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NOTES FROM A CHAPLAIN’S DIARY

By Rev. J. R. Edwards

Members of Unit 21 will remember Rev. J. R. Edwards as the gracious “Padre” who served for many months in British General Hospital No. 12 at Rouen. He is now minister of the Kenyon Baptist Church at Brixton, England.

Dear Friends:

I have been recalling the days when I served in France during the great war. Some of the things which, with the aid of a note book, came to mind, I wish I had forgotten; other things I am glad to remember.

One year of my time out there was spent as a chaplain in a hospital of 1500 patients. At a Sunday service which I conducted in a camp twelve miles away, a collection was taken and handed to me to be spent for our sick and wounded comrades. Altogether I was given well over 200 lbs. I came to be known as an all the year round Santa Claus.

Among the things I don’t want to forget is the cheerful courage of the boys, especially those in the heavy surgical wards. Every one of them was imprisoned in a frame of straps and pullies. Sometimes there was a lively argument as to who possessed the greatest number of wounds. I can see again a little fellow called “Tiny” as, with closed eyes, he mentally surveyed his damaged body. “I make my score sixteen,” he said. Then he added, “Arf a mo! I forgot. My right arm is broken in two places, so we’ll call it eighteen, all told. Any advance on eighteen?” There was no higher bidder that day.

Every one in the ward rejoiced in a nick name; the orderly had two—Food Controller and Jam King. The boy in the corner, who did more than his share of talking, was the Parrot. The stout fellow who was accused of allowing his head to grow through his hair, was Convict 99. His neighbor who, owing to face injuries, could not be shaved, was Blue Beard. An Australian giant was Lofty. The thin boy with a thinner voice was Whizz Bang. A school master was the Professor. The nurses arranged that the Schoolboy, who couldn’t read, was placed next to the professor. The daily lesson was called the daily dose. “There’s one thing about our pupil” said Ginger. “He’s never late for school; and if he isn’t what you might call brilliant, he deserves full marks for attendance.” The man who kept a photograph of his wife and six children under his pillow was known as Dad. Others included Grumpy, Baby, Noisy, and Jock, who sometimes was called the Sleeping Beauty.

When a local resident, a well meaning old lady, visited the ward, as she sometimes did, Jock would quietly disappear under the blanket. When he thought the coast was clear, his head would cautiously emerge, and in a loud whisper, he would say; “Sister! Is yon old body awa’?” One day he confessed that he nearly gave the show away, when he heard the old lady say that number ten seemed to sleep all the year around.
The almost careless way, in which the sufferers took their troubles was amazing. The angels, whose duty it is to help and hearten the wounded and dying, did their job well, and no mistake. Here are a few sayings I recall. "Me leg is off; that’s cured me corn anyway."

"Sister! Padre and I are going in for the three-legged race at the sports tomorrow—his two and my one. We’ll win, too, you’ll see."

"I’m glad I had my photo taken before coming out here, so that people can see that once upon a time I was a handsome young man."

A blinded boy, on hearing that he would never see again, quietly remarked that he was a handy sort of fellow, and would soon pick up a trade. As Christmas approached, it was a common saying: "By the way, Nurse, you know I’ve got a spare stocking don’t you?"

And this from a letter to mother. Thanks for the mouth organ. It filled a great gap.

Army songs, including "O for a roly poly, like mother used to make," were sung, sometimes feebly enough it must be confessed. Sooner or later, however, they fell into disfavour. The grand old hymns, however, retained their freshness and power. When the boys were too tired to sing at all, I would bring along the Santa Claus gramophone. It was interesting to watch the effects of the rendering of:

"At even, ere the sun was set."
"Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear!"
"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide!"
"How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds!"

Now and again, when the lights were low and all was quiet, I was invited by a boy to pray with him, for himself, and for the folk, at home. I counted that a rare privilege. Also, it helped to explain to me the wonder of the cheerful courage displayed, week after week, and month after month.

I remember standing at the bedside of a Canadian, soon after he had been transferred from an automobile to a bed. It was easy to see that, in him, Tiny had a serious rival.

"They’ve knocked you about a bit," I said. "Yes," he replied. "But they haven’t knocked all the hope out of me."

We felt that here was a fellow worthy of a place in our hall of suffering—one who would be trusted to maintain the tradition of Ward No. 7. And so it proved to be. "A noble army, men and boys."

Today great demands are being made on us—demands of faith, and cheerful courage, and hope. The British have a noble tradition here: that tradition must be maintained. And it seems to me that we shall be more likely to endure, as good soldiers, if we live in fellowship with Him who is the Source of all the great qualities of the soul, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who suffered unto the death for us and Who is now within the reach of all who want Him.

I am sure that prayer, the reading of the Bible, the ministry of kindness, and the singing of great hymns especially when we gather in the House of the Lord, help to make Him real to the reverent and believing soul. Try it for yourself!

Rev. J. R. Edwards
CADET ALVIN JORDAN

Alvin B. Jordan, 19-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. George H. B. Jordan, 3505 Henrietta street, St. Louis, Mo., has been appointed to the Coast Guard Academy at New London, Conn., where he will receive four years training for a commission in the Guard.

Alvin, ranking 42nd among 246 candidates selected through competitive examinations throughout the United States, was the only student admitted from St. Louis. He is a graduate of McKinley High School, and spent one year in the Chemical Engineering School at Washington University where he was a member of "Pershing's Rifles," the honorary group of the R. O. T. C.

LEGION AWARD TO DR. PADGETT

The following story from the Kansas City Times of April 27, 1940 was sent to us by Ed Wendleburg, former member of Unit 21, now residing in Independence, Mo.

The American Legion last night honored Howard McCutcheon, Dr. Earl C. Padgett and H. Roe Bartle for outstanding citizenship and presented each an engraved plaque at a dinner at the Hotel Muehlbach.

The award to Dr. Padgett, a widely known plastic surgeon, was made by Dr. William Merrit Ketcham. Dr. Padgett was honored for an outstanding achievement in the field of science, the development and use of a device which, by making it possible to cut skin of uniform thickness, has simplified greatly the problem of skin grafting. With Dr. Padgett's device skin can be cut to a thickness of eight one-hundredths of an inch.

A REQUEST FROM CALVIN TILTON

Dear Bill:

As I indicated over the telephone I enjoyed the April issue of Rouen Post very much. Do you suppose it could be arranged for me to have the original drawing of your cartoon depicting the country boy at the railroad station in Grant City? Please slip the enclosed check to Bill Engel to help cover expenses.

WALTER BROWN PAYS A VISIT

Walter (Mike) Brown, accompanied by Mrs. Brown and their two sons, en route for Denver, stopped in St. Louis July 4 for a visit to the scenes of Mrs. Brown's girlhood. Brown, a former newspaper man and a graduate of the Missouri University School of Journalism, is secretary to Governor Lehman of New York, a position he has held for the past five years. Before joining the Governor's staff, the once great triple threat (shovel, mop, and broom) of Sergeant Puckett's fatigue squad, was manager for the Associated Press in New York State.

WALTER BROWN

Arthur Melville, publisher of the Rouen Post, is taking time out from his linotype of late to show social and business callers at the Southwest Printery his recently bound issues of the Post. A stiff leather cover of navy blue bearing the name of the paper in gold, encloses every issue of the monthly publication since May, 1936.
Arshav Nushan, outstanding drum major in these parts, led the Shrine band, drum corps, and patrol during the preliminary entertainment at the Tuberculosis Day baseball game at Sportsman’s Park, July 16.

Irl Trickey, of Cape Girardeau, called at the Veteran’s Administration Facility at Jefferson Barracks for a physical checkup late in July. Irl seldom sees his fellow townsman “Mule” Brown these days. Brown has withdrawn to the quiet of a farm on the outskirts of the Cape and his visits to Main street are few and far between. Arthur Melville, well-known family man and publisher of the Rouen Post, suffered the loss of four finger nails from his right hand while operating a new paper cutter a few weeks ago. His doctor assured him that the nails would grow again — that they always return unless the victim has reached an advanced age. The doctor’s prediction failed to cheer Mrs. Melville. “If Art is as old as he acts,” she declared, “it’s goodbye nails.”

A proposal by Justin Jackson at the July meeting that Rouen Post donate Toby Dunville to the World War museum in the Soldiers’ Memorial met with favorable response but was tabled for further discussion. Frank (Filbert) Depke’s persistent attempts to monopolize the floor at recent meetings has been explained by Jules Silberberg. It seems that the roly poly chiropodist enrolled in a public speaking class a few months ago — and the members of Rouen Post are bearing the brunt of his misguided passion for oratory.

Ambassador Bullitt’s prediction that Germany will attack America, if the Nazis succeed in subduing England, has stirred “Weaving Willie” Engel to action. According to reliable neighbors, the former A. E. F. captain is spending his evenings and weekends building tank traps in his Gannon avenue garden. Toby Dunville feels that Engel’s precautions are a waste of energy. “No tank could ever penetrate that jungle of rock and weeds,” declared the vociferous auditor.

Robert (Shorty) Richner, the perennial commuter, has returned to his home in Pixley, California, after a brief stay in St. Louis. Another Base Hospital Unit No. 21 is being organized at the Washington University Medical School. Wonder who’ll succeed Toby Dunville as Piano Sergeant in the new Unit? Service Officer Charley Jablonsky is still engaged in compiling a list of deceased nurses and the location of their graves. We are interested in the whereabouts of the venerable P. H. Byrns who has been missing from his accustomed haunts since giving us a tip on a most unreliable horse a few weeks ago. Jules Silberberg, compositor on the St. Louis Post-Dispatch has been assigned to the day force after twenty years of night duty.

AN ORCHID FROM COLONEL MURPHY

My dear Stack:

I have been tremendously interested in the June issue of the Rouen Post. The article on hospital administration shows what can be done with proper spirit of cooperation and this experience of the American units attached to the British service should be of the greatest possible value in case the United States and Great Britain are again partners in this great effort to preserve the ideals of democracy.

The fantasy “Rare Days In June” is a gem. This article with illustrations must make a good many hearts beat a little faster and it gives to us all the satisfaction that at one time we did play a part in serving our country. Congratulations to you on the whole issue.

Fred T. Murphy

Col. Fred T. Murphy