The Rouen Post, May 1941

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A few months ago, the London Daily Telegraph published a letter from William Dawkings of Whitstable, Kent, in which the former Coldstream Guardsman told of his son David, finding a haven from bombs in St. Louis with Miss Jeannette Parish who had nursed the elder Dawkings in General Hospital No. 12 at Rouen during the first World War. He closed with a request to hear from other British veterans who had known General 12 during its operation by the St. Louis Unit. The response was quick and voluminous. To Dawkings, knee-deep in the sudden shower of daily mail, it seemed as though every reader of the Telegraph had at one time been a patient in General 12. Letters poured in from towns, hamlets and quiet farms. A woman who had served with the Volunteer Aid Detachment wrote from her home in North Ireland. Most of the correspondents recalled various members of the American unit by name and all were lavish in praise of their treatment while in the hospital. One suggested forming a Rouen Post in England with the personnel of Unit 21 as honorary members.

Dawkings, who has been in poor health for years, seems to have found new vigor through his correspondence with other veterans of the “Rouen sector.” He writes: “Only last week my doctor commented on my improved physical condition. My circulation is better and the phlebitis that has compelled me to spend much time in bed seems to have disappeared. I am at business every day now.”

The following letters have been passed along to us by Dawkings with the hope that they will be of interest to the American comrades of the B. E. F. in France.

DONCASTER

Dear Mr. Dawkings:

Allow me to express the pleasure I received from reading your letter published in the Daily Telegraph. I was a patient in General Hospital No. 12 at Rouen in the early part of 1918 and like hundreds of others who have doubtless read your letter, have never forgotten the services rendered by our friends from America.

If I remember rightly, I was in Ward 7, being one of their first patients suffering from gas burns. The Sister in charge of that ward was Sister Nina Shelton. There was also Nurse Wilcox and Nurse Marion. News of these friends would be most acceptable after a lapse of years and I think it very nice of you to offer your services in contacting them.

Yours sincerely,

C. LAWRENCE,

Late 24th Bn. Royal Fusiliers

MAY, 1941
Dear Sir:

Thanks for your letter and the copy of the *Rouen Post*. As the names you mentioned were unfamiliar I looked up my old records and found I had made a mistake in the number of the hospital. The hospital where I served was originally No. 9 General, which eventually became Base Hospital No. 4 under the Americans. The staff of No. 4 were principally from Cleveland, Ohio. On their return to the United States they published a book which was a photographic record from the time of their departure from Cleveland until their return. A copy was sent to me and it brought back many pleasant memories, and if you think it will be of any interest I shall be pleased to loan it to you.

Sincerely,

P. W. PREVETT

LINCOLNSHIRE

I was interested in your letter to the Daily Telegraph respecting General Hospital No. 12 at Rouen. I was a patient there in 1917 when our American friends under Major Murphy took over from our own R. A. M. C. I have often talked with my wife of the kindness we Tommies received from the American doctors and nurses and I shall always remember Lt. Chesney and Sister Kate Murphy of Unit 21. Also, I especially remember Miss Hamilton Bruce of the Volunteer Aid Detachment and her pal Nurse Callahan.

I am glad to hear of your son being in St. Louis. I have a twelve-year-old daughter and although I have thought of sending her to Canada nothing has been done about it. One of her friends in Lincoln sailed on the first refugee ship bound for Canada but the ship was torpedoed and she is now back home.

Yours faithfully,

ADAM WRIGHT,
Late Sergt, 2nd Royal Warwick Regt.,
B. E. F., France

COLEERAINE, NORTH IRELAND

I read your letter in the Telegraph with much interest as I was a V. A. D. in the World War and worked with American nurses at No. 8 General Hospital at Rouen where I often visited No. 12 General Hospital. I also worked with the nurses at No. 14 Stationary Hospital at Dimereaux before they were assigned to their own hospital. I wonder if it would be possible to get in touch with any of those nurses or any of my former patients. I would love to do so.

Sincerely,

M. M. KANE
Dear Sir:

Your letter in the Telegram of today is of great interest to me as I was a patient in General Hospital No. 12 when the American Unit from St. Louis arrived. One of their first operations was performed in a bell tent by Dr. Proetz with Sister Parish holding my head in her very capable hands. Nurse McDonald later took charge of me and when I was finally discharged, gave me a wallet bearing the inscription, “Pour un bon soldat.” The wallet, much worn, is still one of my cherished possessions.

Sisters Parish and McDonald were from St. Louis and if the American Red Cross is still in touch with them I’d like to let them know that a very grateful patient of theirs is still very much alive—and though too old for overseas service, was one of the first in the Home Guards who will do their bit to keep the old flag flying over London.

L. J. MEARA
72 Woodford Green, Essex

SURREY

Dear Sir:

I read your letter in the Telegram with much interest. Being an “Old Contemptible” and a former patient in No. 12 General Hospital at Rouen I would like very much to express my gratitude to our American friends for the many things they did for me in 1917.

I well remember my journey in the hospital train from the Somme to Rouen and how comfortable we were made upon arriving at the hospital. Those days will never be forgotten.

Sincerely,

F. R. GREGORY,
Late of the 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment,
2nd Brigade, 1st Division
126 Stonelight Ave.,
Worcester Park
Surrey

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Dear Sir:

I was a patient in Ward G 5, General Hospital No. 12 from November 17 to March 1918 and am still appreciative of the care and attention I received. I recall the Christmas of 1917 as one of the best I have had. Unfortunately I have lost all contact with the people who nursed me but I can still remember a Sister Bailey, Sister Page and wardmaster “Brute” Warren. There was also a Miss Shelton in a nearby ward who was very kind.

Among the patients in G 5 was a Private Stevens who typed a book for Dr. Schwab and started an anti-vulgarity league which should be particularly remembered by the Padre who conducted a bible class in our ward.

Since that last war I have spent 12 years in and around Philadelphia, but never got as far west as St. Louis. I have a son in the Royal Navy.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. EASY

Rectory Farm,
Milton, Cambridgeshire
We have had no real mail since December 2nd. Not a letter, a parcel nor anything. Finally today a letter came from Rachel written before Thanksgiving. Olive has had only one letter from home since we came. Joe Meyer had one today but it was very old too.

I have just made rounds and it surely is cold tonight. There is not an over supply of coal at any time so we have fires at night where the orderlies sit. I have a bell-tent for an office and a paraffin stove and a student lamp to keep me warm. It does very well until the kerosene burns out. Fortunately, I rarely have time to sit. Last night I did not stop one instant except when I ate my supper. I have a delirious man whom I watch every odd moment. He is sleeping tonight. Their delirium is more like nightmare. This man imagines he has been left on a hill with his wound unbandaged and cries and cries until I have talked him awake, then he is all right for awhile. But shortly he will be off again. I wonder that more do not have it. Poor old things.

I feel as though I could stay on night duty indefinitely, but the girls say it is very exhausting at the end of the month. I do not mind the cold as much as on day duty for Harlan has a fire in the morning and I undress there. Then Olive always has our fire started when I get up in the evening and that isn't hard to take. We sleep in the unoccupied huts—just have our cots carried in—and find them very comfortable. I put two hot water bottles in before breakfast and before sleep overtakes me I am piping hot.

No one can accuse me of risking exposure to the weather. The men say that if I fell down I could not possibly get up. This is what I wear. One silk and wool union suit, one all wool shirt, two pairs of wool stockings, wool tights, wool bloomers, dress, apron, sweater, heavy brown coat, knitted helmet and the blue knitted cap we have added to our uniform. The rest of my costume consists of heavy hobnailed shoes with inner soles, kid gloves protected by gloves of wool, and last but not least, a pair of heavy socks pulled over my shoes. Carry a stable lantern sometimes shaded with a red handkerchief. My flash light I use to peek into beds and to do Carrel tubes. As you may suspect by this time, I am hardly a figure to conjure with romance as I plod on my rounds—but I have certainly learned how to ward off the wintry blasts.

My hands are a sight. My friends at home would never recognize them. Absolutely filthy doesn't begin to describe them. Even Hinds doesn't keep the cracks healed and every line is full of dirt. I go to bed with each finger bound up separately in zinc oxide salve and then more salve on the palms and backs and my mittens over all.

(To be continued)
The Rouen Post is now entering its fifth year and still going strong. Bill Stack still has a large fund of material with which to carry on for some time to come; however, in order to do this we again make our annual appeal for contributions. Some have asked if it is not about time and others have sent contributions voluntarily.

In our previous appeals we have outlined our needs. The situation, for the present, remains the same except there is some likelihood of increased costs this year—and we want to be prepared to carry on Bill's fine work without interruption.

Please make your check payable to Rouen Post #242 and mail to

Rouen Post #242
514 Commercial Bldg.,
St. Louis, Missouri

Again we thank you for your generous support in previous years and trust we may again have it this year.

THE ROUEN POST

By: Wm. E. Engel