

arrangement, I on during daytime, LaChance and Stokes at night. This worked better but I needed assistance from the Med service.

This same day, October 25, although Captain Montgomery did not record it in his diary, the 38th had two distinguished guests. They were Lieutenant Gen-

eral Mark W. Clark, commanding general of the Fifth Army, and Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau.

The two were photographed together standing beside the railway tracks at Caserta with a tangled mass of wrecked rail equipment in the background.

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The official business of the 38th Evacuation Hospital day by day was reported by the Daily Bulletin and these reports, supplemented by the occasional and generally terse diary entries of Captain Montgomery, provide a factual chronology of the unit's service in Africa and Europe, but letters of Captain Pickens from Italy, as those he wrote from Africa had done, provide illuminating detail and frequently important additional data.

The first letter he wrote after landing in Italy, for example, provides color and evokes interest that the completely factual recording fails to achieve. In that way it brings home to Charlotte and North Carolina the phase of the war in which the 38th was involved. This letter followed by two months the last one he had written from North Africa. It was dated "2 November 1943" and the only identification of the place from which it was being written was simply "Italy."

He began:

"It has been said that all roads lead to Rome, but from our experience they are small and narrow when you get this close. What roads are here are well built and well marked, but it is impossible to have them running over some of the mountains that spread down this peninsula. Consequently, our progress must of necessity be slow. As I told you in one of my earlier letters from Africa, wars are fought on roads and for the control of roads. It is more true in this war than in any previous one since it moves, normally, very swiftly when it moves, and the roads are necessary for the moving of troops and their supplies.

"These roads remind me very much of the trip from Blowing Rock to Linville or from Clayton to Highlands. The Germans have placed their defense in strategic spots and it takes time to blast them out without making the cost too high. The cost in men and material so far has been most reasonable as far as I can see and

we are in a position to see the cost in wounded men. You folks may become impatient, as we do over here, about the slowness of our progress, but it is better that way if the means justify the ends.

"The roads run along the valleys and each valley is dotted with small villages and small farms. The farms are highly cultivated and extensively irrigated. The villages are crowded and dirty but not as dirty as Africa. When the war has moved by, the villages are pockmarked and in a lot of cases are almost totally demolished. If there happens to be a railroad line thru the town, the town has been wiped out and the rail connections are ruined for great distances up and down the line. When I say ruined, I mean the rails are twisted and scattered and large holes mark the right of way, and boxcars are scattered up and down the tracks and the electric wiring is spread over the countryside. All of the trains are operated, or, I should say, were operated, by electricity. It will be many months before rail connections are made again in this section. This was all done by our Air Force to cut off the German supply line. The bridges across the streams and irrigation canals are all out. This might have been done by us or by the enemy as he moved up the peninsula, but in any case we move over temporary structures at slow speed. The engineers have done a remarkable job on this work and they work swiftly. Some of the bridges are forty or fifty feet high over the water."

More interestingly, he wrote also of the people in this war-torn region from below Salerno to Caserta:

"Where towns are demolished, the townspeople have been slow in coming back and trying to make any repairs. Occasionally you will see the natives cleaning up the rubbish and repairing the doors and putting on a temporary roof. Some of them open their shops for business. The barbers are all busy cutting soldiers' hair. The grocers have apples, nuts, small oranges and



This photograph, made by Margaret Bourke-White for *Life* during her visit to the encampment between Riardo and Vairano, shows the mud with which the 38th's personnel had to contend during the 1943-1944 winter. The nurse crossing the road is Lieutenant Violet Burgess.

some vegetables on crude tables. The pharmacies are open where their stocks have not been completely ruined. The photographers are busy taking pictures for the troops in the towns. Other than these, there is little business being transacted. The churches are open and mass is said regularly, and the little bells chime at regular intervals. The people merely stand around the streets and watch the big trucks and tanks go by. They are not too short of food except in certain lines. There is little beef available, and, surprising to me, practically no salt. There seems to be a reasonable amount of sugar. Cigarettes are in great demand. They have had little tobacco for some years and a package of cigarettes or a pound of salt go further in trade than any other two items. They have an animal called a water buffalo which seems to grow in quantity that might answer the meat need. Some of the Americans have purchased them for \$25 to \$30 a head and tried the steaks. I had a steak once with one of the Air Corps outfits, but it tasted like veal and was as tough as whet-leather. Of course, there is a shortage of wheat and consequently spaghetti, their main dish."

The members of the 38th were not long in discovering that the Italian soldiers with few exceptions, it appeared, were quite willing to be finished with the war.

"It appears that the farms were controlled by absentee landowners, that is, most of the farms. Some small farmers own their own land. Along the coast, these small owners have a tract of land running up from the sea, and with beautiful terracing, they grow grapes, fruit, and some vegetables. The big landowners apparently were close to the old government and many of them have not been seen since our landing. I don't know what the outcome will be after things are cleared up and we move on to the north. The children are no different from those in Africa when it comes to begging for candy, and are highly delighted when we give them a piece. It's hard to turn a youngster down when you think he had no part in this mess we are in. The older ones I waste little sympathy on, since they started this business and now want to stop when the going gets tough. The roads are lined with Italian soldiers walking southward, heading home. They all appear to think

the Americans are their best friends and try to be as chummy as possible.

"We have a difficult time in our particular unit because about one-third of our enlisted men are of Italian extraction and the majority of them speak the language or have relatives somewhere along the line. I think, on the whole, they are happy about being out of the war, in spite of the fact that Bagdolio has promised to raise an army and fight the Germans. I would not want that job. These folks don't want to fight anybody; they just want to go home. They have had all the fighting and glory and marching bands and parades, victories and defeats they want. The average one of them wants to get back to his little farm or vineyard or olive grove and be quiet for a while. It is bad that we have to fight this part of the war all over their country and leave so much devastation, but as I think back, I remember that they started it before we did. They will have to put up with it until we are finished in this section."

Captain Montgomery had noted on October 16 that they had been given quarters in a new military barracks, "beautiful, with terrazzo floors, high ceilings," from which the retreating Germans had torn out the plumbing.

In his letter Captain Pickens went on to describe the barracks to which his fellow officer had referred:

"In this last setup we have moved into some abandoned Italian officers' barracks. Our quarters are very comfortable, the first time we have had a roof over our heads that did not move with each gust of wind, since we left England. The first few days we were here our feet hurt from walking on the concrete floor. We are much more used to having a little mud or dust under our feet. The Germans took all the fixtures with them, including all the plumbing work. With typical Amer-



General Mud was the big enemy at the Vairano-Riardo site. This photograph of the entrance there further illustrates the fight the 38th had with this enemy.

ican ingenuity, the men have brought the water in and we have showers, good and hot, and plenty of running water for washing. We still chlorinate our drinking water.

"There was enough scrap lumber around to build shutters for the windows; all the glass had been blown out from bombs. We have a good blackout and our own generators furnish the necessary light inside. Because of the unusual demand on our personnel, we were allowed to hire some civilian labor. We have four barbers who shave and cut hair for the patients and the rest of the command. We also have a number of women who keep our quarters clean and who clean up the hospital. By order of the mayor, in cooperation with Amgot, they are paid 40 lire per day, 40 cents. Buck and I have supplemented our maid by allowing her to do our laundry and keep our shoes shined and turn our beds down. We have added a couple of dollars a week to her income.

"Now you know the truth; we have become civilized again and we dread the day when we will have to pull up anchor and move on and back into tents. Buck is doing the hiring and today he had to do some firing. There were too many women, more than we needed, so we had to get rid of some. They have been crying all afternoon about their starving bambinos, but there was nothing he could do about the situation."

He wrote of the havoc the bombs had caused at Naples, particularly along its harbor area, and of the booby traps left by the withdrawing enemy:

"Naples is not the city it once was. The tourist hotels, located along the water front, have been almost completely demolished. The bombing of the dock area caused this, because some of the bombs reached over. What our Air Force did not do, the Germans did before they left. They also left time bombs, which went off until twenty-one days after their departure. This caused considerable damage and many casualties, casualties among our troops as well as the civilian population. The main post office building exploded about a week after the Germans got out. The Engineers had checked it thoroughly, but the Germans are smart about hiding their 'booby traps.' Only this week were the lights turned on. The whole city was evacuated for a day for fear the electric current would start other explosions. I don't know whether any came or not."

They were in a region that twenty centuries before had been the playground of the Roman Empire, but they had seen little of it except as they pushed through to their new base at Caserta. Roman Emperors and wealthy patricians had lived lavishly in their villas ringed about the hillsides above the bay of Naples and old Tiberius had sought the isolation of Capri in the company of his astrologers and philosophers during the

last years of his reign, but though members of the 38th had seen Capri across the blue waters they had not had opportunity to visit the island. At least, wrote Captain Pickens, he hadn't:

"Capri is still across the bay, but there is no transportation across unless you know someone in Q.M. who runs a 'duck,' the amphibious truck. I have not been as yet, and don't know that I will get a chance. I have not seen Sorrento either. I think I will get there, however, since Fifth Army has taken over the Victoria Hotel for an officers' rest spot and we are allowed to go for two or three days when time permits. I think I shall be able to earn that much rest before long.

"The bay is filled with ships but there are no pleasure liners along the docks. The Neapolitan nights are strictly blackouts now. There is no singing, and no music. The restaurants along the hill overlooking the bay are open, but the food is poor. We tried one and had some dark brown spaghetti, fish that tasted like filet of cat, potatoes hot and cold, apples and grapes. This, with a poor grade of dago red wine, made the meal. Any other trips into the city will find us taking some good American corned beef and some hard crackers and a can of fruit juice.

"Vesuvius steams and smokes along in spite of the war around it. The American troops call it 'Smoky Joe.' With all the destruction, if you can get up on top of the hills overlooking the town, the sight is still impressive and inspiring. The shattered buildings and the sunken ships and the rubbish are forgotten for the moment."

They did have a closeup look, however, at one of the palaces that had escaped major damage, and he wrote about it:

"The King's castle is still intact and now used by the Army as it was used by the Germans. The old Duchess still lives in a part of it. It seemed funny to see Quartermaster troops working over requisitions in the main ballroom. G.I. shoes and O.D. uniforms seemed a little incongruous on that polished floor and under that magnificent chandelier, with the paintings of old masters looking on in disgust. The draperies of fine embroidered silk embellishing the windows blew in the wind and tangled with tommy guns and automatic rifles. On one beautifully carved recumbent statue of a maid a soldier had placed a little sign in one hand reading "What is your telephone number?"

"But so it goes in time of war."

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The day before the 38th's mess officer wrote this first letter home dated Italy, Captain Montgomery added two lines to his diary to record a trip he had taken. But he gave no details:

Nov. 1st. Went to Pompeii today. Then to Naples. Saw Victor Emmanuel.

But five days later, when on November 5 he made another entry, he was looking toward the imminent moving again of the hospital. He wrote:

All alerted. Back to tents, I expect. All patients to be out by noon tomorrow. Receiving closed yesterday.

That same day Captain Pickens wrote his second letter from Italy. In another three days the 38th Evacuation Hospital would have been on active duty overseas one year. On November 8 the year before the unit had landed at Arzew to begin its service in the African campaign.

The 38th's mess officer wrote of the arrival of a visi-

tor from the States. He was Walter Nicholson of Charlotte. Nicholson was in the Merchant Marines and on his first trip his ship had met with some difficulty in the nearby harbor. While it was being repaired, he was sitting out the waiting period.

"What prompted this letter was the 'bull sessions' we have been having with him since his arrival," Captain Pickens explains. "He brings a fresh point of view to us and it was a bit of a shock to me to see how blase we had become."

The letter reveals the change in attitude of the members of the hospital unit since their arrival in Africa, a change typical perhaps of the change that a year of warfare had brought to most of the nation's fighting men and women. Yet the members of the 38th were little more than a year and a half from the beginning days of their Fort Bragg training.

"The war came right close to him when he landed," he wrote of Nicholson, "and he was frankly scared.