pital had attained a total of 819 patients. Operations performed that day totaled twenty, including five listed as "excisions for foreign bodies." On April 4 the patients, the Daily Bulletin reported, numbered 856 and there were 21 operations; on April 12 a total of 868 was reported and the next day the number was 880. The Bulletin for April 30 read, strangely, no patients, one admission, 448 dispositions, no vacant beds, no wards in operations. "The hospital was officially closed 1830 hours 29 April 1943," the Bulletin explained.

Again, the 38th was preparing to change location that would bring it nearer to the fighting.

9

But before the 38th moved from Telergma, Captain Pickens in letters written late in March and during April, told in considerable detail of the stay there—the routine of battlefield hospital administration, the characters, both natives and invading military, encountered there and in nearby communities visited, the day by day happenings that had interested him.

"Fundamentally . . . we think of living in the rough," he wrote on March 27, 1943, "as the quest for food, clothing, and shelter. The refinements follow. Food comes first. . . . Every ambulance coming into this hospital is loaded with sick men and they all report that they are hungry first and sick second. Before they are relegated to their proper stations they are in the chow line crying for food. Of course, food has been refined by the art of cooking. . . . We try to cook the food the Quartermaster is kind enough to give us after he, incidentally, has taken the choice bit for himself. Someone once said they had never seen a thin Army cook and that two Army cooks could never sleep in the same pup-tent. I'll go a step farther and say no detachment of QM troops ever went hungry.

"Our cooking is done on field ranges, the proper use of which is fully outlined in certain field manuals which we try to follow to the letter. These ranges are operated on gasoline. They were designed to use what is commonly known as white gas, that cheap gas containing little or no lead, that stuff you bought back in the good old days from what might be termed second-rate pumps. But of course only the best for the Army, so all of our gas is leaded, containing tetra-ethyl. This makes the trucks and tanks and planes go zip, but it just stops up the lowly field range. So we just have to take the creation apart after each meal and clean out the lead and carbon. This causes wear and tear on the parts and since the IQ in the Mess Section isn't very high, the care of the parts is correspondingly low. I say the IQ in the Mess Section is low, advisedly, since if it were otherwise, all of us would have sense enough to be somewhere else."

When the parts wear out, he continued his letter, "the job starts—try and find replacements. It's a game only the stalwarts can play. . . . Inspired by the thought of those sick and wounded and hungry men, we buck the pass-the-buck line in search of parts. We go to the nearest depot and gather rumor that the parts might be found in the second. To the second we go and they never heard of parts being shipped over and so we hurry home to put out a meal and then get to the third source. There they say at the fourth we might find them, since it has been said that parts are there and frozen except for medical units. . . . We take a little hope and go again. Incidentally, the depots are miles apart—good thing, since Jerry likes to find them bunched. With meager hopes we approach the fourth. Voila! Here we find the parts, but none will be issued since they will send a trained man around to visit all units to repair all breaks, and he will carry the parts. . . ." And so, he said, the grand run-around continued.

"The other branches of our unit are also tracking down needed replacements. My good friend Bernard Walker says his dental work must stop if he fails to get certain items, maybe false teeth, I don't know, and the X-ray group is out searching for film. However, I still claim priority, since they all get hungry and it's a funny thing how that hunger comes at about the same time each day. The game is still on and when the final whistle blows we will turn up with the much needed parts."

At this point in the letter he changed his reporting to tell the story related by one of the 38th's patients back from the front:

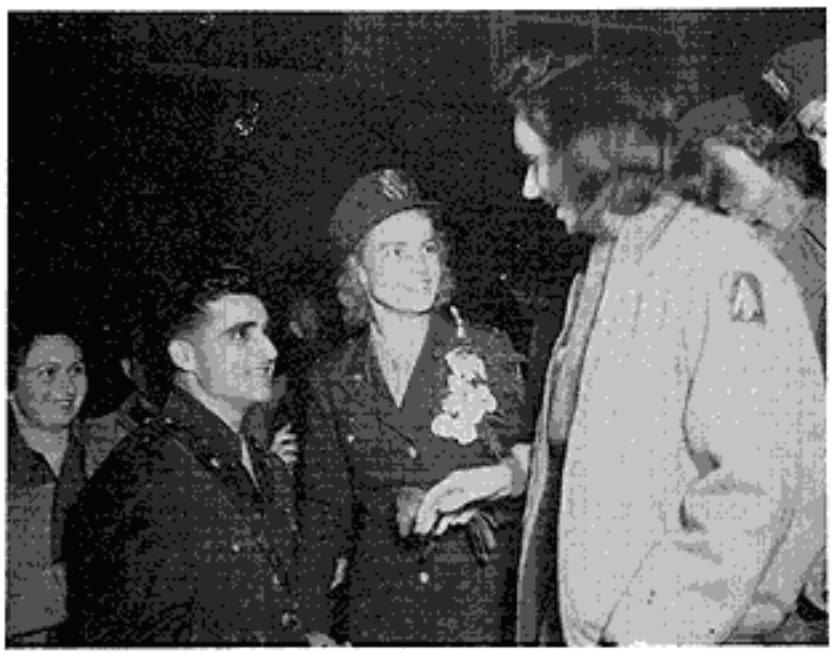
"He and some of his comrades had captured some Italian prisoners. They say they are not so difficult to

take. I don't know. They had picked up some 21 of them and brought them into their side of the line, which was some thirty miles from the main part of the enemy. Just after supper they were strafed and one of the prisoners did not turn up after it was over. They never had to guard them too carefully because the Italians never seemed interested in escaping. But this fellow did get away. The Americans didn't bother much about it, just knew he had gone. The next morning at breakfast he turned up. He had walked all the way back to his own line and brought his brother back with him during the night."

He reported that one of the 38th's officers—he didn't give his name—who enjoyed hearing the complaints of the men back from the front and encouraged them to suggest what was needed most on the fighting line, "got a good answer today. He had stopped at one cot and asked this particular chap what he thought was needed most at the front. The soldier replied that he could tell him in few words. 'What we need most up there,' he said, 'are more Americans and fewer Germans.'"

Captain Pickens told another story:

"A Negro had reported back to one of the hospitals. He was found by an officer lying on a stretcher covered with blankets. His clothes were missing. The officer asked him what was the matter with him and the fellow said nothing was the matter, he was just having his clothes deloused. The officer said no, that he was really sick and he would take care of him if he would only tell him what was the matter. The Negro said nothing was wrong, he was just waiting to get his clothes back so he could return to the front. No, the officer insisted, he had something wrong, and he made arrangements to have him evacuated to the rear. The next thing the Negro soldier knew he was in a hospital 500 miles to the rear and still asking for his clothes. C'est la guerre!"



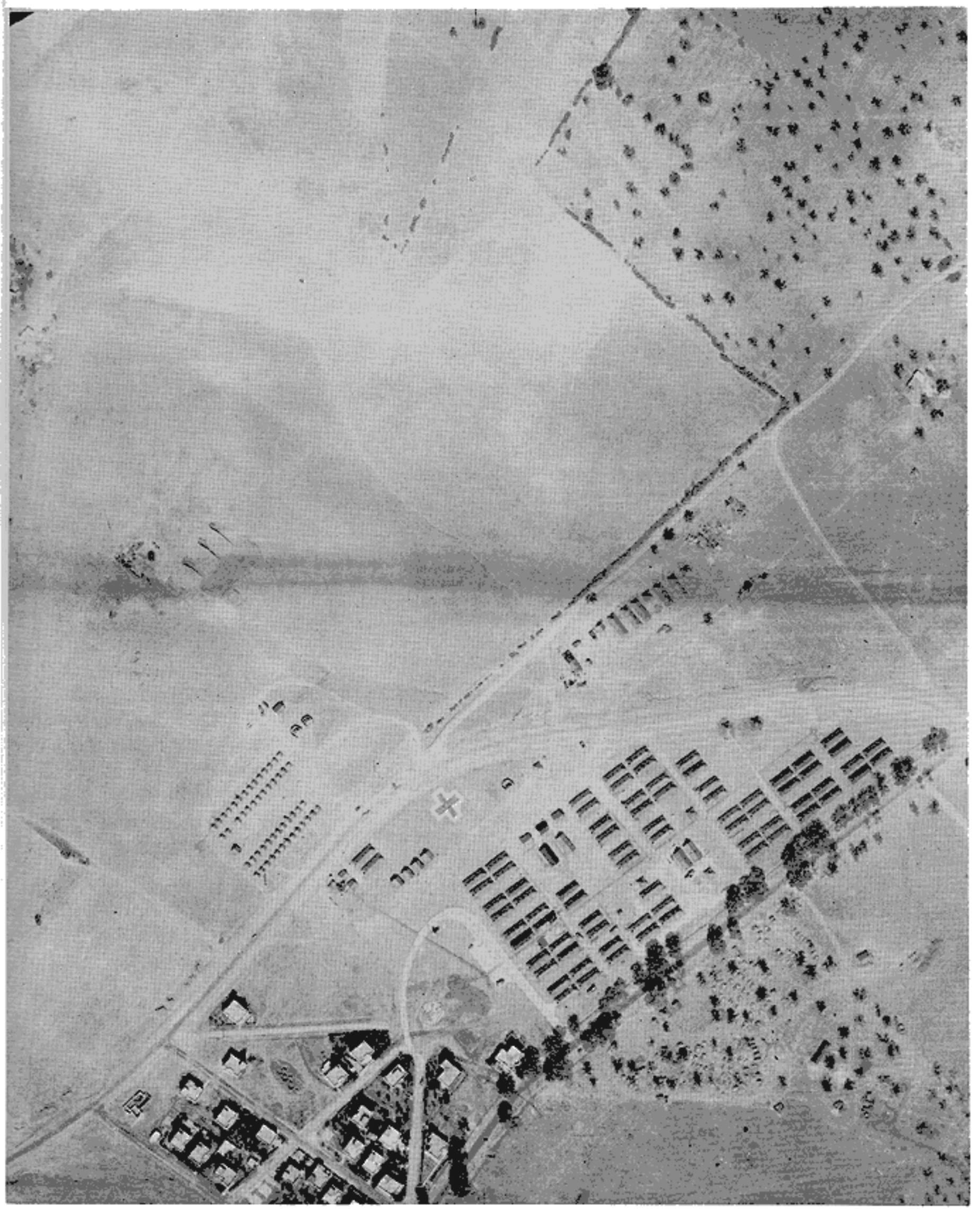
He's engrossed in Nurse Mary Blandford's story. Others, Elva Wells, left, and Ruby McCain.

After serving in the administration of the hospital, said Captain Pickens, although a layman, he was beginning to get a rather definite opinion about the doctors and the practice of medicine:

"I always thought that a doctor was a doctor and when you were sick you called for him. But now," said he, "I find I'm all wrong. Oh, I knew that some of them sort of specialized on some things, but I always thought any of them could do anything from giving you pills to taking out your ingrowing toenails. But, no, that is not the case. There are two groups as I see it now. . . . On one side you find the medical man, whom I deem to call the medicine man, and on the other you find the surgeons, whom I call the saw boys. The medicine men try to keep you from getting too close to the saw boys and the saw boys say the only real cure comes from cutting. Then the saw boys divide up into smaller groups. Some of them work on your eyes, ears, nose and throat. They claim to cure back pains by taking out your tonsils. Then there is the group that cuts on the middle part of your poor frame. Don't get near them with a slight old-fashioned stomach ache or they will have your appendix out in nothing flat. Then there is another set called the orthopeds. They can break your bones and set you up in white plaster casts. There are other subdivisions but I haven't gone that far with my study.

"In the medicine man group they deal more with what they choose to call diagnosis and some lean to mental cures. This crowd borders closely on Mary Baker Eddy's setup. This bunch has to know your family history back at least four generations and all of your actions up to the last time you brushed your teeth. From this they can tell you whether you are really sick or just think you are sick. It's all very interesting to me and the more I see of it the more determined I am to stay well and healthy. . . . I almost got sick this week from my second round of typhoid shots. I think Charlie Gay, who gave me the shot, tried to give me the disease instead of immunizing me. I recovered after the first day when I was forced to retreat to my tent for an hour. Of course, the Colonel came around during that particular hour and wanted to raise sand about something. That is always the way."

Three weeks before the 38th's base was moved from Telergma, five members of the unit took a four-hour ride in a Jeep to visit an ancient city built by the Caesars. It was a cold day, with the thermometer hovering around freezing, and the traveling was uncomfortable, but the letter Captain Pickens wrote on their return that evening provides an interesting description



This aerial photograph of the encampment near Tunis shows a larger area than the Kuester drawing, which is confined to the portion shown in the lower right section.

of a surviving Roman city in the area in which the Charlotte hospital personnel served during its first months in north Africa.

The place they visited was Timgad, a city "left over from an ancient era, to which we sacrificed an entire day's leave." The letter was written April 10. "Five of us—Kavanagh, Bob Miller, Bob Schirmer and I, along with a driver named Elmer Neinhouser, spent the day getting to and from and visiting Timgad. Five of us in a jeep that isn't comfortable for one, and the weather just touching 32 degrees. . . . I myself had wrapped in 'long johns,' the common name for G.I. woolen underwear, my normal woolen uniform, a field jacket, another heavier field jacket, a sweater, a heavy woolen scarf, woolen gloves, G.I. shoes with galoshes, and two heavy woolen blankets. The others were dressed likewise. But it was to no avail, as we all froze slowly but surely. . . ."

But they went on, despite the cold and the other discomforts. And on their return that night, Captain Pickens described Timgad:

"There you see what's left of the outpost of old Roman civilization. There the followers of the Caesars had built a city out of stone back in the second century. At least, that was when they started it. Here was a city built out on the plains, miles from the surrounding mountains, snow-capped mountains, without the sign of any rock anywhere. It is said their slaves hauled the rock from Constantine in chariots, a small matter of about a hundred miles. When I say a city, I mean a city whose population was reputed to have been over 50,000 in its heyday. It was built there as an outpost for their military garrison at first, to protect their coastline from the Berbers who lived in the mountains and had a habit of swooping down on their civilized brothers at unpredictable moments. From this humble beginning, Timgad grew. The surrounding valleys are rich and I suspect the Romans were not different from our large landholders before the Civil War and they made good use of their slaves on the land. They were black slaves in those days, too. Where they came from I was unable to find out.

"And so the city grew. It spread and sprawled over the hills. The stonepaved streets are still there with the signs of the chariot tracks plainly visible. The streets are laid out like any modern city. . . . At each intersection there is a manhole made of stone and underneath are the unmistakable signs of a city sewer system, cut in stone. Each street has a sidewalk and each sidewalk shows signs of having been covered overhead with stone. The houses are clearly outlined with the remaining stones in place. They were built right on the sidewalk, with a patio in the rear. The rooms were average size and had small window openings toward the ceiling. Some of the windows had stone bars in them simulating our window frames or panes. Each house had a sewage system with baths and toilets, all built of stone. The baths were built so they could be heated. In those days the soldiers on the outpost of civilization had hot baths, but not in these modern times. I didn't look for the kitchens; I was spending the day trying to get away from them."

He continued his recital of what the five 38th members on leave for a day saw in Timgad:

"At the top of a hill at the end of what appeared to be the principal street was the forum, clearly outlined with many of the pillars still standing. . . . Here I suppose the population could come and listen to the politicians of that day, or possibly could speak his own mind. I stood there and wondered what had been said over a thousand years ago by the politicians and whether it was any different from what we hear today.

"A little farther on was the theatre, almost intact. The stone seats rose abruptly up the hill, with the white tie and tails area clearly marked. The orchestra pit cut out of very large stones and the stage worn smooth with much dancing, comedy, and tragedy, were marked unmistakably. The footlight setup was there in stone. One of the boys sat on the back row, the goober gallery, and listened while the other three of us sang the parody on the quartet from Rigoletto. The listener said the accoustics were good and the music terrible."

From the forum the visiting soldiers went to the Christian church called St. George's. "I couldn't find the reason for the name," Captain Pickens wrote. "We had no guide but an old Arab who spoke very little French and no English. He walked around with us and we gathered from him that no work had been done on the ruins for the last twenty years. We saw the baptismal font. It was an immersion proposition with beautiful mosaics. The Baptists had a start way back there."

They went next to the market place, "where the various vendors advertised their wares with carved plaques on the stone over the stalls. The vegetable man had a cabbage carved over his place. The bread man showed his product with sheaves of grain cut in the stone. The wine merchant had clusters of grapes on one side and smiling Bacchus on the other. . . . The butcher had his space showing where he cut his meat and allowed the drippings to run into the public drain. All of these shops were located around a circle, indicating that the housewife got in that habit back in those days and nowadays goes in an ever shortening circle with the influx of rationing and rationing cards and the point system."

Timgad had boasted "a small museum on the edge of the forgotten city. Here the mosaics had been pieced together. Caesar was shown as a young man and then

Private Israel Tabi, second from left, with hand pointing, a native of North Africa, is interpreting for Lieutenant Colonel T. Preston White, left, as he talks with a native and his two sons. The man's wife is being treated in the native patients section of the hospital during its stay at St. Cloud.

when he was older. Neptune rode a great chariot pulled by four mermaids. Bacchus was there also, always smiling. There were many busts of male and female Romans. There were stones dovetailed as well as any modern carpenters could fit wood. Among other things so far excavated were iron locks and keys, large and cumbersome; coins of many denominations and sizes; crude forks and knives; jewelry after a fashion and even socalled hatpins for the ladies. . . .

"We turned to look at the great arch. Apparently all cities that amount to anything have an arch. . . . And Timgad had an arch built of mammoth pieces of stone and still standing almost intact. I couldn't discover any reason for this one. It was just like the rest, looked good, but caused a traffic jam, made another bottleneck. The one interesting thing about Timgad's arch was the size of the stones. They weighed six tons each, 12,000 pounds for those poor slaves to push that 100 miles. I don't think it was worth it."

The preoccupation of the members of the 38th with the thought of finding somewhere an adequate supply of clean water that would permit them regular baths is further revealed in the group's interest in learning of ancient Timgad's water system:

"Our attention was next drawn to the question of water supply. All cities have to have one, even our tent city of over a thousand population here. We just tap the mill race that runs by our camp and treat the water with calcium hypochloride and run it thru alum and some other chemicals. Ours tastes all right and I think it is clean. The Romans built a long viaduct from the mountains. It was hollowed stone and apparently stretched for miles. I could find no storage tanks, but I suppose they had one. I don't doubt but what typhoid

was prevalent, but they had doctors in those days, too, as was indicated on the stones where he had his home." Then the 38th's mess officer made a sly gibe at his medical associates of the 38th: "He was probably a very busy man and his fees must have been sizeable, since he lived in a larger house than the majority and had two bathrooms."

Captain Pickens referred to the fact that the "Germans in their propaganda broadcasts to the American troops in North Africa said in their earlier broadcasts that we were just here on a sightseeing tour. Our five tried to carry out that idea," he admitted. But, said he, "while we were doing that, some of our brethren were impressing the Boche that we could do some fighting at the same time. They never suspect that we are such a versatile group and can sometimes combine business with pleasure. However, I must say in all honesty that I am yet to figure out the pleasure of freezing to death to look at a lot of bones."

He concluded his description of what the five men of the 38th had seen that April day in the ancient ruined city of the Romans:

"So much for Timgad, except this: an earthquake came along in the seventh century and razed the place. Twenty years ago the French got tired of digging it out again, and today I am tired of the whole blooming thing."

10

April 15, 1943, at Telergma marked the first anniversary of the 38th Evacuation Hospital unit's activation into the service at Fort Bragg. The year, more than likely, had been the busiest and surely the most exciting in the lives of the men and women who composed the organization.

Of the twelve months since their beginning training at the great, sprawling North Carolina military base, almost exactly four had been spent in preliminary training at Bragg and sailing for overseas duty; almost exactly the next three were devoted to further training and organizing in England and embarking and sailing for duty in Africa; and the remaining five months had seen the hospital fulfilling in northern Africa the assignment for which it had been organized as the fruition of a dream eighteen months before of certain Charlotte medical men.

For Captain Jack Montgomery the day marked one year in the service, as he noted in his diary, of which, he wrote, "5 m. 1 week in Africa."

The next day, after datelining his letter "16 April 1943 Northwest Africa," Captain Pickens would type out a long message to pay tribute to the work of the Red Cross as he had observed it. Whether his opinion of the organization was generally shared by the officers, nurses, and men of the 38th, he did not venture to suggest. Many returning service men, in fact, were critical of the Red Cross and some were even abusive, and for that reason the 38th's mess officer's observations, particularly if they were representative of the 38th's attitude, are interesting.

After saying that many things had happened during his months in the service that he would prefer to forget, he added quickly that "there is one thing I would like to give you that has proven worthwhile. The clear-cut work of the Red Cross, as I see it every day in our little part in this job of cleaning up North Africa in order to give it back to the French, is a part important."

He proceeded at once to elaborate:

"In our hospital where we first set up, there was no provision for Red Cross and what they do. It seems that this work, being purely civilian, has to be requested by the Army. So, at the request of the commanding officer of this theatre, we have two Red Cross representatives who are stationed with us. They are Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Brooke, the first from Philadelphia and the latter from Englewood, New Jersey. They are both women who obviously had other means of support, refined, well trained, able. One of them reminds me so much of Vinton that it isn't funny. They volunteer, and after a thorough orientation course, are placed in a pool in the States. From there they are drawn to fill in wherever the Army requests them. Here they set up their little pyramidal tent and have gone to work. I will try to give you a little picture of what they do in order that you can appreciate the Red Cross a little more."

He proceeds with his picture: