Does June, tripping through the roses, stir memories of Blackpool, veterans of Unit 21? Lazy, carefree Blackpool, basking in the sparkling sunshine, with the whitecaps of the Irish Sea caressing her white sands, and the great Tower stretching its steel network toward blue skies above the maze of hotels and rooming houses behind the Promenade. Blackpool... World War headquarters of the Royal Army Medical Corps... home of countless sideshows and the entrancing Winter Gardens... the playground of Lancashire.

You were sent to Blackpool, after a hurried trip from St. Louis, to train for base hospital service in France. But, in the teeming life by the sea, the war seemed a colorful phantasy; a tinted backdrop for a soldiers' chorus in some light opera. The uniforms of officers, enlisted men, and women war workers, lent glamour to swank tea shops, hotel lobbies, and the crowded Princess Parade; chorus girls, in tights and jaunty army caps, sang of Blighty and the Home Fires. It was all very jolly. Save for a chance conversation with some lonely woman on an Albert road doorstep at twilight, or a passing glimpse of convalescent Tommies in wheel chairs on a hospital terrace, one saw little but the silver lining of the dark clouds across the Channel.

The years have passed with incredible swiftness since those haunting days in Lancashire. But they have left you memories none can take, that can never be shared by those who remained in mufti, or earned their bonuses in Brooklyn Navy Yard. Your neighbors see you as a placid family man, a kindly plug, with a penchant for cultivating snapdragons and dozing through the monthly meetings of the Parent-Teachers' Association. As you trudge homeward from the bus line, with a garden spade or a new mallet for the croquet set, you bear little resemblance to the trim soldier of World War days. Your unrestrained waistline and ruddy jowls are hardly synonymous with romance. But, in your heart, you treasure a rosemary of the past—the memory of a wartime intermezzo—unknown to the kindly folk who wave from their lawn chairs. They would be astonished to learn that you were once the toast of an English seaside resort... a ten day wonder in khaki.

Yet, twenty-three years ago this month sandy-haired girls, with roses in their cheeks, marveled at the whiteness of your teeth and eagerly solicited buttons from your tunic as a remembrance. Men were scarce in wartime Blackpool, and members of the first American hospital units overseas were greeted with delight by fair vacationists seeking relaxation from the workaday world of munitions plants and offices in nearby towns. They walked arm in arm with you through curious, friendly crowds along the
THE ROUEN POST

Promenade, introduced you to curried mutton, fish and chip shops, and band concerts on the Central Pier. They were your companions on excursions to picturesque Fleetwood, and sight-seeing tours in open trams; you posed before their cameras, and took them to tea when the daily squad drills and lectures were over. They carried their own cigarettes and smoked in public with popular approval, a privilege not then accorded to American girls.

You held hands in the gilded cinema, where the audience roared with laughter as the wistful figure of Charlie Chaplin shuffled across the screen in “The Floorwalker.” The picture had been shown in St. Louis during the previous winter; seeing it again, with an English girl at your side and the nocturnal roar of the Irish Sea breaking in upon the orchestra, seemed like a dream. You half expected to wake and find yourself back in the West End Lyric.

Remember the Winter Gardens? The entertainment never lagged in the great Pavilion; the ballroom orchestra featured “Mammy” ... “Broken Doll” ... “Take Me Back To Blighty.” You seldom venture upon a dance floor these days. The old sense of rhythm isn’t what is used to be, and the sight of vacant-faced jitterbugs arouse a homicidal urge. But you can recall nights, when, after cheerful hours in Yates Wine Lodge, you repaired to the spacious ballroom in the Gardens to whirl your partner in a frenzied one-step and skip lightly to waltz time. It was the largest ballroom you had ever seen and you glided over its gleaming floor until the Guinness stout rose to your head and forced you to the sidelines.

The interlude at Blackpool was all too short. You turned with reluctance from the crowded shore when the hour of departure arrived. The girls tightened the straps on your pack and clung to your arms in the milling crowd of soldiers and civilians outside the billets in Albert road. The order “fall in” rang through the gathering dusk; you lined up in squad formation. Led by the Royal Army Medical Corps band, and flanked by women, children, and the canine population of the neighborhood, you headed over Topping street to Talbot road station. As your squad passed through the station gate you turned and waved a final farewell; the band played “Auld Lang Syne,” and, with misty eyes, you watched from the carriage windows as the music grew fainter and fainter and the fluttering handkerchiefs dwindled to an animated speck in the lingering clouds of smoke.

Another June has come to Blackpool ... Military uniforms are again in evidence along the Princess Parade. The stately Tower surveys the landscape as of old; perchance, beyond the house tops, a giant Ferris wheel still turns lazily against the azure sky. The scene is the same, but a new generation strolls among the dunes on the South Shore. The girls you knew—the Peggys, Nells, and Marys of 1917—are plump matrons today. It may be they still visit Blackpool at Whitsuntide — middle-aged women to whom romance no longer beckons. And as they brush past youthful soldiers in the crowds or watch the dancers in the ballroom of the Winter Gardens, perhaps they recall a June, long past, when they held the stage with young men in olive drab who lingered for a few fleeting days in the carnival spirit of Blackpool.
“I herewith acknowledge with gratitude receipt of a neatly gotten out publication devoted to the interests of Rouen Post No. 242, American Legion, of St. Louis, Mo.”

“The Rouen Post is composed of former members of Base Hospital No. 21, one of the first of the United States expeditionary units to arrive in France in 1917. The organization was formed in St. Louis and sailed for overseas duty on May 19, 1917. Nine days were spent at Blackpool, England, learning the rudiments of drill. The organization then proceeded, via Southampton and Le Havre, to Rouen, France, where a British general hospital, located on a race track, was taken over. Most of this outfit was destined to spend the greater part of two years in Rouen, but a handful of youthful irrespressibles, including this writer, were detached in July, 1918, and forwarded, with a sigh of relief by the Base Commander, to the American Expeditionary Forces where they formed the nucleus of a unique establishment termed Mobile Hospital 4.”

“Editor of the publication just received is William Stack, who may or may not still be a commercial artist. I recall Bill Stack as a solid chunk of a young fellow who used to get sore as hell when the noisy troupe within the barracks disturbed him at his regular evening attempt to depict events of the day. It was Bill's steadfast ambition to get some of these drawings back to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and just as steadfastly he never got around to it.”

SPECIAL BULLETINS

By John Hettich (San Diego County News Chronicle)

Rouen, France, June 13, 1917

Privates Robert (Shorty) Richner and James Barnard, today protested to the adjutant of General Hospital No. 12 that the twice-a-day bread ration is insufficient to sustain energy in American soldiers. Bread ration was ordered increased to thrice daily.

Rouen, France, March 8, 1918

The flower of the American Expeditionary Forces—members of Base Hospital No. 21, were paid today. After paying off obligations to Judge Neely, the obliging crap shooter, eager young soldiers swarmed over the landscape to visit such historic points of interest as the “Second Cafe,” the “White Star,” and the Tivoli Music Hall.

Rouen, France, March 20, 1918

A sensational military trial was concluded today with the acquittal of the three American soldiers, Pat Purcell, Bill Stack and Shorty Richner, who were arrested March 18 for making loud and uncouth noises immediately following the production of similar noises on a bugle by dapper Sergeant Welsch, also an American. Another American, one “Dutch” Rieser, was fined twenty days pay and sentenced to serve 30 days in the “clink,” for visiting Paris without permission. “It is the patriotic duty of every American to see Paris,” said Rieser in defense of his absence from camp. Sergeant Duffy, who was Rieser's companion in crime escaped with a fine of two day's pay. Lance-corporal Paul Graham has been removed from military police duty in the city of Rouen after violent words with Sergeant Welsch.

All mentioned are members of Base Hospital Unit 21 on detached service with British General Hospital No. 12.”
In an earlier paragraph the changes in command have been noted. The peculiar situation of the hospital—that is, belonging at one time to both the American and British Expeditionary Forces—gave rise to many unusual problems of administration. In a broad way the military side was handled according to American regulations—the technical according to British. Many times the two would more or less come into conflict and then problems were settled on their merits with the viewpoint of efficiency of service. Throughout our entire stay the never-failing courtesy and thoughtfulness of the British officials made the administrative work most happy. Although located in Base Section No. 4 of the A. E. F., the Unit was only responsible to the Commanding General of the section for matters of discipline. Technically it was a British hospital, and hence under the administration of the D. D. M. S. of Rouen area. When the American Medical Service and personnel was involved the Unit was directly responsible to the office of the Chief Surgeon. Medical records were kept according to the British system and British forms used. For each American patient an additional set of American records was made. All medical and surgical supplies were obtained from the British except certain special X-ray and laboratory equipment which were obtained from the American Medical Service. Both the British and American Red Cross Societies rendered the most valuable aid to the hospital. During the latter part of 1918, a home service worker of the American Red Cross Society was attached to the hospital. The hospital office was divided into two groups, the “American” and “British”—that is, one set of clerks handled medical records and British returns, the other American returns, pay rolls, etc. The staff and personnel were paid by the American Government, while rations, fuel, etc., were obtained from the British. Two distinct quartermaster departments were maintained; one looking after the hospital supplies and British clothing, the other after the pay and equipment of American soldiers and patients. During 1918, the American quartermaster department of the hospital was enlarged and all American patients in British and French hospitals in the area were equipped and paid through No. 21. Further, all disciplinary problems of American patients in British hospitals and convalescent camps in Rouen area were placed under the Commanding Officer of the hospital.

Early in 1918, a hundred casual American nurses were sent to British hospitals in France and this number subsequently increased by two further units. Although they were scattered from Boulogne to Trouville, they were placed under the Commanding Officer of Base Hospital 21, and all records, returns, and pay rolls made through the hospital office. As no officer of the Medical Corps was attached to Rouen Base Section, the hospital provided sanitary and medical service for the American troops stationed in the city. Capt. T. C. Austin, M. C., who crossed with the Unit as Adjutant, was transferred to Paris in the fall of 1917 as attending surgeon, and T. C. Hester, who had come over as Master Hospital Sergeant, was commissioned First Lieutenant in the Sanitary Corps and became Adjutant and Company Commander.