LETTERS TO THE MATRON-IN-CHIEF, Q.A.I.M.N.S. FROM MEMBERS ON ACTIVE SERVICE.

We are privileged, by consent of headquarters, to publish a series of letters addressed to the Matron-in-Chief by Members of Q.A.I.M.N.S. on active service abroad. We feel sure these reports will be read with sincere interest by their colleagues on home service, and will command admiration and gratitude for the courage and self-denial of our military nurses in the service of our country.

From MISS E. C. M. HUFFAM.

Evacuation of the 4th C.C.S., B.E.F., 1940.

April, a glorious hot month, the woods full of wild flowers, many we did not recognise—whole carpets of wild anemones and the roadsides just a blaze of yellow with large, honey-scented cowslips.

One Friday afternoon towards the end of the month, the C.O. of the Motor Ambulance Corps sent his car to take as many Sisters as were off duty for a real car run. We decided to visit Chateau Thierry and see the lovely American 1916-18 War Memorial. High over the hill, looking down on the town, a wide and very impressive memorial—so friendly and clean in the sunshine. Three of us had gone that day and were walking quietly through the main street looking really for shoe shops hoping to buy summer slippers, when a very charming, gay young French lady came just behind and said, "Sisters—English Sisters? Oh, where have you come from and are you come to stay? and do please come and have tea with me." Well, we felt slightly shocked, as we, of course, never told strangers who or what we were. She smiled so joyfully and laughingly said, "No, don't tell me. My sister is a Q.A. and is in Dieppe, only do come and have tea." We went gladly and made friends. She was so full of life and aged 25—had married a real Frenchman while studying at the Lycée in Paris. He was an officer with his Regiment near the Maginot Line. She was teaching English in a large school and had a delightful flat in the American Memorial Crèche building. We thoroughly enjoyed that day and promised to come again. Alas, we did not see her again, but were able to send her books and she did the same to us.

Very shortly after that wonderful day, the "Balloon," in soldier slang, went up. Up, in real earnest. The first we knew of it in our own area was a 'phone message at 2 a.m. when the Theatre Sister on call came to each of us and said, "There's an air-raid warning." We jumped up and dressed, seized tin hats, respirators, camp-chairs and rug and went down to the cellar. The town's "Wailing Winnie" went off as we were chatting, so we came up from below to find two gendarmes in a clear square, and no one going to the "Cave." The pink May trees were in full bloom, and the white. Many people came to the balconies and looked out, otherwise we were the only people dressed and on the alert. Within an hour the "All clear" went, so we made tea and decided the dawn had been worth seeing—when again the telephone rang and at the same time the guns began firing and five German planes came low over the mess. We heard heavy bombs drop somewhere up the road and as soon as a lull came from overhead, we went to the hospital to find all was well, and to be thoroughly scolded by the Commanding Officer for not remaining under cover. We scurried back and had breakfast at 6 a.m. and waited for the second "All clear," which came at 7.40 a.m. So we sallied forth to face the day—thinking it only an incident as we'd had planes over before. But daily at 4.45 a.m. the German Patrol came over. They came in groups of eleven, thirteen, seventeen and did all the damage they could. Then, naturally, the casualties came pouring in, shrapnel wounds mostly Air Force—many severely burnt. A large convoy of the 51st Division from the Maginot area came, then work was all that mattered—no one even thought of off duty. The orderlies were magnificent—the M.O.s worked ceaselessly, and the Sisters, bless them, were there at every turn. Electricity went off—gas cut off—they got hot drinks, big dressings done by Primus stoves, the theatre going regardless of "Jerry's" night or day raids. He took a fancy to call every two hours, when we tried to get the Ambulance Train loaded with very serious cases for the base however often he came. When it looked impossible the M.A.C. brought the patients back to the hospital, while the train drew off to a siding. This game of put and take went on for 36 hours, but we got all patients off on the train without incident—beat "Jerry" to it, and beat him well. He came that day as usual at 4.45 a.m., while the ambulances were being loaded for the third time in twelve hours, refilled with very badly wounded officers and men. "Jerry" came again and flew low over all. The ambulances were lined up, drivers, orderlies, medical officers, none had been off duty at all for full 24 hours—the chronic grumblers never made a single moan, all were kindly and helpful. Britishers at bay did their utmost against wretched odds. One miserable half-hour, when all were keyed up, one Irish orderly, looking up to the sky, murmured quietly, "Cobber Kain, we need you" (he had been a patient—measles). Like Jessie's Dream at Lucknow, came the drone of our very own squadron. An officer called, "Hold on there for a minute," and at the end of those very 60 seconds the entire sky was ours, and the Ambulance Train was filled up with the normal peace-time amount of comfort and smooth running. The Sisters were told to pack and be on the train (the same train) by noon prompt. So when the worst cases had been given the helpful hypodermics of morphia, and the operating theatre cleared and Emergency Panniers packed, the Sisters raced to their Mess, 10 minutes down the avenue, packed, ate their stew from the tin plates prepared by two good orderlies, packed their personal kit, helped pack the Mess kit and got to the train. Got in with two American lady refugees—Lady Beatty and Mrs. Benson from Rheims, where they had just opened a wonderful officers' club, and been told to go quickly and join the Sisters of the 4th C.C.S. We met in the train and were just making friends when "Wailing Winnie" wailed to some purpose, and overhead "Jerry" was sending down some boomps—boomp. Back came our own and chased them just as we feared they had us well into focus, and away puffed No. 5 Ambulance Train. The Sisters in that train were the first we had seen during our months in France, so we felt very drawn to them and found they looked so fresh and young. This Ambulance Train got us to Chateau Thierry about evening, but the French people would have none of us. They daren't and were trembling when they saw our men in uniform, as they were convinced Les Boches would follow Les Anglais immediately. They did, and the town had its first air-raid that very night—a severe one. The official interpreter got us billets three kilos away—two per tiny cottage, sharing double beds. We retired very early, all abed by 9 p.m., as we were very tired, and once more 3 a.m. Les Boches with heavy bombs, one just near—the next field to our surrounds.

It was there we actually became soldiers, and threw ourselves flat in ditches and under hedges whenever "Jerry" came overhead. There, too, we realised the value of tin hats. The orderlies and a few officers were camped in a barn, and while wandering almost from door to door trying to purchase eggs for a picnic lunch, one orderly said, "Gee, Sister, a whole franc each, I can show you where to get them for nothing." The officers found having

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