

BROADCAST TALK TO NORTH AMERICA.

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On August 1st I left the United Kingdom by air to visit the British Military Nursing Service in North Africa. That is the Service known so well by its traditional grey and scarlet uniform and its scarlet cape. That uniform goes back to the days of Florence Nightingale, the first of all trained nurses employed in Military Hospitals, in 1854, nearly 100 years ago.

That was the year these original 40 nurses first functioned in the Crimea. Since that day we have never looked back. When I heard I was to be allowed to accept the invitation of the Director of Medical Services in North Africa to visit his area and see the Q.A.s (that is their short name, which denotes Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service), then I thought at once of the Americans, and rang up the Headquarters, European Theatre of Operations, to ask the Chief Nurse, Colonel Margaret Aaron, if she would come with me. Would she not? And so, on the flight out and back, I had her for my companion—and what a pleasant companion. If she enjoyed my company as much as I did hers, she had nothing to complain of. We had time to talk and talk, all about our two Services. It was most interesting and instructive for me.

But perhaps, before I go further, you will like to hear something of our Q.A.s since the beginning; for since 1854 there have always been female trained nurses in British Military Hospitals (trained according to the standard of their day), and now all State Registered Nurses on the General State Registers of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland. These are what you would call "graduate nurses," but we call them Sisters in the Army. They are commissioned into the Women's Forces, and hold rank from Lieutenant to Brigadier, but their true position in the Army was very aptly described by an American soldier on a Hospital Ship. He told the Matron, who holds the relative rank of Major: "We call them nurses, and you call them Sisters, but really they are mothers to us." Here I must stop for a minute to send my sincerest thanks to all those Americans who gave the Q.A.s of this ship such a warm welcome in New York. I wish those kind people could have read the letters I received describing the marvellous way in which they were fêted and entertained. I do thank them most heartily.

And now to continue our history. In 1884, definite regulations were laid down for Nurses in the Army, and later it became Princess Christian's Army Nursing Service, which was the Nursing Service of the Boer War. After the Boer War, the Service was reorganised and became Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. Princess Christian, Queen Alexandra and now Queen Mary have all been our Presidents, and we have to thank them for their keen interest in our work and welfare. Without it we could not have reached the high standard and status which now exists.

In 1914-18, 18,000 trained nurses of Q.A.I.M.N.S. and its reserve, with the Territorial Army Nursing Service, our Sister Service of the Territorial Army, served with the Armies in all the war areas.

In 1939, on the outbreak of hostilities, there were 624 Q.A. regulars serving in all the overseas stations—Hong Kong, India, Egypt, the Sudan, Malta and Gibraltar, where their duties have always been to administer and organise and discipline the wards, nurse all the seriously ill patients themselves, and train the male R.A.M.C. orderlies.

During this war, the Q.A.s and the Territorial Army Nursing Service have been merged into one Service, and when I speak of Q.As, I now mean both Military Nursing Services.

It was my privilege to mobilise on September 4th, 1939, as Principal Matron of the B.E.F., France, and it was there, except for one year, in 1917-18, that I saw active service. . . . The first six Q.A.s landed at Cherbourg on September 10, and 24 hours later many more arrived with me at the same port.

By May, 1940, 1,300 had reached France, and in the end were all evacuated safely.

There are many stories of adventure which I could tell of this period, stories of the Sisters who were near Brussels and Lille, and on the Hospital Trains and in forward C.C.S.s. It was the first time in this war that Q.A.s had really shown their mettle under fire and bombs. They did not fail to live up to the high traditions of the Service. Several of them were awarded honours for tending wounded on quays, in Hospital carriers and in trains.

By a miracle, every one of the 1,300 Q.A.s reached England safely, even though a few of them waded out to ships at Dunkirk.

But all this has been keeping too near home. Already, hundreds of Q.A.s had been drafted overseas. Fourteen of them are now prisoners in Hong Kong, and 44 others are still missing in Malaya. We have had our casualties, too, on land and at sea. One word about Malta. At one time no more Sisters could be sent there, and State Registered Male Nurses were sent in their place. I should like to pay a tribute to these men, who are trained by the Sisters.

These men give their skill and training in forward units where Sisters do not usually go, however willing they may be to take all risks with their colleagues of the R.A.M.C. For volunteers are never lacking for forward units. I remember one Matron, who, when asked if she would call for volunteers to return in France, to help near Rouen, said: "No, it would be useless. The whole unit would volunteer!"

At this time I think I should quote a remark of one young officer, who described the conduct of a senior Sister under machine-gun fire as an act of supreme courage, but, remember, she was tending a young officer, burnt and blinded, and, knowing her personally, as I do, I think she would say she "forgot about herself." . . .

Before I finish the story of the war areas overseas (except North Africa), I think I must tell you a little about those in India, Burma, the Middle East, Palestine, the Sudan and East and West Africa, where they are nursing patients in combined hospitals for British and native troops. For nursing is international, and our patients are of every creed, race and language. I hear of Sisters learning Hindustani, Arabic and Swahili, and of the many wards full of native troops from all corners of the Empire—yes, and women, children, civilians, evacuees and Allies—all patients of ours, whenever they are to be found in beds in our Hospitals. . . .

Fifty Q.A.s were in Greece, and did Trojan work there, and again almost by a miracle they all escaped injury from the incessant bombing on the way to Crete and to the Middle East. They arrived—sorry, but safe.

And so the story goes on, more and more, till now some thousands of these Sisters are serving with the Army everywhere, in Hospitals, Casualty Clearing Stations, Hospital Ships, Hospital Carriers, Ambulance Trains, and in Camp Reception Stations.

Seven out of every eight are on active service overseas.

And now I come to the story of my own thrilling lightning tour in North Africa.

Col. Aaron and I started off together from the United Kingdom, and within 24 hours we found ourselves in Algiers. We had become "short snorters"! I now possess the signatures of an American bomber pilot and the U.S.A. Air Force Colonel who first took an airfield in Africa. I am proud of that. We had meant to tour together, but found that this was not possible, as most of the American

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