Dr Muriel "Molly" Newhouse (1912-2000), FRCP, FFOM: Memoir of service in the RAMC during World War Two

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Molly Newhouse lived for 87 years and practised medicine for over 50 of them. She is well known for her work on the health hazards of asbestos. But today, Letty and I would like to remember our aunt in other ways too.

Molly (officially Muriel) was born in South Africa in 1912. The family moved back to London in 1922, where she and Marjorie went to St Pauls School. She then studied medicine, qualifying as a doctor in 1936. In her first 'House job' at the Royal Free, she met two of her lifelong friends Alice Stewart and Barbara Thomas. Both of them have helped me get the record straight although neither is able to be here today.

In 1942, Molly was called up to join the Royal Army Medical Corps, where she served for the rest of the War. Her first two years, in various military hospitals in Britain, were dominated by the need to master Documentation. 'We reckoned,' she wrote,' that for every ten minutes spent at the bedside, fifty were spent on paperwork'. One army doctor in twenty was a woman. Her manuscript memoirs also describe what it was like to be one of them.

> Throughout my service I found little prejudice against women. In the units one was know as 'Doc', and the Doc's word, whether man or woman , was law…

but some 'other ranks' did get confused , addressing her as ' Miss Newhouse, Sir"

Shortly after D-Day, Molly and her unit landed in Normandy, on a Mulberry harbour at Aromanches. Soon they were in the battle zone. Although officially a physician (supposed to treat the sick rather than the wounded) she was drawn into the hectic surgical ward in a front-line field hospital and worked for a time as anaesthetist. Firing was uncomfortably close, and casualties came in faster than they could be dealt with. Molly survived this exciting but stressful episode, and was soon on her way to India where she spent much of 1945 at various hospitals. 'To anyone straight out of England, the standard of comfort was positively startling', she wrote, and then elaborates,

> Under great pressure from my bearer, who thought a large household would add prestige to himself and myself, I hired a horse from the Hyderabad Army Surplus Horse Department and had lovely riding over the wide open country

While in India there was a surprise encounter with her brother, John, on his way back from Burma. Before the end of the year she was posted to Singapore, where her duties included the care of released prisoners of war, but the social life continued to be agreeable.

Molly came home in mid 1946 in a Flying Boat. By the time she was demobbed she had risen to the rank of Colonel, which was as high as women medical officers could go

She practised medicine as a civilian in England and Cyprus over the following years. Letty will say some more about this. John Newhouse persuaded his sister to come back in 1959 and do a course, in Occupational Medicine, at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She never turned back.

Molly was quickly taken on to the staff of the School . Her first study concerned skin disease in a car factory, but by the mid 1960s she was acknowledged as an expert on the health problems of asbestos. Her classic study of people in and around an asbestos factory in East London demonstrated a link between asbestos dust (with its dangerous fibres) and a deadly type of cancer, Mesothelioma. Patients included not only asbestos workers, but people living nearby and the families of asbestos workers. Wives who washed dusty work clothes could be affected.

This was only the start of a number of studies involving asbestos, various types of cancer, and lung disease by Molly and her colleagues, which all helped to make the hazards undeniable and encourage caution in those handling the material. Regulations, brought in 1969, banned the import of the more dangerous, blue, form of asbestos. Over the following years safety over the use of asbestos was gradually tightened further. Molly sat on a series of committees and continued to collect the evidence on the long-term consequences of exposure to asbestos.

Molly's research was pioneering in a different way, for the method she developed to keeping track of people who had been exposed to asbestos. This was done through flagging their record at the National Health Service Central Registrar. In its early days this was a very time-consuming business, but flagging is now widely used for studies in industrial and social medicine.

Apart from asbestos, Molly investigated a number of other problems: enzyme washing powders, welding, the corsetry of sales ladies, the manufacture of brakes, and a skin problem of North Sea Fishermen known as the Dogger Bank Itch. As a leading light of the Medical Women's Federation , she did a survey of women doctors. She also taught Occupational Medicine at the School of Hygiene, and practised it on an occasional basis. She retired officially in 1977, but continued, research, much of it collaborative, for another 10 years. She had been promoted to Reader in 1969, which for those days was just about as high as a woman could go in a University. She achieved international recognition and the respect and affection of her students and colleagues.

In these years, she lived mainly in a south-facing flat overlooking Hyde Park. She had a poodle called Perry and a fine collection of lustre-ware jugs. Her holidays included tours devoted to Garden History, and tending her own garden in Oxfordshire.

In her eighties, failing health, to her frustration, limited her activities. She even gave up smoking last year, but Scrabble with Alice continued. She spent her last two years at Fawler with a series kind helpers, who, as it happens also came from South Africa. They all deserve credit for taking excellent care of her, but Claudine Marais is due particularly honorable mention for her brave last stand last week.

I would like to end with thanks to Mol herself, not just for her contribution to science and environmental safety, but for her kindness, her generosity, her ability to listen and to give advice, her sense of humour and her sense of fun.

At the end of July 1942, my appointment at an Oxford hospital terminated, the decision asto what to do next was difficult. I had been advised to accept a position as one of the medical officers at an ordinance factory in Lancashire. This was undoubtedly extremely worthy war work, but considerably dull. I had not yet made up my mind definitely when the matter was taken out of my hands by receiving my calling up papers for the R.A.M.C. I spent justover four years in the Army, grumbling and planning for peace, and I left it with the most profound relief. Yet recently I have begun to look back with amusement and affection on those four years. I can pretend to no very heroic experiences, no great hardships, nothing that was not shared by hundreds of women and thousands of men, but perhaps the sentiment of that time, when our aims were simple and personal ambition for once a secondary consideration, is worth recalling.

It was a cold, miserable Saturday in November of 1942 that I first reported to the R.A.M.C. depot at Crookham. My predominant emotion was that of a new girl going to an extremely formidable school. I had fitted on my uniform and hated the sight of it, but of course it was not ready by the Saturday, so I set off in my old tweeds, rather pleased, as I at least avoided the sensation of being in fancy dress my khaki produced. We arrived at the R.A.M.C. depot in time for lunch. It was cold and seemed unfriendly and obviously full of people who knew all the ropes.

The memories of the first week are blurred and for the most part unpleasant. The chief is one of cold quarters and cold lecture rooms where we had dullish lectures on such subjects as the structure of a division and the duties of field ambulance, and so forth. On Sunday morning we did a tremendously long intelligence test, part of it simplicity itself, part of it appalling problems in mental arithmetic, While we performed I could hear one cracked bell tolling, presumably Aldershot's effort to celebrate the victory of El Alamein. I never dared find out my intelligence standard. I simple did not wish to know if I were only suitable to be employed as an unskilled labourer. There was a new intake of officers each week and by the end of the second week, there being even newer boys at the school, I was beginning to enjoy myself. There were only seven girls among our fifty odd recruits; four were from my medical school and also many of the men were known to me. Some had recently qualified at Oxford and I had been partly responsible for seeing them through their finals. They were delighted to find me a fellow recruit, and all wished to see me fire a rifle. I did not acquiesce in their wishes, but we all turned out together for one and a quarter hour's incredibly boring drill at 7.45 a.m. We marched, we doubled, we about turned and saluted by numbers, the girls always in the middle of the middle file of the middle squad, and the smallest of us always slightly out of step. However, after three weeks which included two good weekends in London, we left Crookham with pleasant memories of that well stocked bar, with Manet's bar maid over the fireplace, feeling extremely healthy and having forgiven the R.A.M.C. even for the unheated rooms and our first injection of T.A.B.

My first posting wasto a very large mixed camp at Oswestry. Here there were four training mixed A.A. regiments, an O.C.T.U., a school for A.T.S. officers, and various other units. There were seven M.O.s, four men and three women, a very friendly and agreeable crowd. We lived in fairly comfortable wooden quarters and there were two enormous messes, each accommodating about 200 officers. The bars of these messes were pretty animated, but there were a good many coffee parties and so forth in the various officers' quarters. I shared a room with a large, cheerful A.T.S. officer of about 22, a pleasant creature and very keen on her regimental duties. She wasorderly officer, poor soul, every other day, and rose at six in the morning, knocking over every item of/movable furniture on her way out. She used to explain to me why the women medical officers were unpopular with the A.T.S. officers; apparently they put on side and were entitled to wear the cross strap to the Sam Browne. I was still too much of a new girl to put on side to even an A.T.S. subaltern, and I had not bought a Sam Browne, so I was considered to be within the pale and, as I was such a new girl, my lack of military keenness was excused.

My own duties after the first week or two's bewilderment were fairly simple. At 8 o'clock I had a sick parade only for A.T.S. I then went to the camp hospital where I did a round of the A.T.S. beds. In the afternoon there were various inoculation parades and medical inspections. The A.T.S. girls came to this camp about their sixth week of military life. Their chief troubles were blisters from the smart new boots they were issued with and minor attacks of hysteria due to homesickness and the strangeness of army life. I soon found a little pamphlet which stated that care of the feet was the duty of the platoon officer, so gave an impassioned oration on blisters to the junior officers of my regiment and cut the attendance at sick parades by fifty per cent. The hysteria usually settled down after a day or two in the C.R.S. under the care of the charming V.A.D.s it was staffed with. I had plenty of time on my hands and had some pleasant trips to Chester and Shrewesbury, sitting in the front of an ambulance which had been detailed to take a patient to hospital. I was also impressed by the ideal opportunity for medical research. Here were thousands of men and women living under standard conditions and diet; how easy to investigate their vitamin requirements and so on. Poor innocent that I was, I did not realise then that to perform any useful research in the Army you needed the rank of a brigadier and the backing probably of the Cabinet itself.

Very soon Christmas came upon us; a Christmas in the Army was an entirely new experience. I had had several Christmases in hospital and was pretty used to being offered drinks in operating theatres, kitchens, first aid posts andother odd places. But this tremendous festival was something entirely outside my experience, Every mess gave a party, drink flowed throughout the twenty-four hours and a piece of mistletoe hung outside our mess made a hazard of every meal including breakfast. It lasted from a day or two before Christmas until, I think it was the sixth of January, when I was posted. I moved then to a large military hospital on the outskirts of Manchester. Until this time I had had really a very pleasant time. I had enjoyed the camp life. Methods seemed to be strange and rather peculiar, but little administration was in my hands and I hadbothered very little about Army forms and the like. Now I met Documentation in its full vigour. We reckoned at the hospital that for every ten minutes by the bedside fifty were spent on paper work. At first it seemed intolerable. Iwas hopelessly inaccurate, and everyone, from the corporal in the medical division office to the colonel commanding returned my papers for amendment. For the first few months the work was very dull too. I was in charge of a forty-bedded ward for the minor sick and for men for investigation, prior to medical boarding. They were a poor type of soldier, elderly, morose and a large proportion of low intelligence, as a very big Unarmed Pioneer depot was stationed nearby. My ward routine was varied by days as a member of medical boards and days in the admitting room.

It usually fell to my turn to assist with the medical boards on a Friday. This was a particularly dreary day as the psychiatric cases were dealt with. One of the commonest diagnoses was "psychopathic personality". This covered literally a multitude of sins, and the men were usually ones with unbeleivably long crime sheets, the intelligence standard of a child of four, and a similarity of appearance that was quite striking. They were untidy soldiers, often rather dirty, their brows were low and their necks thickset. The board usually accepted the specialist's report without dispute, and by 5 o'clock I could say wearily I had struck my blow for England by assisting from 25 to 30 men to leave His Majesty's Service. The admitting room washardly more inspiring. It was small and airless and well protected by blast walls that shut out all daylight. All day long men came for admission to hospital. They were rapidly examined, the necessary four forms and five signatures were filled in, and then they were sent to the appropriate ward. The most exciting duty was on a Saturday afternoon, when the casualties from the hospital's mixed hockey game arrived.

It was a bleak February. Manchester, hardly recovered from its blitz, wrapped in fog, rain and blackout, was more than depressing. To add to my troubles, as the most junior of the subalterns, and also I think because I was considered to have ideas a little above my humble station, I was continuously sent out on temporary duty. For ten days I looked after the Pay Corps in Rochdale, a week or two later I was in Bury, and again in Stockport. The Pay Corps had a large number of A.T.S. attached to it. They were locally recruited, lived at home and worked in the Pay Corps offices which were either in old and damp mills or warehouses. Thesegirls were supposed to be under military discipline and were supposed if ill to be admitted to the various small sickbays known as Camp Reception Stations. However, if "Muvver said" her girl was going to be at home for a day or two, athome she usually was, whatever the M.O., the A.T.S. officer or anyone else said. I think it was in Stockport that I crossed swords with a furious father who threatened me with the law for detaining his daughter with the beautifully permed hair in order to cleanse it from what I hastily explained was only a very minor attack of nits.

These jobs were on the whole extremely dreary. However, while doing one of them I lived in a boarding house where I shared a table with the officer in charge of travelling claims, and picked up some useful tips such as how to fill up that well known form, the 01771. The last temporary duty of that type I did was at Droitwich and was extremely pleasant. Spring was coming and the country was looking beautiful. It was a great relief to be away from Manchester. The C.R.S. was in a little converted temperance hotel and very comfortable. The staff were charming, the administration was done by a hyper-efficient sergeant. Five minutes signing morning and afternoon appeared to keep the concern going. I was only there for three weeks, so did not really look into things very deeply. There had been trouble about spoons disappearing and the A.D.M.S. had ordered them to be counted after every meal. However, it did not seem a very practical idea and I actually only lost three - total cost approximately 11d . One of my A.T.S. units was quartered in a large luxury hotel, which had most undesirably become bug ridden. The morning sick parade was enlivened by tearful little A.T.S. girls appearing with suspicious bites and the disgusting insects imprisoned in matchboxes. A very serious view of this outbreak was taken by the highest authorities, and one weekend we were visited by some very exalted hygiene experts from the War Office, who, after spending a considerable time inspecting the beautiful built-in wooden furniture and the very much less beautiful wooden bunks the girls were sleeping on, fumigated the affected wing with a very dangerous but highly efficaceous gas.

When I returned to Manchester, things appeared to be very much easier. I wasput in charge of a ward for acute medical cases and after this always hadinteresting work. The officer in charge of the medical division, my chief, had changed, and was now a physician of great experience and a delight to work under. He had had service in the previous war, had joined up again in 1939, and was recently returned from the Middle East. He had very little patience with the cumbersome paper chase of the Home Establishment, and to a very large extent he protected the junior officers of his division from the constant nagging and interference of the administrative side. All that summer we remained very busy. Large numbers of Italian P.O.W.s were admitted, many suffering with malaria. Also some convoys of our own men from North Africa and some returning via S.Africa from the Middle East. These latter had sheaves of documents which had to be seen to be believed. Sometimes it was possible to trace their progress from their original treatment in a Field Ambulance in the Western Desert, throughout months at the hospital in South Africa, to the hospital ship they were brought home in. But more often the essential documents which would have helped in preparing their papers for the final medical board were missing. If I mention the documents of the patient rather than the patient himself, I must be forgiven, but it was always on the paper work that emphasis lay.

The Italians were small, cheerful, docile patients. My ward sister had been in Lybia and the Western Desert and we soon picked up enough Italian to take an adequate medical history. The Italians were supposed to be isolated from the British, but they were nursed in the same wards and it was impossible to stop either the nursing staff or their fellow patients treating them as rather amusing pets. I remember the evening it was announced that Mussolini had abdicated. I happened to have about twenty Italians in my ward at the time. I thought they had better hear what I imagined would be most distressing news. "Mussolini", I gold them, in my best Italian, "Mussolini e finito". They understood at once. "Bene, bene", they cried, and cheered. Poor fellows! little they cared about politics. They thought they would be sent home at once, for, although they were delighted to be warm, safe and comfortable in hospital, they didn't care for the Manchester climate.

German prisoners were treated rather differently and segregated in small wards under armed guards. We only had a few at a time. Three I rememberhad typhoid fever and managed to keep up their attitude of offended arrogance throughout that long and distressing illness. As the summer ~~was~~ wore on we began to hear rumours via the local post office, the shoemaker, the civilian cook's assistant, and various other reliable sources that we were going to be taken over by the Americans. It seemed a pity to me as by that time I had been five or six months at the hospital and was busy and happy. The medical and nursing staff were continuously changing but in the medical division we had had an immunity from posting for some months and had got a very workmanlike team together. Our leisure time was spent bicycling round North Cheshire and we had several very charming little pubs we used to visit.

One, a delightful little place except when the wind was blowing directly off the sewage farm (I should explain that the hospital was surrounded on three sides by sewage farms), had a quite exceptional supply of liquor for those thirsty days. We were convinced some of it was smuggled up the Ship Canal, but quite where it could be smuggled from in 1943 it never occurred to us to question.

In spite of the rumours, life continued much the same throughout August and September. At the end of the month we were told to clear the hospital for an important convoy, and we soon learnt we were to receive 300 of the first batch of prisoners to be repatriated from Germany. As usual with convoys, it was several days later than expected and after the preliminary rather heavy work of ~~two o~~ evacuating our patients had been done, we had two or three empty days of waiting, while our expectancy and tension grew. Eventually, the train carrying our convoy arrived in Manchester about midnight, and it was 1 o'clock that the buses were seen coming up the hospital drive.

The staff had decorated the hall of the hospital, which was filled with many more than the authorised reception party, for at that time we felt that men from Germany were like men from another world. The first party to come in out of the blackout was about twenty blinded officers. A horrified silence fell on us. This was worse than anything we had imagined. However there was no time to sentimentalise, as this was late on Monday night and we hoped to have the whole convoy examined, documented and away on leave by the Wednesday morning.

The quartermaster had prepared a large and heavy meal and in a very short time the wards were filled with incredibly cheerful, robust and startlingly normal soldiers, tucking in to roast mutton, apple pudding and a glass of beer. However, about three o'clock they were all in bed and the medical staff retired. The clerks remained ~~and~~ at their desks throughout that night and the next preparing the endless documents relating to pay, rations, railway warrants, medical boards and so forth. Our week started the following morning and I went from bed to bed, hearing again and again the story of the march back from the coast into Germany, more than three years previously. Many of the men had suffered privations the~~re~~n they had never recovered from. Others had been sent to work in salt mines in Germany and Poland and had contracted serious chest disease. All said they had nearly starved until the Red Cross parcels started to come. On the other hand, some had been passed as unfit by the medical board months before and had since completely recovered. I remember a pair of marines who had been captured in Greece who were particularly triumphant. On the Wednesday morning the work was done and the men ready to go on leave; the Press was allowed in - the first time I had seen it at work, and I was surprised at the careful posing of pictures which look so impromptu when seen in the morning papers.

We never opened the hospital for general admissions again, for now at last the Americans were really coming. Not at once, of course, not for three or four weeks, and the unit, which had been in Manchester since September 1939, began to dissolve itself. My work ceased when the wards were empty. I was sent out occasionally to do sick parades in Manchester, and even held a sick parade surrounded by enormous military policemen in Arkwright Jail. But otherwise the days were empty of labour. During this time we were much occupied with farewell parties; the officers' mess, the sisters' mess, the V.A.D.s' mess, the drivers' and the sergeants', and so on. The current drink was a sticky rum and orange mixture, which tasted rather nasty but provided oceans of good feeling. Eventually the Americans arrived. As I watched their enormous trucks drive into the grounds I had the guilty feeling that this was what was meant by "occupation". However, the advance party of ten officers and ten nurses proved to be very good fun. They were from Chicago, and all had Italian names. The surgeon smoked wicked black cigars at breakfast and they all put marmalade in their porridge. However, for two or three weeks we lived like fighting cocks, first our own quartermaster showing what he could do, then a delirious ten days on American rations with grapefruit juice, orange juice, peanut butter, sauerkraut and other exotic dishes. Meanwhile it rained and the Americans told us about Chicago and how inefficient were the British methods of heating and what they thought of Manchester. Another series of parties broke out, the American nurses gave a dance, and we had the great pleasure of watching our colonel dancing cheek to cheek with the youngest and prettiest.

Eventually my new posting came through and I heard I was to go to a small hospital in North Wales. By this time I had been in the Army a year, had acquired the three pips of a captain, and had also become a graded physician. My feet were definitely off the bottom rung of the ladder, but it took me many more months to realise that it was possible to control my destiny even to the slightest extent, to make myself moderately comfortable, or to become aware of future moves events by any other method than the grapevine that started somewhere near the colonel's batman.

My arrival at the new hospital was not very propitious. I alighted at a small station on the North Wales coast and my heavy luggage continued on to Llandudno. It took three hours for the hospital, which was some four miles from the station, to find a truck to send to meet me. I eventually arrived in the dripping dark. I found I was to share a smallish room with two other women M.O.s. One took me aside and told me the other was suffering from epilepsy. A few moments later the other confided that the first was very neurotic and only wished to be boarded out of the Army. There were four or five other officers whom I met at dinner who appeared, I was thankful to notice, to be more or less normal. The hospital was situated in a mid Victorian baronial hall; previous to having been taken over by the Army it had been a rather crankish rheumatism clinic. It was inconvenient as a hospital as, although there were some fine lofty wards, there were two or three steps between each ward and distribution of food and stretcher carrying was awkward. The work was not arduous, though my old friends the Unarmed Pioneers had also moved and were now again stationed only a few miles away, and arrived in their scores at my out-patient clinics. There was very little to do outside the hospital. It was damp, wet weather for walking and the hospital was in the middle of a large park two miles on either side from a main road. Just outside the gates was a little golf club where we met the officers of the neighbouring camp and had some merry evenings, but my mother tells me I wrote and told her I had found myself soliloquising aloud to the sheep, and really I'm not surprised. Christmas came in a burst of warm sunshine. The festivities were not nearly so severe as they had been at the A.A. camp. For one thing, the colonel did not approve, and secondly our quartermaster, a universally popular little man who was quite round and bald and wasof course known as Pop, disposed of most of the mess whiskey ration by his own methods - which were probably responsible for his rolling down a narrow and twisting turret staircase, without however injuring himself.

At the turn of the year I was beginning to get very restive. Some people were going overseas, new hospitals were being formed, and I seemed well and truly out of it. When the colonel began to take each of his officers in turn on one side and complain of electric shocks in the right side of his tongue, I took it he had caught the prevailing neurosis and began to wonder whether I could not agitate for a posting. However, to my relief a posting arrived and about the middle of January 1944 I moved to Shrewesbury.

Here a 1,200-bed hospital that was to form one of the base hospitals for the 21st Army Group was beginning to mobilise. When I arrived it was having severe growing pains. The wards and outpatients were extremely busy. The medical officers particularly on the medical side appeared to have been selected by someone with no mean sense of humour. Our O.C. division, a tall pale gentleman with large black moustache, had a daily consumption of three double gins before lunch and uncountable double whiskies before and after dinner. In fact, the mess secretary reckoned he consumed half the mess liquor ration for a month in ten days. I thought little of him, and he less of me for he told me affectionately at some sergeants' mess dance,"My dear, I think your medicine stinks". I should have replied, "Maybe, but not of gin" - but its taken me four years to think of that doubtfully witty reparte, and even a rather tipsy colonel is big game for a young female captain. The rest of the medical division consisted of three dentists who also had medical qualifications but who for respectively five, seven and twelve years had only practised dentristy, a young M.O. who had been captured in Norway and repatriated the previous October, a charming, intelligent person, but not unreasonably he felt uncertain of himself and out of touch with medical practice, and the last member of the division was a hard working young Welsh woman M.O. who had been qualified only six months.

My duties consisted of care of one medical ward and supervision of two others, where I had to give advice about treatment and help with the documentation. I also had a soldiers' outpatients, an A.T.S. outpatient clinic, as well as this. The hospital was a centre for new recruits to the Q.A.I.M.N.S., whom I had to examine, and we also examined new recruits for the R.A.M.C. I was well and truly busy, but I was always happiest in the Army when I had more work than I knew what to do with, and the days passed rapidly.

The colonel at this hospital was much against having women medical officers on his staff. We heard later he had protested at a War Office conference at taking them overseas, but had been overruled as there was a great shortage of medical manpower and the women were required to make up the establishments of base hospitals ~~both~~ in the 21st Army Group in the Far East. Throughout my service I found very little prejudice against women. In the units one was known as "Doc", and the Doc's word, whether man or woman, was law. The patients also accepted the women M.O.s as doctors without question. The other ranks of one's unit, particularly some of the older regulars, found it a little difficult to reconcile the idea of a woman with the idea of an officer, and I was frequently told, "You are wanted on the phone, Miss Newhouse Sir". One excellent R.S.M., who wasin hospital for a long time and used to help with the clerical work, greeted me every day with "Good morning Sir", but did not hesitate to ask my advice on purely feminine questions such as what presents to send to his wife and neice. As the usual proportion of women to men medical officers was about one to twenty, it was very rarely necessary for a woman to deal with male V.D., the only province where genuine embarassment might occur, and as for inspections of cookhouses, quarters, hospital premises, latrines and so forth, I think the average woman has a keener eye for dirt, stopped up drains and unpleasant smells than the average young man. One result of the colonel's prejudice was that I slept in a billet justoutside the hospital instead of in the mess. This was an advantage, as I was much spoilt, a large fire lighted in my room every evening and breakfast in bed with a farmhouse egg every Sunday. I nearly lost my comfortable billet when I was serenaded by an American officer, who was paying us a goodwill visit, at about 2 o'clock in the morning. The singing could have been explained, but the appearance of a large cabbage on the doorstep, left in lieu of a bouquet, defeated me. Riccey was one of the best, but when the performance was repeated two nights later I couldhave boxed his ears.

At Shrewesbury, as well as eight male wards we also had a ward for A.T.S. This was staffed by a sister and V.A.D.s instead of R.A.M.C. nursing orderlies, but in the isolation block, where there were usually one or two girls with measles or chicken pox, although the nursing was done by sisters, some of the cleaning of the wards was done by the R.A.M.C. orderlies on duty. This led to a curious protest. The wives of the R.A.M.C. orderlies wrote to the War Office protesting their husbands had not joined the Army to nurse a lot of A.T.S. hussies. This did not make the colonel feel any kinder towards women in general or his women M.O.s in particular.

Shrewesbury wasone of the pleasantest messes I was ever in. The dominant personality was that of the senior surgeon, an Irishman who had been with an advanced hospital in Tunisia. He had a great contempt for red tape and bumbledom, a flow of language that made his bridge playing a constant source of delightful surprises, and above all a great keenness and enthusiasm for surgery. His lectures on war surgery were vivid and very well worth attending. Another good friend was fat Sammy, who had commanded a hospital in Iceland for three years. He told us that "The first winter you look at the Penguins, the second winter you talk to the Penguins, and the third winter the Penguins talk to you." However, he appeared to be normal, and cheerful enough, that spring, but rather bitter at losing his majority, Eventually he was posted away to command an ambulance train and his majority was restored.

We were getting very excited by this time for this was the early spring of 1944 and although security was the watchword it was obvious that sometime, something, was going to happen. We were visited by the senior consultants of the 21st Army Group, and the specialists were introduced and interviewed. We were also issued with the shoulder badges, blue shields with a red cross, which we were told were distinctive for the 21st Army Group. I was naive enough to be really thrilled by my shoulder badges. In fact I still have them. After six or seven weeks I felt very attached to this unit and it was a great blow when I heard that I wasto move again. Actually that unit did not have such a happy time. They had many changes of staff, spent a miserable summer in huts and went to Brussels, I think, very late in 1944.

My next unit was again in Wales, and after ten days leave in London helping to clear up our blitzed flat I reported to Bellas y Coed. This was another 1,200-bed hospital of the 21st Army Group. Only half of it was stationed at Bellas, and it was hardly functioning as a hospital. We had a few beds open and usually managed to muster about fifteen to twenty patients, and although some of the officers were always away on courses and so forth there were very often more medical staff than patients and the routine work averaged about twenty minutes a day. However, distractions were arranged for us. Every Tuesday morning from 9.30 to 10 o'clock we were our gas masks. On Thursday mornings the colonel inspected the two wards and fifteen patients, while we trooped around after him solemnly wearing our hats and exchanging salutes. About once in ten days one would be orderly officer and inspect the men's meals and the fire piquet. It fell to my lot to lecture to the orderlies for their nursery examination. These lectures were based on the R.A.M.C. manual, so many paragraphs per lecture, and they interested the lecturer as little as the men, and the only laugh in a series of ten was gained by making them practice artificial respiration on each other.

There was a feeling that there should be some pretence at keeping occupied during the morning and that one should stay within the precincts of the building, But in the afternoon this did not appear to be necessary and we explored that lovely country. We walked for miles round the Conway Valley and up to Capel Curig, Snowdon and Tryffan. There were two excellent little hotels open in the village and during April and May several friends and relatives came to spend a few days' holiday and envy me the lovely surroundings. But in spite of a fine spring, beautiful countryside, plenty of books from London and very pleasant companions among the hospital staff I remained rather irritated and miserable. One reason, I think, was that this unit had been in existence some considerable time. It had been to the Middle East and had worked in Teheran for a few months, and the mess was divided into the group who knew what was what and who prefaced every second remark with "When we were in Teheran" - the old soldiers in fact - and the rest. I missed the feeling of expectancy and preparation that had been so marked in Shrewesbury. Here security was so intense that as far as the junior fry were concerned we might have been going to spend the rest of the war in the depths of Wales. Also all leave had been stopped since February and there was a ban on travelling more than 20 miles from one's unit, and this induced a claustrophobic feeling.

However, even in the depths of Wales certain signs of forthcoming events became apparent. The first of these was a programme of quite tough training for the company. Of course the old hands who had been in Teheran knew all about tent pitching and the like, but they were put through it again and half the company were taken for an hour's march each day. I, in a spirit of bravado induced by a highly delightful climb over Tryfan and the Glyders, agreed to accompany them one day, and set off clad in boots and gaiters with a small pack on my back and a webbing belt round my waist. I marched at the head of the column with the company officer, and though I completed the ten miles, gained the best crop of blisters I have ever seen. The company officer, Jock, was a great lad. He was an instrument maker in Edinburgh in civil life and a territorial. He had come straight to us from an infantry O.C.T.U., and his tales of the O.C.T.U. were a constant source of entertainment. One instructor whom, he said, "wore a wee cap on his head like Robin Hood", used to appeal for "bags of glint" - "Now men, I want bags of glint!" "Bags of glint" became a catchword with us for many weeks. There were two other girls among theM.O.s, Bell and Kit, both good companions, and when we were issued with our webbing we spent many an hour fitting it together and climbing in and out of it, and when we eventually started moving the three of us had a pretty slick drill for getting each other dressed, our belts fastened and packs adjusted. For we were issued with the same clothes and equipment as the male M.O.s and saw no reason why we should not dress up as real soldiers. The Matron, on the other hand, would on no account allow her Sisters to be put into trousers, and they went to Normandy in their grey and scarlet or khaki suits, and I do not suppose they were any more comfortable than we were. The next problem to occupy us was the question of kit. For we were allowed a valise weighing 66 lbs., a small piece of hand luggage and as much as we could carry on our backs. There were many anxious weighings, for one camp bed alone weighed 22 lbs and each blanket 4 lbs, and we were told we must be self contained for several months. We still knew nothing about our future. D.Day came, and the finer feelings which drove the Londoners to Westminster Abbey were unknown to me as I was only possessed by an intense irritation that I was wasting my time in this one-eyed Paradise of peacefulness, while the rest of the world, including - oh crowning injury - two parties from my own unit, were at long last engaged in great events. However about the 15th of June the R.T.O. was seen coming from the colonel's office and without further ado Bell and Kit and I did our final pack. Sure enough, the following morning there were orders to move. This was my first move with a unit in the Army and I was rather surprised to find it was necessary for everyone to be at the station at least two hours before the train left, but I soon grasped the idea and very soon found that the most essential parts of one's equipment were a long novel, several parcels of food and a largish flask of whiskey. We had a special train which took us from North Wales and I firmly believe I was the only person on the train who had no idea of its destination. At Llandudno "we married moved up" - lovely R.T.O's. phrase - with the rest of the unit. After a few hours the country became familiar and my pitying friends told me we were going to Reigate. The train was taken through London from the G.W.R. to the Southern Line and we were intensely embarrassed when the Londoners, now suffering badly from buzz bombs, turned out into their little gardens to cheer us on our way.

We arrived about 9 o'clock in the evening and were packed into three-ton lorries and taken to a large country house, a most beautiful mansion, with exquisite panelling of walnut oak and pine, but entirely bereft of furniture. An advance party had provided some sort of meal and by the time this was eaten our valises had arrived and we set off to find a place to sleep. We should have been quicker off the mark, for as we wearily lugged our 66 lbs. of valise up the stairs, it became apparent that the sisters were firmly established in all the likely rooms and our batman had made his usual strategic retreat. However, we eventually found a little room, that must have at one time been the quarters of My Lord's under kitchen maid. Here we set up our camp beds, the three just fitted in, drove in nails and rigged up bits of string to hang our clothes on, and fell into bed. We remained in Surrey for about three weeks. We ate off bare ~~little~~ trestle tables out of mess tins, a messy procedure and not really necessary as we had a large mess staff of batmen and orderlies and the mess equipment wouldhave been easy enough to unpack. My brother, who visited me whenever our respective units were within a hundred or two miles of each other, was always astonished at the low level of comfort and the poor quality of the food in the R.A.M.C!s General Hospital messes. He told me that no combatant colonel would havetolerated such a standard in a static unit for an instant.

However, I was not with the unit very much at this time, for it was only three quarters of an hour's journey to my home in Paddington. So much of the day was spent in London. A very strange London it was, emptied of most of the services and the Americans by the Invasion, but dominated by the frightful doodle bug. My mother was not well and I was able to get a night's leave to take her to Oxford.

I neglected to go through that formality before spending another night having an all time and everlasting row with my erratic young man. Bell rang me up at 7.30 in the morning to tell me my absence had been noted, and on my return I was given the greatest talking to my my C.O. that it had been my fortune to have since I left school. As well asthe crime of being absent without leave, a pretty bad one, it appeared I was also guilty of grinning in an insolent fashion when found not wearing my gas mask in the sacred period 9.30 to 10 Tuesday morning. As the song says, "This is the Army, Mr. Jones". No action was taken, but my mouth had been dry with fright and I thought it wiser after this to stay a little closer to the unit, and spent some quite pleasant mornings in the Park, the hours punctuated by the doodle bugs, which used to come over in threes. It was uncanny seeing them sail straight through the ack-ack and the balloon barrage. Just over our heads the chase was taken up by fighters, and one's anxiety to see the kill usually predominated over the fear they would crash on the roof. They were most terrifying at night when their crescendo roar appeared to shake the atmosphere.

One morning we were told to pack all our stuff for a trial load of the lorries. It was all stacked on the lawns and it was most shaming to see the mountainous pile of officers' and sisters' luggage against the neat stack of kit bags of the company. Yet I myself, for the only time in my life, was really travelling light. Even if I had squeezed in six blankets and a pillow.

Eventually we moved again to the concentration area. The wiser officers quietly took a taxi to the station, but Bell and Kit and I solemnly marched off with the company and it was only a mile and a half and quite enjoyable. We arrived in a camp in the New Forest sometime in the afternoon. It was a marvellously run camp; five weeks previously it had held the real assault troops. Now it was more than three quarters empty. In our part of the camp, ourselves, our sisters and the nurses of a Canadian General Hospital were quartered. The camp staff could not do enough to make us comfortable and help us find our way about. We spent three days there and after the past three weeks of family troubles, doodle bugs and my little do with the colonel, it was extremely pleasant to lie under the trees reading detective stories and writing the rather vague letters the situation called for.

We got to know some of the Canadian nurses,who were extremely good fun. They looked so neat too in their well cut jackets and trousers. Their luggage was standardised and their packs light enough for them to carry without a struggle. We three women M.O.s by then were not looking any too tidy, and our sisters, strung about with gas masks, iron rations and water bottles and each with the most enormous suitcase and numerous little bundles of rugs and flasks, looked more like the harrassed housewife on Christmas Eve than part of an Expeditionary Force. The camp had loudspeakers attached to practically every tree. These broadcast light music, interrupted every few minutes by calls for the leaders of the various drafts. The food was quite good and,I noted with interest, served in quite a civilised fashion, while a tent known as the Blue Peter Club boasted a real fireplace, armchairs and a respectable selection of Tatlers and Punches. We did not see much of the other officers of the unit, who were in another part of the camp, but they strolled over occasionally to call. On the fourth morning we were paraded early, packed into the inevitable 3-tonner and taken down to a pier somewhere in Southampton Water to embark. As we struggled up the pier we could see a curious looking craft tied up at the end and hear the startled exclamation from the deck, "Blimey, its women".

We climbed on board and learnt we were on an L.C.T. There was a sort of hold below with bunks in it, a deck, liberally bestrewn with gun turrets and other mysterious objects, to sit on. After the whole party was aboard we moved out into Southampton Water. We were not to sail until dark. The day was spent watching the amazing variety of small craft and singing songs with the Canadians. Half of the personnel of the hospital was on this ship and half on another which lay alongside. We sailed about 10 o'clock in a large convoy, and at 11, exhausted by the novelty of the proceedings, I went down to my bunk and, without thinking and in defiance of all regulations, undressed, put on my pyjamas, and went to sleep. I came on deck again about 5 in the morning and there ahead of us, low and dark, with no sign of activity, no sign of war or the enemy, lay the coast of France. All around us were ships of all sizes and shapes and as we came in there were many quite large liberty ships and cargo vessels unloading into ducks and lighters. The officer on watch invited us up onto the little bridge and we were able, while sipping a mug of steaming tea, to watch the approach through glasses. The Mulberry Port had just been completed and I was relieved to learn from the naval officers that we were going to come alongside and step ashore dryfoot.

However, for some reason we dropped anchor about a quarter of a mile away and for an hour or two the flat bottomed ship wallowed about in a nauseating fashion. At this moment the cooks chose to serve breakfast and very soon produced a pile of pink, greasy looking, tinned salmon about two foot high. I myself by good chance am a good sailor and was able to deal with some dry biscuits and strawberry jam, but many of our sisters were completely overcome. It is a curious fact that those excellent girls of the Q.A.I.M.N.S., who are imperturbed by snow, rain, mud and the summer heat of India, are inevitably prostrated by seasickness and often much distressed by a simple train journey.

Eventually we disembarked and lorries came out along the quay to pick us up. The men and the officers we left standing in a miserable looking huddle as they were to march to our next destination, and from their expressions of mixed determination and apprehension one gathered that the general impression was that this would be on Rommel's doorstep. We had an exciting drive up the low cliffs ofAremanches and the 2-3 miles into Bayeux. The fields on either side were thick with troops bivouacking and there was an enormous amount of traffic. Our driver got lost in Bayeux and we had a good look at the town as he cast about for our road. I still felt it uncanny, all those ships, now all these troops, an untouched town and not even an enemy aircraft. We arrived at a hospital at the other side of Bayeux. There tents were erected and ready for the reception of casualties, but much to their annoyance they were being used as a transit camp for othermedical units. The sisters disappeared into the field where the sisters' mess was situated and we were hospitably received by the officers' mess. We were a slight embarrassment as our valises were with the heavy equipment of the hospital and we had neither bed, blankets nor wash basins. However, the three of us were given a small tent of the Padre's near their little chapel, and lent stretchers and blankets to sleep on. I did not meet my own kit for another three weeks. Soon we were sitting down to a meal in a Normandy orchard, some sort of spam with iron-hard biscuits, but nobly balanced by fresh farm butter and Camenbert cheese. There were two other women M.O.s with this unit and they rapidly explained how to acquire 7-lb. biscuit tins as washbowls and how to convert the wooden boxes the rations came in into valuable pieces of tent furniture. Their tent was very cosy and I believe even had table cloths. After supper I became involved in my first piece of work in the beachhead. This was no less than assistance at the accouchement of a French baby. A complete family, monsieur, madame and grandpère, wandered into the field in great distress and explained in their difficult Norman French that the young madame was expecting a baby very soon and, what with the Débarquement and the curfew, they did not think they could contact the midwife, they understood this was a hospital, could we help? By all means. One of the other girls was an obstetrician, I could speak French, and we went and examined the "jeune madame". There was no call for immediate action. We showed grandpère where my tent was and assured the family we would be on hand for the next few days. The following evening the rest of the unit arrived. They had had a miserable time, spent the night in a field they were sure was mined, marched hundreds of miles, been machine gunned, and one of the N.C.O.s had been hit and taken to hospital. It turned out that it was a wooden bullet and he was back with us in three weeks. However they had brought eleven bottles of whiskey with them, and we felt a slight celebration was due. I retired to my stretcher about 1 o'clock, having celebrated sufficiently to make the blackout seem quite impenetrable and full of great hazards. About 3, I was awakened from a frightful dream - by grandpere. "Would we come at once?". The rest of the night had a most unreal quality. The little house was continuously shaken by gunfire, which was almost unnoticeable in the open or in a tent, and grandmere had a collection of obstetric horrors which, related in half understood French, beat anything I had heard in the Greys Inn Road into a cocked hat. However, the dresings and equipment and the baby's clothes were quite first class and by seven o'clock we had liberated another fine little Frenchman. I got to know this family very well and during the next few months was invited to several magnificent Sunday lunches and some really lovely old calvados. The baby's father was in hiding still when we arrived, but came back to his family soon after the fall of Paris. The next day I was asked to organise a clinic for evacuees, and had already, with the assistance of two 9 year olds from the village, scrubbed out the village schoolroom, but at lunchtime I was told to pack my kit as I was to report to another hospital for temporary duty.

I am not very clear on exact dates, but it was now about D. plus 35 or 40, about the middle of July. A large hospital centre was being created at Bayeux. The hospitals were situated along the St. Lo and Lettrey Roads. At this time there was still very heavy fighting in the St. Lo and Caen areas, and the hospitals that were already open were being extremely hard worked. I myself was a physician, that is, normally I dealt with the sick rather than the wounded, but the weather was very fine and I knew there was very little sickness and that I should probably haveto undertake some surgical duties, and as I bumped along in the truck I hoped I would not make too much of a fool of myself.

This new hospital had officially 600 beds. It had been in Normandy some time, but had been open about ten days. They had admitted, I think, 700 casualties on their first day and the pressure of work had continued at about the same level ever since. I found I wasin charge of a surgical ward and was also working shifts in the resuscitation tent. At thattime the casualties were being evacuated 48 hours after their reception. The casualties came to the hospital via a field dressing station and a casualty clearing station. They were received in a big reception tent, and then alloted to the various other wards. These tented hospitals were wonderfully comfortable. There were beds, chairs and tables and very good equipment. As my ward filled up it was my duty to go round with the sister, examine the patients and make a note on their medical cards, prescribe immediate treatment, decide whether to retain or evacuate immediately, and prepare an operating list in order of urgency for the surgeons. That is, the most serious cases were operated on first. As there were some half a dozen M.O.s doing the same type of work and only two teams of surgeons, though the operating theatres were working throughout the 24 hours, there was some urgency to get your patients examined and your operating list to the theatre as rapidly as possible, for it is not pleasant to see your own patients deteriorating while waiting for operation. It was exciting work. The men were the most magnificent fellows and usually in very high spirits. They told us what was going on up there, vivid accounts of small tank actions and some pictures of life in a slit trench. Usually once they were fed and washed and their wounds dressed they slept until again disturbed, for it was very many weeks since they had been in a real bed and they were bone tired, but in spite of their very real fatigue they were so physically fit that they had an enormous power of recovery. The wards were never quiet, either a convoy was being admitted or their was an evacuation by sea or by air, or patients were being carried to the X-ray tent or the operating theatre, and it was not impossible for a patient destined for an

X-ray of his collar bone to find himself in an ambulance and two hours later at a hospital in England. However, I think there was a good deal of order behind the apparent chaos, and an amazing amount of good work was done. Everybody was helpful in those days. The hospital staff was not nearly large enough to deal with the flow of casualties and the skin wards particularly provided a very skillful team of stretcher bearers.

The resuscitation tent adjoined the operating theatre. Casualties who were very severely wounded and required immediate blood transfusion were admitted into this tent and the M.O. in charge was directly in touch with the surgeon. I usually worked there at night. Tempers were pretty short in the theatre and they did not suffer fools gladly. However the surgical specialist had had a great deal of battle experience in Lybia and whatever his language, his judgement was certain and his skill constant in spite of incredibly long hours operating.

The night sister in the resuscitation ward was a good ally. She was small and pretty, with blazing blue eyes in a brown tanned face, for she slept by day and had her bed out of doors. She had a wonderful facility for making a badly wounded man comfortable, without disturbing the wound or the transfusion, and her cups of tea, strong, hot and sweet, were famous throughout the hospital, and she always had cigarettes and sweets for tired M.O.s who dropped in for a sit down and a little gossip. At this time there were nightly raids on the post and this hospital on the Littré Road was usually liberally bespattered with shrapnel, I think from our own batteries. I only remember one nervous moment, when Sister and I stood on the ridge looking towards Caen, where there appeared to be a good deal of noise and a great deal going on. "I suppose we are advancing", I said. She supposed so in a rather unconvinced sort of way. There wasonly one obvious course of action - "a nice cup of tea" - and shortly afterwards another batch of admissions made us too busy to notice the outside world.

I shared a tent here with an old friend from hospital, who had also suffered with me at Manchester. We were delighted to meet again and our domestic life was happy. After another week or two life became quieter and there was time to visit other hospitals and units, for by now everyone one had ever known was in or around Bayeux. I went into Bayeux for the first time. It was easy to get into the little town. One stepped outside the hospital and hitched the first vehicle that came along. I bought some camenberts and sent them home, but the shops otherwise were empty for Bayeux had been crowded with troops for weeks. I had dinner at the Lyons D'or, a not very good meal, and saw the war correspondents at their special table with their rather special food and wine, which I presume they collected on their visits to forward areas.

About this time I went to a party given by the Welsh Guards.

A long, candle lit table in a barn, lovely food, American coffee, good claret, and a Welsh choir singing in the apple orchard outside. I felt as if I had stepped into a novel about the last war.

After three weeks my official replacement arrived, and regretfully I reported back to my own unit. Here things were not so good. Much of our tentage and equipment was lost, the hospital was not open, the mess was living at the bottom of an enormous field, and my share of Lebensraum was a third of a bell tent, the other two thirds being occupied by Bell and Kit. Rather cramped quarters for three young women, as by now our heavy kit had turned up. However a Pioneer major lent us another tent and for a while we were rather comfortable, but then the mess secretary took our bell tent to store mess goods and we all moved back into one tent with the rather uneasy feeling that if our friend the Pioneer major was to move suddenly we should have no tent at all. For another ten days or so we were idle. We wandered round the lanes and drank bad, bad cider and worse calvades at little estaminets. One farmhouse gave us lovely cider. They were a violently pro-English family and entertained us with stories of how they had outwitted the Germans during the occupation and had successfully hidden an English flyer shortly before the invasion. We visited our friends up and down the Littré and St. Lo Roads, picked mushrooms in the fields and watched the Typhoons circle overhead. Eventually our harassed quartermaster found about half of our tentage and equipment. The wards were set up, equipment issued, inventories made, and we were ready for the reception of casualties. By this time the battle was moving on, the Americans had broken through on the right and the 21st A.G. on the left. In fact it was shortly before the closure of the Falaise Gap. By now many hospitals were open, but the pressure of work was still pretty heavy. For a short time I worked as an anaesthetist in the operating theatre. I worked with the junior surgeon and we prided ourselves on our speed, particularly in the short time wasted between each case. My worst moment was after a long all night session, when we had dealt with some ten to fifteen cases, to find a worried orderly looking with despair at a large bowl filled with artificial teeth. He had remembered to remove them before the anaesthetic was administered, but neglected to send them back to the ward with the patient. My best moment I think was when a very young Canadian officer, already a little drowsy and tipsy with his injection of morphia, looked up as I approached him with my syringe to put him to sleep, and drawled with the greatest affection, "My, my, a lady doc!"

In the middle of August, we received a great number of German prisoners from the Falaise Gap, including all the patients from a captured German field hospital. The Germans were dirty, tired and lousy. Their wounds were in a very bad condition, and I found them sulky and unpleasant. They were unbelievably misinformed and one asked where the bridge across the Channel was.

Among the P.O.W.s were one or two Russian boys of 16 or 17 years old, who had been with the German Army for two years. There were also some Poles, who professed themselves to be very happy to be in English hands.

Soon the armies were across the Seine and the work became less and less and I became restless again. I had liked the more friendly atmosphere in the smaller hospital. My relations with the management in this unit were never too happy and I felt I would like to move to a 600-bedded hospital, which was more mobile than the 1,200-bedders and kept nearer to the forward area, so I put in an application. I saw the Medical Brigadier, who remarked wearily that the women M.O.s were a good deal more bloodthirsty than the male, but he would see what he could do. I got movement alright, for within three months I was on my way to India. However, when my posting came through there was as yet no word of this. I moved to a hospital which was situated right in the middle of Bayeux. It had stopped receiving casualties but was the hospital for the entire Aromanches and Bayeux area. To my disappointment, there was no question of moving up to Brussells, but there was ample work. Strangely enough we had a busy malaria ward, for the weather was now wet and cold, and men who had fought in Africa and Sicily were relapsing frequently. There was a good deal of "Normandy tummy" about and our wards were full. My chief here was an old colleague from Oxford, the most unmilitary soldier, even the R.A.M.C. had produced, but with a dry sense of humour and an uncompromising honesty that was pretty rare in the army. He still worked in the mental atmosphere and at the pace of a research laboratory, so I had plenty of running round to do.

My tent mate at this unit was a Scots girl, Jeannie, an anaesthetist. I felt guilty towards her as I had been cross posted with her fiance. I apologised one day, but, "Ach", she said, in her soft little Highland voice, "Don't worry, it brought the matter to a head."

Our tent was very comfortable, lined with fibre matting and heated by no less than three paraffin stoves, for it was beginning to get very chilly in the evenings. It was a friendly unit and, being in the heart of Bayeux, we were regular patrons of the Garrison Cinema and the theatre. By this time it was forbidden to eat in any French restaurant, but we had some very enjoyable French meals, even if one did keep an uneasy watch for the A.P.M. About the middle of October, Jeannie and I moved into billets, where I slept on an enormous curtained fourposter with voluminous feather beds, sheer heaven after months on a camp bed. The batman, as he came in to light the paraffin stove in the morning, used to greet me with a broad Somerset "Good marning milady". We both felt we were rather too comfortable for it to last long and, sure enough, on October 20th orders came to close the hospital and pack up. It was about time, as the paths round the wards were ankle deep in mud and as the winter approached the tents themselves became damp and unpleasant. Very soon our next destination became fairly clear, for all the members of the staff with previous overseas service were posted away. We still had another two or three weeks in France, which were very pleasant. We took to hitch-hiking round the country seeing the sights. We managed to tour the Falaise Gap, still after two months a very nasty sight. We went several times to Caen, to Lineux and to Deauville. Bayeux itself was improving. The army had almost disappeared, the French had returned. The cafes were getting restocked with wine and beer and the shops were filling up with wildly expensive perfumes, powders and other knick-knacks. On November 6th we reembarked for England, not a highly successful invasion on my part, as I had never penetrated officially more than seven miles from the coast.

The crossing back was simply shocking. I do not remember the name of the ship, but she was an Isle of Mann steamer, proudly carried a plaque to say that she had transported a quarter of a million men between 1914 and 1918. Even the crew admitted it was rough. Once again the cooks obliged with vast heaps of tinned food, but I was able to find a friendly sailor to give me a plate of tomato sandwiches. However it was a great relief to arrive in Southampton waters and we came ashore at Southampton about 8 a.m. Out came our mess tins and mugs and after the vicissitudes of the night the breakfast of coffee, porridge and bacon provided in a ~~f~~ vast customs shed tasted like the best the Ritz could do. Back we piled into a nice comfortable English train, and back, alas, to North Wales.

Once again my unit was stationed in Bellws-y-Coed, but at first Jeannie and I were in billets in Llandudno. We arrived late on Wednesday evening. Horrible little seaside digs, but how wonderful to have electric light, hot baths, plugs that pulled and all the wonderful amenities of modern plumbing. On Thursday we were sitting down so peacefully and happily to our high tea, when our beastly old landlady bustled in, full ofnews, and told us we were off to Burma on December 14th. - oh shades of security, she wasperfectly right, except it was India and not Burma.

I made a ratherhalf hearted attempt to avoid going to the Far East. It seemed just too far away and seemed to entail years and years and years more service. Besides, I wanted to go back to Europe. However I had to reasonable excuse and my application for posting back to the 21st A.G. wassoon turned down. I had fourteen days at hone, not an unmixed pleasure, embarkation leaves never are, then reported back to Bethws. We were fairly busy. The unit had to be medically examined again. We were issued with some khaki drill, and I was given a 48 hours course in tropical medicine at Liverpool. I went to a couple of excellent lecture demonstrations, but as even an introduction into tropical medicine it was a little rapid. However the army had done its best presumably.

Very soon we were again standing on a quay, this time at Liverpool. It was freezing cold, pitch dark, raining hard and my shoes leaked. We stood around for the regulation two hours, then climbed aboard the Alcantara. She must have been a lovely ship in peacetime. Jeannie had got married on leave and left us. I wasthe only woman M.O. on board. I shared a cabin with the matron, the assistant matron and six sisters. Not very spacious, but we had one wash basin and a bath next door. It was not too bad as a matter of fact. All the sisters got up earlier than I did, and most of them ate at different sittings. The fresh water was turned on three times a day. My invaluable iron, that had travelled to France and back, was again produced and we were able to keep up to date with our washing. The first few days it was cold and stormy and miserable. We could not go on deck. It was too cold and too dark at night and in the saloons, in spite of 50 per cent being in their bunks seasick, there was no room to sit down.

There were about 400 women on board, our own sisters, a draft of another 80 Q.A.s, about 200 F.A.N.Y.s and some A.T.S. and civilians and strange little units, like the "Save the Children" outfits. I was asked to help the ship's medical staff. This was a great advantage, as it gave me the entrée to the troops' hospital on board, with its comfortable little office and nice cup of tea around 11 o'clock.

After three or four days the storm subsided and the sun came out. I thought it was about time I earned my cups of tea, and did a round of the women's cabins, persuading the persistently seasick to come on deck and have a little air. I thought I had used my best bedside manner, but the overheard comment was, "Very hard, these women doctors".

Soon we passed Gibraltar. It looked justlike a picture postcard, Through the Mediterranean, and down the Suez Canal. At Port Said the heavily laden transports heading for England shouted cheerfully, "You're going the wrong way", but De Lesseys firmly pointed down the Canal. It was an exciting day, but I was still too "browned off" with this new adventure to admit to any interest and said sourly, "It looked just like a travel film." We anchored off Suez and remained in the bay for four or five days. Even I had to admire the lights on the shore at night, the warm evenings and the lit up decks and no blackout, after four years of war.

A good many of our troops were disembarked and a major's wife and small daughter came on board. The little girl promptly developed measles. Without compunction I moved her and her mother to the isolation hospital, and on the instant installed myself in their cabin, which for the rest of the voyage I shared in great comfort with a charming American lady who was going to work for the Y.W.C.A. in India. At last I was getting a good grasp of army methods!

Christmas came and this officially dry trooper became very wet indeed. Every officer produced a bottle or bottles out of his suitcase. The ship's hospital gave a party. The ship's engineers produced whiskey. The mixing of drinks was quite horrible and some of the hangovers on Boxing Day were quite specially virulent. The mixture was repeated, with the addition of some Egyptian whiskey bought during our stay in Suez, on New Year's Eve, with even more severe results. After this the ship really was dry. I do not know what the unofficial position was on the mess decks, but the official issue was one half pint bottle of beer per head, thin cheer for 3,000 troops a long way from home.

On New Year's Day we reached Aden. By this time ship life was quite pleasant. We had a cool shady spot to lie in, on the boat deck. No chairs were allowed on deck, but we each had three or four lifebelts, which with careful arrangement made quite comfortable cushions. The assistant matron developed a genius for producing tea two or three times a day. The matron had a passion for crosswords. The O.C. Medical Division a very fine line in ship's gossip and the days slipped by in that imperceptible fashion they always do on long sea voyages. Things were not so peaceful for the entire ship's company.

There were no less than seventeen official engagements. The fun had started as the ship crept down the fog from Liverpool, and the daily exchanges between our 400 young ladies and the 4,000 odd troops were many and passionate. In fact my American cabin mate raised her eyebrows very high indeed and said she was an emancipated woman and liked young people to have a good time, but, not even in a South American pleasure cruise, had she seen anything to rival the behaviour of our 400 young women.

Eventually after 32 days on board we reached Bombay. We had another two days in Bombay, while we slept on the ship and explored the city. As oriental cities go I thought it seemed a pleasant enough place. All the time I was in India I was not overcome by the dirt and squalor. Perhaps I had seen enough in our own East End of London as a medical student to be too easily impressed. What did impress me with ever increasing irritation was the inefficiency and indifference of the Indians. The insuperable stubbornness of the railway baboo, the interminable and incomprehensible time it took to cash a cheque, and as for the standard of medicine and medical ethics - but more of that later.

On the evening of our second day in India our nursing staff was put on a train for Calcutta, and very soon they were employed in the hospitals of Burma and Eastern Bengal. The unit itself was to go to Bangalore, where we were told it was to form one of the hospitals of a very big hospital centre.

About 9 o'clock in the evening we climbed aboard our first Indian train. It was a military special. On board there were the staffs of two general hospitals and one convalescent depot. Two full colonels, five lieutenant colonels, three women M.O.s and 66 other officers and about 300 other ranks. We were on that train for five days and four nights. We three women had a four-berth compartment and were comfortable enough. During the day the other officers crowded into it, for they were all crammed together in ~~a~~ filthy third-class carriages with only wooden seats and were finding life very painful indeed. We carried our own food and periodically the train stopped for an hour while the cooks produced tea and uneatable melting bully beef. Although it was the official cold weather, we found it very hot indeed and were quite unable to deal with this sort of food. Only twice did we manage to get a meal of eggs from a station restaurant, and we were very hungry when we arrived. The train averaged a speed of 11 miles per hour. We sat on the steps of the carriages and watched India and marvelled. At one point our senior surgeon, a keen athlete, ran by the side of the train. He nearly outdistanced us. The appearance of the countryside did not change much during the trip, though the scrubby little hills ~~mar~~ near Bangalore were quite pretty.

When we arrived once again we were piled into 3-ton trucks and taken to a transit camp about 10 miles outside Bangalore. Needless to say they were not expecting us and were particularly upset at having to accommodate women. However, they found a nice little concrete hut for us, really senior officer type of quarters. More growls from our brother officers, for they were put up in "bashas", huts constructed from wood and leaves, and as they had been empty for a while were infested with fleas. However we had little sympathy for them, as we put up our camp beds and for the first time struggled with mosquito nets, and at 6 o'clock, the camp being near a large lake, the mosquitos arrived. They did not carry malaria but were extremely large, furious and persistent. For the first day or two our little hut was surrounded by small Indian servants. We had no idea of the language. They spoke no English. We were unable to distinguish a sweeper from a water carrier, or a carpenter from the lad who would bring tea. In fact we did not realise that the caste system was now in operation in full force, and that each little -chap had his own mission in life and could and would do no other.

We managed to get clean and changed and walked over to the mess for dinner, where we had one of the smallest and nastiest meals on record. The food in this transit camp, like in most, was quite awful.

The next morning we went into Bangalore to shop. We ordered khaki drill uniform and looked with slight dismay at the shops. We had been told Bangalore was one of the best stations in India, but compared to Bombay it seemed a small scrubby village. We found a really delicious coffee bar, and eventually landed up at the club for lunch. Oh those Indian clubs, lovely relics of the heyday of the British Raj. Beautiful clubrooms, long bars, restaurants, swimming pools, lawns and gardens, and well trained, unnumbered servants. And how intolerably boring they become after a month or two, when the Saturday night menu was as familiar asthe musicians' programme and as stale as the women's dresses.

While we explored Bangalore and amused ourselves swimming at the club, ordering clothes and going to the cinema, our colonel and registrar went to inspect the new site for the hospital. The project was to build a self contained hospital town which would have been the centre for all casualties from the invasion of Malaya. As yet the hospital town was a dusty plain, covered by hundreds of coolies carrying stones on their heads. The administrative officer told the colonel we were not expected till the following September, very embittering news, as we remembered our brief fourteen days leave.

I got permission to work at the Indian military hospital in Bangalore. It was not very full, as there had been an epidemic of plague and the little tree squirrels that ran wild in the grounds had been shown to be infected, the hospital had been closed, all the ceilings stripped, as they nested in the rafters, and the infected animals, we hoped, exterminated. The wards were just reopening. I wasshown around a ward for tuberculosis. My guide was a little Indian woman M.O., an intelligent girl. I asked how they dealt with tuberculosis in the Indian Army. "Oh they are boarded out", she said, with slight scorn at my ignorance. I asked what happened then, what was going to happen to this little chap by whose bed we stood. "It is very difficult", she said, "You see he is living two days' journey from the railway". And that is the attitude behind the Indians' approach to medicine. The difficulties of the situation may be seen, but the doctor is not unduly concerned.

Three or four days later another of the women M.O.s and myself were posted to Secunderabad. We had a much more comfortable journey than on the military special, sharing a large compartment and having meals brought to us at every stop. There was one excitement at a small station, when a young officer looked in and said as we were doctors would it interest us to know that a man had just died by the train? We jumped out of the carriage and there on the line was a pitiful bundle of rags and bones expiring. There was nothing to be done, the officer said, the old man was travelling without a ticket and the station master would despose of the body. He himself was unconcerned. He explained he had been in Calcutta during the famine.

It was only a 24-hour journey to Secunderabad. We arrived in the evening and were met at the station. My companion was dropped at her hospital and I was taken to my quarters. Secunderabad was a very large station. It was a great training area and had five large hospitals. The hospital I was posted to was for British troops and was almost entirely staffed by British personnel. It was a beautiful place. It had been a cavalry barracks. Most of the wards were old barrack rooms, others had been more recently built. The older buildings were of solid stone with deep verandahs and well supplied with fans. They were a series of separate buildings with very pleasant grounds.

Our quarters and the mess were quite wonderful. There were some half a dozen women M.O.s and we all hadrooms in a long bungalow with a beautiful verandah. There was a garden and stables and a lovely view over the Deccan. The mess was even more inspiring, a stately building, wide verandahs, Corinthian pillars, an enormous anteroom, a long dining room table, with a most elaborate floral decoration. It was the peacetime mess of the Hussars or Lancers. I felt there should have been a clanking of spurs, and silver as well as flowers on the table. Pure Kipling, apart from the regrettable absence of Hussars. In an alarmed way I ate my dinner at about 10 o'clock and went to bed. The next morning I acquired a bearer of my own and was informed I was the part employer of two sweepers and a gardiner. I hired a bicycle. For my bungalow and the mess were about a mile from the wards and it was getting too hot to walk with comfort. For days I was in a state of complete bewilderment. It was all so very strange.

Did you want a dress made, the tailor came to you. Did you want a tennis racket, tennis rackets appeared. It seemed very luxurious, but was it right. Was it war? Not really. People who used to talk about retreating to a Pacific Island if war came had the wrong idea. The most peaceful places, I firmly believe, in the whole world were the British cantonnements in India. True the old India hands complained of difficulties, but to anyone straight out from England the standard of comfort was positively startling.

The hospital staff was very large and the mess appeared to be dominated by a group of M.O.s who had been in India two or three years. Their attitude was not particularly helpful. If they found you looking heated and worried, their invariable comment was, "You wait till the hot weather comes". When, in May, the hot weather did come, I found that this particular set had had the foresight to arrange their leave for that month, and they cleared out to Kashmir to a man. There were, however, friendlier souls. The medical specialist I had met before at my first posting at the ack-ack camp. He had been kindness itself there and had led me round the army forms. Once again he explained the forms, only now - sinister phrase - they were "modified for India", which meant their complexities if possible were intensified. He took me round the wards and, working with him, I began to acquire a knowledge of the common tropical diseases such as malaria, amoebic dysentery and so forth.

This hospital was a base hospital for 14th Army men. The patients came from east of the Brahmaputra, via Camilla and Calcutta, and had usually been under treatment two or three months at least before they arrived. Some, after convalescence, were made fit for further service in Burma, some only for low category jobs in India, and quite a high proportion were boarded home. After the high spirits and good morale of the 21st Army, these men seemed a depressed and unhappy lot. They were firmly convinced they were the "Forgotten Army". They had fought under the hardest conditions imaginable and they hated India and longed to get home. By this time, 1945, the "   Commission" had done its work, and welfare was improving, but still very little was done for the British other ranks. Typical of the attitude was the Thursday afternoon teaparty for hospital patients at the Secunderabad club. Nice enough in the general idea, but why choose the one afternoon when the swimming bath was closed for cleaning, and why not let the men use the half a dozen billiard tables the club possessed? It was often a matter of considerable difficulty to muster a large enough party from the hospital.

At ~~the~~ first the work was very light. For some reason no convoy was sent to the hospital for nearly three months and the number of patients in the medical side fell from about 700 to approximately 100. I was very interested in the patients, and busily collected notes on the sprue cases for a future thesis. Unfortunately I lost them in one of my many moves. Social life was pleasant, Under great pressure from my bearer, who thought a large household would add prestige to himself and myself, I hired a horse from the Hyderabad Army Surplus Horse Depot, and had lovely riding over the wide open country. There was also a small swimming bath in the garden of the resident's secretary three minutes bicycle ride away from my bungalow, and nearly every afternoon between 5 and 6 a cheerful collection of people gathered round the very pretty but rather~~s~~ scummy little pool. Owing to water restrictions it was only emptied and cleaned once a month, and towards the end of the month, in spite of the reassurances of the pathologists that the water was pure enough to drink, it required a good deal of courage th break the thick green scum on the surface. But we could still lie in the sun and gossip and for the first two weeks of the month it was really lovely. The secretary had three delightful small girls of respectively 7, 5 and 3 years. Francis, Josephine and Caroline. A young Scott from the Airborne Division taught them to swim and our pride was enormous when all three, hand in hand, jumped off the top board. It was an amazing sight to see our baby Caroline hurl herself off the diving board and bobble round the pool like a small yellow duckling. There was more competition for these three girlies' favours than for any other young woman in the station.

About this time I acquired a dog. Poor Sammy was a simple pi dog, and from the day when, for the price of R.5, four too many, he became mine, till the day when with many tears I left him when I was posted from India, he was a major problem. As a tiny puppy he cried all night. My companions in the bungalow protested vigorously. As he grew older, it became apparent that he was the most cowardly dog ever owned by a British sahib. My companions despised him. When he was about six months old he developed a howl and high pitched bark that drove everyone to desperation. I used to protest that he only barked when frightened, but as his own shadow, a strange footfall, or the wind in the trees made him bark, and the more he was shouted at the ~~more~~ worse he became, he was indeed a problem dog. But he was passionately devoted to me, followed me around and cropped up wherever he was least wanted. He would sneak into dinner in the mess in the evening, jump through the window in the colonel's office, even came to the swimming pool. From here he was ~~cleared~~ chased by an indignant miniature dachshund a third of his size, after which adventure he would wait by my bicycle outside.

Shortly after I arrived in Secunderabad, the O.C. Division from the hospital I hadcome out with also came to this hospital. He had already completed a West African tour and he compared India very unfavourably with West Africa. He was very annoyed at being posted from his unit on the Second Front out to the East, but hadtoo great a sense of humour not to make the best of it, and was waiting patiently enough for his demobilisation. His hobby was bird watching, which he used to pursue from a comfortable chair on his verandah between 6 and 7 in the evening. He would find his field glasses and his drinks lying ready for him when he came back to his bungalow, and I spent many a very pleasant evening watching the troopers, the red vented bulbuls, the purple rumped sunbirds and the other exotically named and exotic looking birds of the Indian garden, and exchanging gossip and gin. He was Sammy's only other friend on the station, though when the blessed dog gavetongue every bird within five miles took flight.

I did not take a great part in club life at that time, though I was there the Saturday night when the three major beauties of Secunderabad, a blonde, a brunette and a redhead, appeared in identical frocks of white background with a pattern of large brown daisies, all supplied by the local tailor, whom one can only suppose had a quite abnormal sense of humour for an Indian.

It was getting very hot by now and the temperature rising day by day, by the end of April the thermometer was registering 108°, 109° and 110°. A steady hot south wind blew for days and bicycling became most unpleasant. The earth was very hard, dusty and brown. The nights were hot and sticky and, owing to an outbreak of thieving round the bungalows, we had to move our beds indoors and sleep beneath the fan. It was still fresh enough in the early mornings to ride with pleasure, though the earth was so hard one had to be careful not to lame the horses. We all suffered a good deal from prickly heat, boils and other hot weather tortures.

VE Day came, and was celebrated without much enthus~~i~~aam. Our own war with the Japs showed very little sign of ever coming to an end. An open air hospital dance was arranged, all ranks and all patients. It was rather lovely. There were refreshments and drinks on all sides, but as there were some 500 men and only 80 to 100 women, it was an athletic evening most exhausting, with a temperature of about 105° at midnight.

After the fall of Rangoon we began to get busy again. Our first convoy were the officers and men who had been held in Rangoon goal by the Japanese. When the fall of Rangoon became imminent the Japs had attempted to march away all their prisoners. This party had had a highly unpleasant three days in the jungle. After a 60 mile march the Japs had left them and they were between our own 14th Army and the Japanese. They were strafed by our own aeroplanes but eventually managed to make contact with the British. There were about 200 of them. They had received treatment at a forward hospital and all but about 20 were now fit to travel home. But for an unknown reason they were sent to Secunderabad and no information could be obtained from Delhi asto when they would get away. Naturally they were impatient, but after their three terrible years they made good use of the amenities of Secunderabad. They were inspected by every Brass Hat within 2,000 miles, but still we could give them no definite sailing date. At that time I was in charge of the officers' ward. One morning a very high ranking officer from Bangalore was to inspect. About 10 o'clock I was in the ward and a major cheerfully offered me a lovely long iced orange drink. I took it thirstilly and, having drunk half at a swallow, realised it was 50 per cent gin. The bottles were hastily thrust into lockers as the general appeared. I took him round the ward, introducing each officer with an ease that only gin drinking before 11 o'clock can produce. He impressed them favourably by knowing the details of the engagement on the Sittang River in 1942, when the bridge had been blown too early and most of these men captured. He promised to do all he could to get them away, but it was another two weeks before they moved to Deolali.

I gave the key of my bungalow to four or five of them as they so disliked the hospital atmosphere, and all day long I would get little chits saying terrible disasters had overtaken them, and arrive in a hurry to find yet another tremendous gin party taking place. Eventually they left us, but we continued busy with a convoy of about 200 patients arriving every week.

Among my other duties at Secunderabad was to visit a tented Indian hospital 15 miles away twice a week. It was my first real experience of Indian hospitals run by Indians. It was an incredibly hot place. It was very tidy and neat, but the medical standards were very low. I could do very little as I had not yet acquired any , and not being continuously on the spot had no control over the treatment. However I saw a lot of new conditions and diseases, that came in useful later on.

The other day I was listening to the audit of some accounts at Hogs Norton-in-the-Marsh. Somehow I was irresistably reminded of an R.A.M.C. mess meeting. What a feature of army life mess meetings were. The best I ever remember was in Singapore. It was called for 2.15 p.m. At 2.15 in Singapore its more than hot, but the mess was comparatively cool and well supplied with fans. There wasn't much work and there was a most important subject on the agenda, so there was a 100 per cent turnout of officers. The burning question was the messing and moreover - "Should bar profits be used to supplement the messing fund?" This was a subject of bitter controversy in every mess I was ever in. Three views were generally put forward. First, the teetotallers were all in favour; the hearty supporters of the bar failed to see why their efforts should feed their greedy but more temperate brother officers; and thirdly, someone knew K.R.s and said it was illegal anyway.

That day the subject was given due airing. We heard the point of view of the British officer who liked cheap drinks, but also eggs and bacon for breakfast (eggs had to be bought out of messing). The Indian officer who didn't drink, and the Indian officer who did, and of course the aforementioned chap who knew King's Regulations.

At 3.15 my conscience pricked and I stole off to do my O.P.s. I disposed of a R.E.M.E. corporal with blackouts, a paratrooper with dizzy turns, and one of sister's cups of tea, and returned at 3.50. The meeting was still in full cry. At 4.30 the colonel, the most benevolent and tolerant of men, proposed a little firmly that a grant of £50 be made from the bar fund to the messing fund. In an atmosphere of mutual hate the proposal was unanimously carried. The second item on the agenda was the route of a mess bar from the hospital to Singapore. This seemed to be a subject of even greater possibilities. I decided that I was not in the marathon class of mess members, excused myself on the plea of urgent duties and went for a swim. The lovely thing about the army was that, however you spent the day, the pay still rolled in.