good bath and a change of clothes."

Captain Pickens closed this long mid-January, 1943, letter with a further description of the natives and the geography of the St. Cloud area, which he was still referring to simply as Northwest Africa.

"I have wanted to write something of the impressions in the city I get to visit occasionally. I think Ernie Pyle has stolen my thunder on this, since I see where his articles are appearing in the *Charlotte Observer*, and then he gets better pay for his writings. I think I told you he was here at our hospital for several visits. He had a good story on it that never has appeared as far as I know. . . . But back to the city. The French women are better dressed and better groomed than the English. They go in for more makeup and wild-colored hair. They can really look like chorus girls when they get all their to-do on. This is true of the classes from the low to the high. The men are no more conservative. They go in for loud colors both in dress and hair dye. Most of them wear the familiar tam-o'-shanter instead of a regular hat."

His experiences in trying to communicate with the folk in the St. Cloud area and to understand better the people and their homeland were doubtless shared by

the others, officers, nurses, and enlisted personnel of the Charlotte unit. Some of his experiences and impressions he reveals:

"They rattle their French at you entirely too fast for comfort. I arm myself with a few phrases that should get me along and then I run into trouble. I do better when I stick to American, as they say. However, I still try, and think it is best to practice, altho they must laugh at me as much as I would at a Greek cafe operator who had been in America for ten days.

"The shops are almost empty. They have had little merchandise since the war started. The stores have unusual designs on their windows with the tape that protects them from air raids. The English never thought about that, but these folks make the place look attractive. They go in for plenty of photographs, since there are usually two or three places in each block where you can get your picture made. In these same shops they will fit your glasses. The opticians and the photographers are the same people. There are the same sidewalk cafes as you see in France, but there is little food. I have eaten one meal in town. I had a sort of salad to start with, consisting of a small tomato and some green stuff that resembled lettuce, and not much of either. Then came the main course, fish that was like Mobile Bay catfish, and a pot of spaghetti. No bread or butter and nothing to drink if you didn't like their very poor wine, vin rose or vin rouge; after that a small tangerine. That was all. Now you know why I seldom eat any-



Dress for chow line in North Africa is informal—and varied.



It ended bloodlessly. T. D. Tyson and Colin Munroe get more sunshine than bruises.



Nurses Barbara Wingo and Elva Wells relaxing at Santa Lucia, Africa.

where but in my own backyard out of good American tin cans.

"The hotels have been taken over by the Americans. They must have opened them when they came, since they look as if they had not been cleaned up since the war started. The streetcars run two together like they do in Boston, with the last car open. The people pack in worse than a New York subway, with little Arabs hanging on everywhere. There is little indication of anyone working except the people mending the streets and those helping unload American vessels in the harbor.

"There are a good many French soldiers in sight now and they appear to be a determined lot. They make a better military appearance than we do, but I guess we will take care of our share of the load. Every little Arab has a shoeshine box. I forget them when I said there were few people working. They will shine your shoes at every corner for two francs or one cigarette or one stick of gum. They really get in the way. . . . The Arabs have an open air market where they trade horses and donkeys. There are few good horses in sight. It sounds like an American tobacco auction. . . ."

Enclosed in his next letter, written January 24, 1943, were pictures of members of the 38th made by Captain Pickens with the blue Kodak that he had received from home. This letter serves further to reveal the African people of that area and the feelings of the Americans toward them.

"The reason or inspiration for this letter is the enclosed group of pictures," he began. "You will see that Paul, George Wood, Bob Miller, Tom Tyson and I were off together. Bob Miller had had a letter from Mrs. Davison, wife of the Dean of the Medical School at Duke, stating that she had a friend over there, a classmate from Bryn Mawr, and she wanted Bob to try and see her."

So the group set out in search.

"We went to a neighboring town to the east and some thirty to fifty kilometers and tracked the good lady down. On the way over we had lunch on the beach, which you can see from the pictures. These are the first pictures from the blue Kodak and are much better in the negatives but the developing over here now is very poor—shortage of developing paper. However, you can see us and see that we are being fed well and that we are happy and healthy.

"The trip was taken last Sunday, January 17th. We had a time finding the lady but she finally turned up as the wife of a French colonel in charge of the garrison in that particular town. . . . The visit with her was most instructive, since she gave us the viewpoint of the French about our coming here in November. Her husband was up at the front with the French troops which

are helping our men and the English. We had a typical Sunday afternoon tea; she said she was able to get a supply of tea but very little else. We had some cheese and white bread left from our picnic lunch and Miller had some fruit cake left over, so we contributed our share to the tea party. Her oldest daughter, age 17 or 19, was there and had a good time talking English with us. The mother said she went back to Cincinnati about once in every ten years. She married after the last war in Germany while her husband was in the army of occupation and has been in Syria and France and North Africa ever since. She was in the class of 1916 at college. . . . They went for the cheese, just plain old Kraft's rat cheese, and the white bread, which they had not seen for three years. Of course, the fruit cake was the piece de resistance. If we get another chance to go back I will take her a little sugar, bread, and some corn beef and spam. We have plenty of the latter and can spare it."

One of the pictures they had made showed Dr. Sanger with a herd of goats and sheep. "We tried to catch a small lamb and have him hold it for the picture, but were unable to get it done," Captain Pickens wrote. "The Arabs minding the flock did not understand French and I think thought we either wanted to buy the lamb or shoot it and put up a great deal of interference with our plan for proving to Mary Ann that she was not the only one that could have a lamb. You would have laughed to see us trying to corner enough of the flock to get the picture. Paul was running with the animals, Tyson was trying to get behind them and shoo them toward me and I was trying to stay in front of them in order to snap at the proper time. Miller stayed in the jeep and George Wood was driving along behind us enjoying the show.

"The other pictures are of George Snyder near our tent, and to finish the roll and get it developed in a hurry I caught one of our nurses shining her shoes back of her tent. I hope you will be able to add these to the collection of pictures in the album. I have given all of the boys copies so they can send them to their wives if they wish. As a matter of fact, they very likely have already sent copies along, since they seem to have more time than I do for such things."

The final paragraph in the letter was revealing:

"You have indicated an interest in our new CO and have said that no one had written about him. There is little that can be said except that he is better in many respects than the old one and not so good in others. His personal conduct is better and he gets the work done, although we don't always agree with his methods. He is very profane, which always indicates a lack of vocabulary and consequently poor education or poor thought. He is good natured almost to a fault; he wants



to be liked and respected and admired and doesn't know exactly how to get it across. He is moody, either up in the clouds or down in the dumps. You can never tell just which way he will get out of bed, but all in all I think we gained in the trade. I wonder if all CO are selfish, conceited, egotistical, and consider their troops as being a bunch of dumbbells."

The preoccupation through the years of American service men and women on duty in foreign lands, particularly those in the field, with the idea of surviving long enough to obtain somewhere a hot bath with soap is revealed in countless letters home. During World War I American fighting men holed up in the trenches in France dreamed of escaping some day into the steaming warmth of a hot shower bath and after that into the clean sheets of a real bed.

In World War II in Africa, members of Charlotte's 38th Evacuation Hospital unit, sloshing through the mud and perspiring in the dust of Algiers as they labored to keep the hospital operating at peak efficiency, were likewise soon obsessed with one consuming desire. Everybody was hoping and dreaming and figuring and scheming how to get a hot bath. In their bunks they dreamed of oceans of hot water and clouds of foaming soap suds.

And one day—it was January 30, 1943—a group of the officers and nurses decided to fashion their fantasies into realities. They decided to drive southward, though it meant a trip of many miles, to get baths.

Captain Pickens describes in considerable detail this unusual journey. The letter was written the next day:

"Never did I think I would ride 140 miles for a hot bath, but that is exactly what I did yesterday. 65 miles down to the spot and 75 miles back on a small truck with ten other people is the story's beginning."

Then he tells the story:

"Our commanding officer had made arrangements for us to make the trip. One half of our officers and one half of the nursing staff were to go. One half of the reason for the trip was to get a hot bath and the other half was to see the scenery. The bath outweighed the scenes in my estimation, but that is beside the point now. I will try to give you a picture of the trip.

"Lt. Col. White, Major Pitts, Capt. Medearis, Capt. Snyder, Lt. Schirmer and four of the nurses were on the truck with me. It is what the Army calls a weapons carrier and normally would accommodate about eight people comfortably. We were after a hot bath, so we put up with the inconvenience of being packed in. There were two other large trucks in the movement filled equally as well. I had made arrangements for us to stop along the way and have some sandwiches and some fruit juice for lunch.

"The spa to which we were headed is almost due

south of our station. It was one of the Trans-Atlantic hotels built to take care of the tourists for a day or two off the boats making Mediterranean cruises. The water comes from the earth at an even temperature of 150 degrees, summer and winter. The place has been used as a watering spot since the days of the Romans. . . .

"The roads down and back are surprisingly good. They are well paved and cover some rough and hazardous territory. We were on our way to the desert and passed over the northern part of the Atlas mountains. Of course, the desert is far to the south, but the vegetation gets more sparse as you go south. The roads are well marked. On the way we passed thru two very fertile valleys. There were many orange groves and olive groves, the first I had seen. There were few, if any, grapefruit trees and few lemons, but plenty of tangerines in sight. Also seen for the first time in Africa were two large cotton fields with a little cotton still left on the stalks. I did not get a chance to see if it was long or short staple, but I would guess that it was long. There is plenty of grain growing and there was some grazing land with sheep and goats in sight. Where there was a little water there were truck farms with tomatoes, artichokes, cauliflower, turnips, carrots, and cabbage. These items were being harvested. As a matter of fact, we have recently had an issue of fresh cauliflower and cabbage for our mess.

"We saw large numbers of quail that looked more like English grouse. They were large and healthy looking, but of course we could not take a shot at them. The flowers were beautiful—roses that looked like sunflowers in size, bougainvillea, hibiscus that reminds me of Florida. The children in the towns and along the roads, whether Arabic or French, have a chant which is either 'shooing gum' or 'OK Americano.' Some of them venture a 'shocolot' or 'cigarette' occasionally. Capt. Snyder had a good time throwing chewing gum and candy to them as we passed. He said that possibly someone might do the same for his children sometime. We had to keep riding when this was done; otherwise we would have had a mob around us in ten seconds. I think the people are beginning to like us a little better since they have gotten used to the American ways.

"But back to the trip," his letter continues. "On almost every mountain top there is a small mosque with its white dome shining in the sun. It is said that the Moslems make a trip to these places of worship once a year. They are so inaccessible that this is well understood. I would hate to make the trip up one of those barren peaks even once in a lifetime to say my prayers in public.

"There were plenty of Arabs in view, along with the inevitable donkey, the man usually riding and the woman walking and carrying the burdens. We stopped

for lunch in a sort of canyon overlooking a small stream far below. Before we had been there ten minutes there were at least six Arabs peering at us from around the rocks, children mostly. They grew bolder as time went on and came out into full view. One little girl had so little with which to clothe herself that our chief nurse finally broke down and gave her scarf to the waif to help her keep warm and decent. Of course, they fell upon the food we did not eat and made for the empty tin cans. When we prepared to leave they disappeared as quickly as they came and there was no indication of where they had gone. They were beautifully camouflaged, since they look like the dirt that surrounds them and usually have a great deal of it on them.

"But back to the bath, since we had begun to look somewhat like them. We arrived at the spa, which had been taken over by one of our general hospitals. They had some 300 patients. They were cordial to us, since they, too, had seen some life in the mud and dust before being set up here. There were many baths available, almost one for each of our entire party. We had a choice of shower, tub, or one of those walkdown petit swimming pools. I took the latter, then finished with a cold shower. The water was just right for a good lather. It was a little hard but not bad enough to interfere. I actually took two while I was there, since during one washing I thought about the last time I had had a real bath. Discounting the saltwater baths on the boat coming down, it was back in October in England when I last stepped under a hot shower. I was afraid that another delay might be my part again and I tried to prepare for it. I washed my head as well and discovered that I was more gray-haired than I thought. But it was worth it. There was singing all along the line while the water poured on, the first I had heard from any of our group since our days in England. The women had armed themselves with lemons, vinegar and all sorts of bath salts and had equally as good a time.

"We were rosy when we came out of the hotel. Some of us could have passed for broiled lobsters, we soaked so long. On the outside we looked around the place for a while, ate some oranges, took some pictures, and then started back. It was a grand trip, this 140 miles for a bath."

While the unit was still at St. Cloud the work of the hospital began to gain the attention of not only the war correspondents and visiting generals but also of Army officialdom in Washington.

In his letter of January 31, 1942, Captain Pickens referred to the letter received some days before by Major Pennington from Brigadier General Fred W. Rankin, a member of the Surgeon General's staff. General Rankin was a first cousin of Charlotte's well known Dr. W. S. Rankin, pioneer leader in North Carolina

public health service, and before entering the Army had achieved a national reputation as an authority in the treatment of cancer. His home was in Lexington, Kentucky, but he was a native North Carolinian.

"I think I can quote from a letter received by Major Pennington written by Brigadier General Rankin about our unit," the Charlotte officer wrote. "General Rankin is on the staff of the Surgeon General. He is writing about what the Surgeon General said about us after a trip to Africa. Here is a part of the letter: 'I was very much pleased and delighted to receive a message from the Surgeon General's own hand from you, Paul Sanger, George Wood, Pat Imes and the other officers of the 38th Evacuation Hospital. I was even more pleased at the praise the General showered upon your outfit for the manner in which you are carrying on in that theatre of war. He not only told me how beautifully your hospital is being run and what splendid work is being done, but he told the assembled staff here in the Surgeon General's office. In fact, the only other hospital he mentioned by name was Staige Blackford's Evacuation Hospital from the University of Virginia. He obviously was impressed with the manner in which you people are doing business, and I was delighted, of course, since I feel I am closely associated with you. His description of your location and your difficulties and your spirit flattered you very much and would have pleased you, I am sure, had you heard him.'"

In the last weeks of the 38th's stay at St. Cloud they initiated the practice of having movies twice a week. Since no tent was large enough to accommodate the personnel of the unit, the movies were shown outdoors and even though at that time of the year it was rather cold, the shows were well attended. Although Captain Pickens considered himself no movie fan, he attended regularly the screen showings at St. Cloud. "It helps get your mind off the worries of the day or thinking too much of getting home," he reasoned. "Of course, the latter is uppermost in all of our minds all of the time."

The Post Exchange at St. Cloud was opened once a week for the issuance free of such items as soap, razor blades, candy, writing paper and envelopes. Other things that were available but only for purchase included powder, cigarettes, cigars, and after-shaving lotions. The Quartermaster had opened a place, too, where additional uniform equipment might be purchased.

The 38th's personnel was beginning, too, to understand better and appreciate the Arabs around the hospital encampment, particularly the children who frequently came on various pretexts to visit the encampment. One youngster was a ten-year-old boy named Abduk, who came regularly to collect and deliver laundry. Captain Pickens was one of the youth's regular



customers. In a letter to the homefolk he spoke appreciatively of Abduk:

"I think I told you some time ago I was having most of my laundry done by a neighboring Arabic family. They have a young son named Abduk, aged 10, who comes to collect and deliver. He has made friends with all of the unit and has developed a real business. He has learned English in the weeks we have been here and has an amazing conception of what it is all about. He has the brightest face you can imagine and breaks into a quick smile which shows his white teeth. He now knows the value of the dollar with respect to the franc and keeps up with his accounts in good order. He has been at this so long now he can tell whose clothes belong to whom. He is rank conscious and looks after the higher ranks first, altho he says the lower ranks are nicer to him. He is not particularly interested in the money and is now tired of eating candy and chewing

gum. He much prefers to come and visit and talk and get a lesson in 'Americano,' as he calls our language. He wants to know the why of everything, why wear leggings, why your insignia is at a certain spot, why so much saluting (here I wonder, too, since according to the regulations we are not supposed to salute in a war theatre, but 'orders is orders'), why we wash so much, why so much laundry, why we have so much soap, and so on. I get a great kick out of spending some time with him and telling him. He will never forget his experience with the American troops. His father works for the planter on whose property we are encamped. He makes 37 francs per day, the father does; that's about 50 cents. There are at least six in the family. They seem to do all right. Abduk is being well fed now and some of the nurses are working on some clothes for him. He has for the time being developed into the mascot of the 38th.

## 8

Early on a morning in mid-November of 1942 Louie Dennison, the Swiss architect, and his Colorado-born wife heard the disturbing sounds of gunfire from the direction of the nearby Algerian town of St. Cloud.

"I wonder what the commotion over there is about," he said to his wife. "I think I'll ride over and see."

"Well, be careful," she cautioned. "And remember your liver."

He got on his horse and rode into St. Cloud. After some hours he was home again.

"What was the commotion about?" Mrs. Dennison asked him.

"The Americans are coming," he told her.

"Now, Louie, I told you to remember your liver. Drinking this early in the morning doesn't help it. You should have stayed away from those cafes."

"But the Americans are coming," he insisted. "In fact, they're already here. That's what the shooting was about."

"Oh, Louie, your liver. You should think of your liver."

But a few minutes later, when she saw along the road a group of refugees streaming out of St. Cloud, she believed her husband. And she was overjoyed to realize

that at last her fellow Americans—though now she was a naturalized Swiss citizen—had arrived to challenge the Nazis.

This was the story Mrs. Dennison herself told to four of the officers of the 38th Evacuation Hospital unit some two months later as the four were guests at dinner in the Dennison home. The four American officers were enjoying an interlude in the hospital routine. Captain Pickens, who had referred in an earlier letter home to a visit he and Colonel Bauchspies had made to the Dennisons, relates the story in a long letter dated "Northwest Africa, Feb. 5-6, 1943."

"Lt. Col. Paul Sanger, Lt. Col. George Wood, Major Vaiden Kendrick and I had been invited to come up on the mountain to the Dennison home for dinner. It was a change and we had heard from Col. Bauchspies what sumptuous meals they could prepare and serve, so we looked forward to the visit. We were not disappointed. The house is comfortable, with tile floors and pleasant furniture on the modern manner," he continued his narration of the visit away from the unit's encampment. "The servants are all Arabic. Rosalie, a middle-aged Arab, is a marvelous cook, with just the right touch for proper seasoning. We had in times past given Mrs.