

OUR BRAVE WAR NURSES.

THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON, S.W.1.

November 13th, 1941.

Huge cockroaches that eat silk underwear and all the gum from envelopes, stamps and labels are just "minor personal troubles" to members of the Q.A.I.M.N.S. and T.A.N.S., serving with the British Army overseas.

"It was no uncommon sight to open a trunk and find some of these creatures enjoying a meal provided by one's best pyjamas," writes one Q.A.I.M.N.S. Sister. But, she goes on, "We seem to manage to nurse all the same."

Tropical heat hampers work; so do the tiny ants, which are literally everywhere, including the dining-room table. But, as these nurses say themselves in letters home, "soon after arrival we are functioning as if we had been here for years."

Some of these front line nursing sisters were sent to a country wrapped in winter. They arrived in bitterly cold weather, were housed in hotels without heating of any kind. Yet they didn't grumble. "We were comfortable," they wrote home, "except for the doubtful drainage and the lack of water supply."

And it was nothing for them to "meet the cesspool in the kitchen."

These women of the Q.A.I.M.N.S. pass lightly over the difficulties of creating workable conditions where few or no facilities exist; where packing cases become cupboards and sheets of corrugated iron serve as draining boards, temperamental Primus-stoves replace gas-rings, and native orderlies, of varying degrees of intelligence, and with no knowledge of English—but one and all keen and helpful—give what assistance they can and are gradually turned into useful nursing orderlies.

The Q.A.I.M.N.S. is in the front line everywhere. Some of its members have seen the Navy in action. Others have transferred from one ship to another in a convoy in mid-ocean to nurse a seaman taken ill at sea; escaped from a sinking ship by climbing down a rope ladder; nursed a woman who had been severely injured on a trawler, and stayed with her on the trawler after all others had been trans-shipped to a destroyer.

In another ship was a Q.A.I.M.N.S. assistant matron, the only woman on board. She was taken ill in mid-ocean. But the convoy went on. Two Sisters were brought over from another ship to look after her and to supervise the sick bay.

In Greece the T.A.N.S. Matron attended official receptions, at one of which she was the only woman present. She was presented to the King and the Crown Prince and General Metaxas and other Greek celebrities. Princess Nicholas (the Duchess of Kent's Mother) visited the Hospital on several occasions and cheered everyone by her wonderful sense of humour and graciousness. The Matron relates that she insisted on seeing everything and even tasted the meat pie in the kitchen and pronounced it good. The King's niece and Princess Alexandra and Princess Frederika, the Crown Princess and Princess Katarina all visited the patients in the wards.

Later on air-raids became continuous, but it was impossible for the Sisters to take much notice of them as

there was so much to do—patients were admitted and evacuated in large numbers daily. The Sisters paid tribute to the R.A.M.C. orderlies who "were marvellous, stretcher-bearing almost continuously, no light task in buildings where there were no lifts."

Then orders came to evacuate, later cancelled, as it was considered safer to stay than risk a get-away. At this moment, the Matron writes, "Personally, I was far too busy to worry about the future and I accepted it all quite calmly." Two days later, however, orders again came that evacuation of the nursing staff was possible, and this entailed a terrible journey over ghastly roads in darkness to a tiny jetty and then by merchant ship to Crete amidst continuous bombing and indescribable noise, finally to a port in the Middle East with several unpleasant attacks en route.

It must not be forgotten that in this war of uncertain movement, many Sisters are suffering periods of inactivity in all war areas, those periods in which it is more difficult than at any other time to win the "war of nerves." It is at these times that they need all possible discipline and self-control, waiting and wondering or only temporarily carrying on in small stations at home, doing the work at hand in the knowledge that at a later date they too may be required to serve "At Home or Abroad" in the Military Medical Units and we can only hope that the more active work, which they so often request, will not materialise.

"BEYOND THE PRICE OF RUBIES."

We feel sure the above article supplied by the War Office will be read with interest. We all honour Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service; it appeals to the patriotism of every nurse.

When war was declared in September, 1939, it was an open secret that our official military nurses of all ranks followed the Flag into France, and there did yeoman service; but discretion being considered by our War Office very necessary, the Press were requested not to give publicity to military movements. Thus we were in honour bound not to give credit to our Military Nursing Services, much as we should have been pleased to do so. But their valour and devotion to duty was never in doubt, and we have now available for publication, with the Censor's consent, official records which it will be our pride and pleasure to publish as space allows.

Members of Q.A.I.M.N.S. and the Reserve have worked unceasingly in General Hospitals, on Ambulance Trains, on Hospital Ships, Hospital Carriers, and on Medical Trooping Duties.

The admirable organisation at home under very able superintendence inaugurated a system of official reports from those on active service being addressed to the Matron-in-Chief at Headquarters in England. It is these living documents which prove the value of the services of a highly skilled Military Nursing Service available in time of war. These invaluable military nursing contingents have been supplied for Dominion troops from their home countries and are serving at the front, or nearby in every sphere of war, for the benefit of sick and wounded. Their skill and devotion is, indeed, "beyond the price of rubies."

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