RETROSPECTION
By Joe Meyer, with apologies to Ogden Nash

Was it 25 years ago, or only yesterday, that you boarded a Pullman and rode in style to New York?

Was it that long ago when you got your first hint of war’s woe (the food) as on that lumbering old liner, the St. Paul, you did embark?

Surely it hasn’t been 25 years since you disported yourself in Blackpool, braved seasickness and submarines in the Channel and planted your unsteady feet on old Rouen’s cobble-stones?

Was it almost half a life-time ago that you learned, to the detriment of your meagre store of francs, who was the smartest man in camp?” (Roll them bones!)

Was it all of a quarter-century ago that you carried Aussie-burdened stretchers half the night, after carrying bed-pans all day,

And then had energy left for fun during your time off. And say—

Have 25 summers gone into history since you gave up your attempts the French language to master,

Because you found out that a few essential words and a few expressive gestures would serve your purposes faster?

Have 25 winters intervened since you missed the last tram-car bound for Champ de Courses—and then, madn’t or sadn’t,

Battled with British officers for a taxi (if you had francs) or staggered back to camp on foot (if you hadn’t)?

Was it 25 years ago that you heartily damned the inventor of MacConochies stue,

And with your emphatically expressed opinion of Australian rabbit made the air blue?

Was it that long ago that through your first air raid you shivered,

And then got used to them, more or less, and just mildly quivered?

Has it been 25 years since AWOL, VAD, BEF, WAAC PU and VVV meant something in your mundane scheme,

And how long has it been since you first went on leave to Paris—or was the whole thing a dreme?

No, it wasn’t a dream, and it’s been all of twenty-five years,
But often just like yesterday it appears.

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THE ROUEN POST

You yourself with the reminiscent list of happenings can carry on. There are dozens and dozens of high-lights for your mind to tarry on. Of those two years which to your country’s service you dedicated; there are memories which “bless and burn” and which you wouldn’t want eradicated. In fact, you’d find it enjoyable.

To revive those memories in company with your old comrades—so come to the Unit’s 25th Reunion. There’s no better way in which to make your time employable.

CINDERELLA MAN

Often when recollections of 1917-18 shuttle through my mind I find myself wondering what has become of Bob Moran—one of the few veterans of Base Hospital Unit 21 whose name is not on our mailing list.

Bob Moran was a nice guy. At least “Chappy” Chalfant and I, who once shared a tent with him, thought so. But a pleasing personality was hardly an enduring distinction in an outfit rich in good fellowship. I remember Bob chiefly for his overnight leap from a coal pile to the status of “an officer and a gentleman.”

Moran, like George Delany, was employed in the St. Louis division of the Western Electric Company when he decided, in the spring of 1917, to see Paris at the expense of Uncle Sam. Shortly after Base Hospital Unit 21 arrived in Rouen to take over British General Hospital 12, Moran was assigned to duty as a clerk in the company office, an enviable berth by comparison with the plight of an unhappy majority who found themselves launched on unplanned careers as orderlies.

In their first flush of enthusiasm at the prospects of immediate service overseas the enlisted personnel had, in the main, overlooked the fact that a hospital requires considerable number of menials. There had been much talk in the recruiting office at the Washington University Medical School about the need for typists, chauffeurs, but no one was asked about his qualifications as a ward jockey. It was not until the men reached Blackpool, and listened to a series of lectures by British medical officers, that they realized many of them were scheduled to “fight the war” with bedpans. Even then, the majority clung to the illusion that they were destined for higher roles.

“The other fellow” would undoubtedly be stuck with the ward chores.

Favored with one of the few desirable jobs in camp, Private Moran found life pleasant enough at the Base. As a clerk he was excused from the arduous task of stretcher bearing—an exemption granted only to non-coms, clerks, and overfed cooks. It was not a bad war.

For a few carefree months he pursued the even tenor of his way with no thought of the uncertain state of man. Then the blow fell. Hard Luck, who had been busily engaged with various members of the Unit, crept up and slipped Moran a hotfoot.

With startling abruptness he was transferred to Sergeant Puckett’s “fatigue squad.” Manual labor replaced the office routine by day and another name was added to the list of nocturnal stretcher bearers. Napoleon is credited with saying that every soldier carries a field marshal’s baton in his knapsack. In Bob’s case he had been handed a shovel.
One evening, about a week after his introduction to the working class, Moran ruefully examining his blistered hands, remembered that he had a father who was then assistant chief of the United States Secret Service. Using a code, learned during temporary employment in that department, the former clerk advised the elder Moran that his his son was being pushed around in Normandy. Convinced by now that the army was primarily created for officers, he asked for a transfer to some branch of the service where his experience with Western Electric might lead to a commission. It was a bleak, soggy evening in late November. Since early morning the wind and the rain had apparently joined forces in an all out assault upon Rouen and the surrounding countryside. Wild gusts shook the village of tents huddled in the mire of General Hospital 12, and when the wind dropped, as it did at intervals, torrents of rain lashed the canvas roofs. It was a day to be indoors—even the orderlies ceased repining for the moment. But Private Moran, in dungarees and porous raincoat, rounded out the afternoon with a squad unloading coal trucks as Sergeant Puckett watched from the window of a well-heated hut.

The evening meal was over when a dripping, black-face caricature of the once-dapper clerk sloshed wearily into the company kitchen. Realizing that the mess hall would be deserted, I invited him to eat with me in the comparatively cheerful cookhouse. He was discouraged. Nearly two months had passed since his appeal to Moran, senior, and, as yet, he had received no reply. For all he knew his letter might have gone down with some torpedoed ship.

The door opened and Dave Perkins, regular army sergeant, entered with a flurry of rain. “What a night,” he muttered. “How about some coffee?” Then his eye fell upon Bob who had finished his meal and was drying by the stove. “I was looking for you in the mess hall, Moran,” he announced. “You’re wanted in the Adjutant’s office.”

Some ten minutes later a rejuvenated buck private came dashing back to the kitchen. His lethargy had vanished; he had the air of a prisoner who has just received a pardon. With a triumphant grin he handed me a telegram. It was an order for Private Robert Moran to report to the office of the Quartermaster in Paris the following day. The letter to Washington had been answered.

One month after his departure from Rouen, Robert Moran, 2nd Lt., U. S. A. a sartorial treat in trenchcoat, gleaming boots and swagger stick, lent additional color to the crowds along the Paris boulevards. The enlisted men who saluted in passing would have been surprised to know that the smartly gloved hands of the young lieutenant were still calloused from contact with a shovel.

**RECOLLECTIONS OF A RED CROSS NURSE**

*By Retta Snyder*

The long-expected German drive was launched on March 21 and we have not had a minute off duty yesterday nor today. Convoy after convoy in and convoy after convoy out. It’s the life and tremendously interesting. I am in the head hut with Harlan in charge. Olive, Bing Flint and another nurse and I are the staff. We just chase and make beds all day long. The first day I went on duty I thought I would expire before the night but I didn’t.

I feel it my duty to write tonight but I shall go to sleep in the attempt. We are so busy we hardly know where we stand but one person can do only so much and the rest goes undone. I am back on my beloved D line with a double tent alone. Everything to do for twenty-eight patients. Everyone has a dressing, some small but most are heavy surgery. I just plod along and do my best. Many nurses have more than I and no one fusses anyway.
Toby Dunville, former auditor of the St. Louis Mart Building, has left our family circle but the old saying, “out of sight, out of mind,” does not apply to the veteran piano-sergeant. The testimonial shown above was recently prepared and sent to Dunville in Minneapolis by former members of Base Hospital Unit No. 21.

In acknowledging the tribute from his old comrades Dunville wrote: “It is a beautiful piece of work, and though I question the sentiment expressed, I shall have the parchment framed as a perpetual reminder of a great gang of fellows. If I should ever learn how some of the other non-coms happened to receive their stripes I shall return the compliment. Sincerely,

Toby Dunville