

Christmas 1944 came on a Monday with the 38th Evacuation Hospital still based at Montecatini and 424 patients under treatment in fifteen wards. The returning season brought again a series of greetings from the unit's various commanding officers from Colonel George T. Wood, Jr., to the President of the United States.

The Daily Bulletin of Sunday, December 24, carried the greetings of the Fifth Army's new commander, Lieutenant General L. K. Truscott, Jr. The General wrote:

"I am particularly pleased that my first greeting to you should come at the time of the year when people throughout the Christian world are drawn together closest in the spirit of the season.

"I have known the Fifth Army since its beginnings and am familiar with its great achievements. I am proud of my former service with it—from the beaches at Salerno beyond the fall of Rome. I left it for a time to participate in the operations in Southern France but when I went off I carried with me a feeling of deep attachment for the organization of which I had been so long a part and have followed all of its operations since with close personal interest.

"I am honored to be returning as its commander and feel that I am coming back to friends with whom I have broad common interests and whose problems I understand. It is as a friend—as well as commander—that I extend to you my sincere good wishes at this Christmastime.

"Unfortunately the conditions of war have separated us from homes and loved ones and have once again denied us the blessing of being with them at this season of traditional family reunion. The forces that have compelled our presence here—those which have challenged the world and engulfed it in unprecedented struggle—must be destroyed and eradicated so that with the end of fighting there will remain no shadow to cloud any future Christmas.

"I hope that each and everyone of you here in Italy will have the best possible Christmas under the circumstances in which you find yourselves and I pledge

you that I will do all in my power to lead you to the future successes in this theater which can contribute so much to the final allied victory—with which will come happy, lasting reunions and the restoration of an enduring peace in the hearts and minds of all mankind."

Brigadier General J. I. Martin, Fifth Army surgeon, four days earlier, on December 20, had addressed his greetings to "Officers and Men, 38th Evacuation Hospital:"

"Dear Friends:

"As medical troops in war you have been guided every day by the ideals of human action the first Christmas brought to the world. In various ways and in various stations you have healed the sick, revived the wounded, strengthened the weary and brought peace and comfort to the minds and bodies of thousands of our fellow men.

"I know the poignant feelings a Christmas celebration away from home arouses in your own minds; how you, who daily see the shattering consequences of war, long to know once again the spirit with which you and your families approached the Christmas season. I join you in the earnest hope that beyond this year the state of the world's affairs will no longer isolate any of us from the desires closest to our hearts.

"But please know this Christmas that countless thousands of families who are strangers to you—in addition to those with whom you are tied by kinship—embrace you in their thoughts. By your valor, skill, and wholehearted devotion to the welfare of the men they love, you have become an indivisible part of those families. Through your own sacrifices in fortifying the health of others you have created the preconditions for the celebration of future Christmas Days in homes throughout the nation.

"To the nation's thanks," he concluded his greetings, "let me add my own voice in prayer for your continued well-being. I am very proud of each and everyone of you and cherish the friendship and fealty so manifest in the past year. May God bless you all."

The Christmas Day Daily Bulletin of the 38th carried the greetings from Colonel Wood, President Roosevelt, General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.

The President wrote:

"To Our Ill and Wounded Fighters

"With a deep personal sense of obligation I welcome the privilege of sending to you this Christmas Day a message of admiration and affection. You have given of your blood and health to restore to Christmas its meaning and to make the spirit of Christmas genuinely prevail throughout the world. It takes courage to fight on a battle front and it takes courage to fight from a hospital bed. We would not cheapen your hours of heroism by wishing you a 'Merry Christmas' but we wish you to know that we are with you in spirit, in comradeship and in faith.

"To the Men and Women of the Armed Forces

"On behalf of a grateful nation, I send to the men and women of our Armed Forces everywhere warm and confident good wishes this 4th Christmas of War. On Christmas Day more than any other day we remember you with pride and with humility, with anguish and with joy. We shall keep on remembering you all the days of our lives.

"It is, therefore, with solemn pride that I salute those who stand in the forefront of the struggle to bring back to a suffering world the way of life symbolized by the spirit of Christmas."

General Marshall's message emphasized the improvement in the war situation in the year since he sent his 1943 greetings:

"Since my Christmas message a year ago a great change has come over the Army," he wrote. "In Europe



Red Cross worker Lucy Brooke, left, and Lieutenant Sara Moran are flanked by officers from Charlotte, left to right, Milo Hoffman, Buck Medearis, Colin Munroe, and Jack Montgomery.

our troops with the British are attacking the enemy along a thousand-mile front. American bombers and fighters are covering all of Germany. In the Pacific more and more troops and planes are being deployed against the enemy, and with the tremendous blows of the Navy, the liberation of the Philippines is now well within our reach. In Burma and China, American planes are punishing the Japs with the vigorous support of our grand echelons. The nation is thankful for the victories of recent months, for the magnificent work and sacrifices of the men in the field. The people are very proud of the Army and they have great confidence in its ability to crush the enemy's final resistance.

"This Christmas message goes to every man and woman in the service," General Marshall's greetings continued, "with my personal thanks for what each of you is doing for the honor and security of AMERICA and for the liberation of oppressed people throughout the world. I am aware of the hardships and the hazards that are your daily portion and I am conscious of the price you pay for every victory. May the Lord watch over you and may you find, wherever you are, some cheer in this Christmas season."

The Secretary of War's message was similar in expressing the nation's appreciation:

"At this Christmas season the thoughts of an entire nation are with the troops. The candles which burn in the windows are beamed straight from the heart of AMERICA to the men and women in uniform. Wherever you are stationed it is your Christmas that we hope to share.

"I have a very personal knowledge of your service and your sacrifices. I have been with you on distant fronts where your courage has overcome the fiercest resistance of the enemy. The pride I feel in your valor has been deepened by the evidence of your humanity and your dignity in foreign lands. In liberated areas I have seen the gratitude of people whom you have rescued from the oppression and misery engendered by a savage foe. This year, because of you, the meaning of Christmas has been restored to them.

"From millions of homes the spirit of Christmas flows out to the posts and bases and battle lines where Americans serve throughout the world. From thousands of altars the nation offers up its prayers for you in the midst of war. In sending you my warmest greetings I express the admiration of a grateful nation for your courage and fortitude. Through you the joy of Christmas will return once more to a world at peace."

Colonel Wood's message was addressed, of course, to the members of the 38th. On the front page of the Daily Bulletin, beneath a drawing of the nativity scene

and the dateline: VOLUME III NUMBER 350 MONDAY 25 DECEMBER 1944, it said:

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

"Merry Christmas" from one who is just as lonely for his home and family as you are, has a hollow sound, but I sincerely hope that this will be a happy day for each of you and that you know how deeply appreciated is every effort you have exerted during the year in performance of your duties, and particularly thank you for doing so much to provide our patients with the atmosphere of Christmas.

On behalf of my staff I extend greetings to everyone and may God grant your wish that next year you will be by your own fireside and "Peace on Earth" will be a reality.

G. T. WOOD, JR.
Colonel, M.C.,
Commanding.

At the bottom of the page an inked ribbon proclaimed:

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

For the men and women of the 38th Evacuation Hospital, with few exceptions, it would be the last Christmas overseas.

On Christmas Day 1944 at Montecatini, the Daily Bulletin of that date further discloses, the number of patients in the hospital was 424 and there were 487 vacant beds.

During the next six days the patient load increased daily—443; 613; 624; 722; and on December 30, to 810. On that day the Bulletin announced the welcoming to the 38th of two surgical teams to temporary duty from the 2nd Auxiliary Surgical Group. They were:

General Surgical Team No. 37-1:

Major Edward M. Phifer, M.C.; Captain David S. Feters, M.C.; 2nd Lieutenant Carol F. Sleezer, ANC; 2nd Lieutenant Sophie T. Cowin, ANC; Tec 4 Robert L. Myers, MD; and Tec 4 Richard J. Tysarczyk, MD.

Shock Team No. 105-1

Captain Hermann L. Hegner, MC; 2nd Lieutenant Elaine C. Hatchew, ANC; 2nd Lieutenant Winifred E. Cochran, ANC; Tec 4 Walter H. Cotner, MD; Tec 5 Anthony Serino, MD; and Pfc Elwood D. Heirominus, MD.

December 30 the Bulletin listed service newspapers approved for mailing home: Union Jack, Eighth Army News, Crusader, Parade, Stars and Stripes (Italy edition), Stars and Stripes (Sicily edition), Stars and Stripes (Mediterranean edition), Maple Leaf, NZEF Times, APW (Polish), Yank, and Basic News (compiled by PWB.)

On the last day of 1944 the patient roll dropped to 714.

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As the year 1945 opened, with the 38th still based at Montecatini, Lieutenant General Joseph T. McNarney, from MTOUSA headquarters, sent to the service men and women a New Year's message urging them to exert superhuman effort to insure victory and peace within the forthcoming year.

The message was reproduced in the Daily Bulletin by order of Colonel Wood on January 2. General McNarney wrote:

"Never before has the vital importance of the Italian Front been so obvious as in this crisis of the great counter-offensive which the Germans have launched against our forces in Luxembourg and Belgium.

"The great number of men and vast amount of supply needed by the Germans to pursue the Italian campaign is costing him dearly now in his all-out, desperate counter-attack on the Western Front.

"Anything short of a superhuman effort on our part, any slackening in our effort, means a longer and more difficult war. It is not enough for us merely to hold and engage the enemy force. We must carry the fight to him and destroy him. We must force him to pour more and more men and supplies into Italy.

"As we enter the New Year I call on every one of you, in every branch of the Service, to drive yourselves to the utmost, to give your last ounce of courage and determination, and to destroy the enemy ruthlessly wherever you find him. Only by putting all that we have into this final battle for victory can we be assured that the New Year will bring us the peace and the reunion with our own that we all so much desire. May good fortune attend your efforts."

On Sunday, January 7, the Bulletin carried a congratulatory message from General Mark W. Clark, the