

THE R.A.M.C. IN WAR-TIME MALTA

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line became part of the famous 29th Division. Both did good work at Gallipoli, and later the first line served in Palestine.

After the war, the unit returned to Ipswich, one company being kept at Norwich. Even in peace the Terriers' tradition of enthusiasm and efficiency was maintained, and in 1938 a long cherished ambition was realized, when the T.A. Ambulance Shield which was competed for annually by all Territorial medical units, was brought home to Ipswich.

The Shield is still held, but is at present in safe custody in London.

In the inevitable re-organization which came to all units at the beginning of the present war, the 161st gave of their best to form daughter units, and now they are proud to relate that they have attained the venerable status of a grandmother among units.

The 15th Field Ambulance, which has been raised in Malta since the entry of Italy into the present war, cannot at present lay claim to any inherited traditions of its own.

Nevertheless, the keenness of the young Maltese soldier, of whom the unit is largely composed, combined with the tenacity of his British comrade, has gone far to producing a smart and well balanced unit who are set, as one man, at doing a good job of work in the two thirds of the Islands for which they are responsible.

THE HOSPITALS

For the sand-fly fever or the troublesome boil, a few days' treatment in bed at one of the many Field Ambulance Stations will usually suffice to put the soldier on his feet again — fit for duty. But for the more serious illness, such as appendicitis or pneumonia, the M.O. arranges for immediate admission into one of the General Hospitals.

Of these, the oldest and the best known is the 90th, at Imtarfa, whose Clock Tower is such a familiar sight from almost every part of the Island. The foundations of the present "Main" Hospital were laid during the last war and in 1920 it was completed and formally opened by the Governor.

In peacetime it was the only Military Hospital in Malta, with a full capacity of 196 beds.

Since the outbreak of war, it has expanded enormously and has absorbed the former Imtarfa Barracks, which are still known as the "Barrack" Hospital. Imtarfa is very fortunate in having many amenities for the hospital staff, many of which are also available to convalescent patients.

They have one of the finest Hockey pitches on the Island, a Football ground, four concrete Tennis courts, three Billiard rooms and a miniature rifle range.

The Debating and the Musical Societies have regular meetings, always well attended, and the well stocked Libraries, both medical and general, are much appreciated.

The Imtarfa Cinema, which shows different films four times a week, is a favourite haunt of the "up-patient", and the concerts and dances also held there provide both amusement for the bored convalescent and relaxation for the work-worn orderly.

Though up to the present, Imtarfa has been the acknowledged centre of medical activities, on duty and off, her sister hospitals, though smaller and but newly arrived on the Island, are already vying with her in producing amusements and recreation for themselves and their patients, and a friendly but spirited rivalry has sprung up between them.

Both the other General Hospitals, the 45th and the 39th, claim a common ancestor in the 18th, and the majority of the men hail from the neighbourhood of Leeds.



Many of them were with the General Hospital which, up to the last moment, was attending to the wounded that poured into Boulogne during the withdrawal of June 1940. The 39th have not been without their moments of excitement, even in more recent times.

The ship that was carrying their headquarters and a number of other ranks, was torpedoed on the way to Malta, and although not a single casualty was suffered, many arrived on the wharf with nothing save the pyjamas they stood up in — and an odd blanket! Though they are only on the point of opening up as a hospital, it will not take the 39th long to get into their stride, once permanent quarters have been allotted.

Every one of them, from the O.C. to the 3rd class Sanitary Assistant are impatient to get to work, and there is nothing so distasteful to the R.A.M.C. as not being able to start — not even having too much to do!

The 45th are more fortunate in having been able to take over a most palatial building in another part of the Island, — a building, which though not originally intended as a hospital, has enormous possibilities of which Colonel Whalley and his staff are sparing no effort to make the most.

The wards, one of which is illustrated, are smaller than the usual hospital ward, and there is a cosy home-like atmosphere about them, made

more real by the bowls of flowers which seem to be always plentiful in this corner of Malta.

This may, of course, have something to do with the proximity of a floral cemetery (which by the way, was in existence before the hospital) as it is known to produce dahlias almost as exquisite as the prize-winning one of Bighi.

Be that as it may, in whichever hospital the ailing soldier eventually finds himself, he will be assured of the best and most up-to-date treatment either in the general wards or in one of the well appointed specialist departments in which each of the hospitals abounds.

Whether our hero is suffering from a crooked spine, a flat foot, an enlarged liver, an in-growing toe-nail or water on the brain, there is sure to be the very expert to tackle his particular misfortune.

THE CARE OF THE SERVICE FAMILY

Before leaving the subject of hospitals, we must not forget that most important appendage — The Families' Hospital.

As we leave Imtarfa, it can be seen on the left rather tucked away in a corner at the bottom of a steep drive.

Here the wives and children of soldiers, sailors, airmen and dockyard workers are looked after when they are ill, by the Gynaecological Specialist and his staff of Sisters.

Most probably they will have consulted him beforehand at one of the several Clinics which are held each week at the larger barracks for the families who live near by. Besides the General ward and the Children's ward, there is a



small but up-to-date Maternity Department, where many babies are born into the Services every year.

STATISTICS AND RESEARCH

The ordinary soldier is often bewildered at the wealth of paperwork that is occasioned by his own particular illness — shall we tonsillitis — but the fact that the soldier has had an illness before, however apparently trivial, is often of great assistance to any M.O. who may be called upon to attend him on some future occasion.

In addition, all such records are continually being correlated and condensed into statistics which provide the data needed by the research worker.

Rerearch in wartime is if any thing intensified, and directed along lines which will be of most use in conserving the man-power of the Armed Forces.

The sources of disease are discovered, and methods of prevention are developed and perfected.

Well known examples of this are the valuable, if somewhat irksome, injections of "TAB" and "ATT" which are carefully noted in the pay book and which protect the subject against harmful attacks of Typhoid fever and Lockjaw, both of which have in past wars taken such a heavy toll of armies in the field.

THE COMMAND LABORATORY

Such work is being carried out here in Malta in the Command Laboratory. But in addition to research, the "Lab", as it is affectionally called, is also responsible for carrying out the various tests that an M.O. may require to confirm the diagnosis of a difficult case, or to isolate and identify the germ which is causing some abstruse symptom, so that the appropriate treatment may be given at the earliest possible moment; or, later, to check the progress of patients on special treatment which has to be accurately controlled.

The impression may be gained from this that art of Medicine has become merely the question of turning knobs and peering down high-powered microscopes. — but this is far from the case. The laboratory supplies finesse in the M.O.'s work, rather in the same way as the slide-rule helps the mathematician.

The same principles still apply, and although his work is often made easier, it is at the same time made infinitely more accurate.

Also in the Laboratory, blood is taken from volunteer donors, and its valuable constituents are dried and stored in sterilized bottles. This "stored plasma" as it is called, may then be distributed to medical units and used on some future occasion for transfusing a seriously ill patient, having retained all the strength restoring properties of fresh blood in the meantime.

THE HEALTH RESORT

The Command Convalescent Depot

Returning now to our patient in hospital, who by this time is able to walk about the ward, and help the Sister by taking meals to those who are still in

bed, the M.O. will soon be able to decide which day he can be discharged.

If the illness has been severe or prolonged, he will probably recommend him for a spell at the Command Convalescent Depot, now situated at Paceville.

Here, by carefully graduated games and exercises, he will rapidly regain his former strength under the watchful eye of the S.M.I. who is trained in medical gymnastics, and after a week or ten days he will be able to return to his own unit, a fit man.

INTER-SERVICE COOPERATION

In no other branch of the Army is cooperation with the other Services more complete than it is in the R.A.M.C.

At Imtarfa, where the R.N. and the R.A.F. are looked after as well as the Army, a large Naval contingent of Medical Officers, Sisters and Sick Berth Attendants work in the wards and offices in the best of goodfellowship with their R.A.M.C. colleagues.

On the few occasions during the present war when the Medical Services here have been called upon to deal with sudden emergencies of considerable magnitude, Naval and R.A.M.C. surgical teams worked together for hours on end till the job was done, and only after the last operation case had been wheeled back to the ward was the pace slackened, and a sleep, worth undressing for, obtained.

THE NURSING STAFF

Q.A.I.M.N.S. and V.A.D.

Of the Nursing Sisters, both Naval and Army, the great majority are still working at Imtarfa, where not only their industry lends greatly to the smooth running of the hospital, but also their presence, together with that of the V.A.D.'s largely accounts for the great popularity that Imtarfa undoubtedly enjoys.

The strong VAD contingent provide, through their emblem, the Cross of St. John, a direct link with the Island's past. Its members, who for the most part have given up a life of ease and wartime luxury to take a hard and active part in Malta's War Effort, have the same hours on duty in the wards as the R.A.M.C. Orderlies, — and, what is more, they can cut a no mean figure when it comes to the parade ground! On the first Wednesday in the month, the Detachment hold their parade and are inspected by the C.O. and the Matron.

The drill is a credit to any Company Officer, and the parade ends with a march-past that is carried out in almost perfect formation.

The pity of it is that all this takes place at 7.15 a.m.!

Mention must also be made of the valuable part played by the Medical branch of the M.A.C. which provides not only unskilled workers but also clerks, nursing orderlies, PAD personnel, cooks and carpenters, all of whom are essential in the running of a large General Hospital.

ALL ROUND TRAINING

The R.A.M.C., like the other "Corps", does not have to rely on battles to keep them busy.

Their work comes readily enough, and sick men unlike indents, cannot wait. Besides their special task, the training embraces a wide field of subjects of a more general nature.

They have to have more than a nodding acquaintance with the soldier's "best friend", with which they may easily be called upon to defend their patients — judging by the Nazis' flair for shooting up the Red Cross and for using human screens.

The art of signalling has to be mastered, both with the lump and flag and with the buzzer, so that the many scattered medical outstations are not solely dependent on the telephone for inter-communication up and down the Island.



Many have to be able to drive an Ambulance and ride a motorbike in case of emergencies, and Physical Training is part of the day's work.

SPORTS ACTIVITIES

In their leisure hours, it cannot be said that the grass grows beneath their feet.

In the field of sport they are prominently represented, especially in Cricket and Hockey at which they have few equals in Malta.

The Hospitals' Football Cup, which was competed for by medical units stationed on the Island in the last war, is again to be contested by six elevens, each representing a medical unit.

In the Sailing world, though opportunities are necessarily curtailed, the R.A.M.C. are maintaining their prowess of pre-war days, and the three boats they possess may be taken out by any Officer or man who knows how to sail — and who knows how to get to and from the boathouse!

Stagecraft is another strong line. Pantomimes are written and produced every Christmas, and at least two are being run at the same time this year — which says a lot for the talent available.

For those who enjoy a good argument, the General Debating Societies, of which the Imtarfa one is the forerunner, provide food for thought and wit, while the music lovers attend the recitals and glee-singing arranged by the Musical Society.

In the literary sphere, "Imtarfa Pie" published every two months, is largely filled by contributions, in prose and verse, written by the "medicos" and their patients, and it aspires to a level not usually met with in magazine of its size.

THE FARMERS

To a few pioneers, chicken farming has proved a profitable business, while nearly every outstation takes a pride in the vegetable patch, or the hens, rabbits or pigs, as the case may be. Talking of pigs, Eggbert (spelt with two "G's") who is the pride and joy-to-be of the 161st Field Ambulance, has a most modern sty all to himself, with every convenience.

Eggbert is not encouraged to walk a step further than necessary, as he is expected to furnish most of the Field Ambulance with a Christmas dinner. He looks like making the grade too, for as he is by none other than the Sergeant Cook himself.

The 15th. Field ambulance, on the other hand, tend to go in more for agriculture and horticulture, and are fortunate in having in their ranks an ex-head gardener to one of the noble houses. Needless to say, his spare moments are seldom his own, and his advice is sought on all subjects ranging from how to use a Maltese plough, to the proper treatment for an ailing aspidistra or a perverse pansy.

Farming in fact, has taken such a hold on the Corps that a strong rumour is going round that a complete farm may shortly be taken over, and made a field officer's command.

GLANCING BACK DOWN "CIVVY STREET"

Some Personalities

Men of the R.A.M.C. are drawn from many walks of life. The few who belonged to the original 30th Company are, of course, regular soldiers; but the vast majority, apart from the pack of Terriers belonging to the 161, are purely wartime soldiers.

Many of the later drafts come from Yorkshire and Lancashire, and others, of the 161 in particular, are from East Anglia, while the 15th, are strongest in men born and bred in these islands. Welshmen seem to be more numerous than either the Scots or the Irish, and here and there the broad unmistakable accents of the West Country are heard contrasted with the lighthearted character of the ubiquitous Cockney.

Let me introduce you to a typical handful. "Ding-dong" was a railway clerk at Carlisle before the war. Now he works in a Pack Store, which affectionately calls his "glorified Lost Property Office".

Though he doesn't get many parrots or canaries, he says, there are plenty of other kinds of livestock which he passes on to the incinerator.

Malta's mountains cannot compare with the Cumbrian Fells, but he's settled down to enjoy himself here until the end of the war, which, he says, won't be long, as the Nazis are just about polished off.

"Henry" — known to the Maltese recruits as "Pappagam" — comes from Hoylake in Cheshire, but before joining up he was a fashionable "coiffeur des dames" and has a flourishing Beauty Parlour in Bruton Street, W. Now he has collected three stripes and is a Wardmaster in a General Hospital.

One of his recent jobs was to take a complete census of all the patients.

That took him until 3 o'clock the morning! Apart from little extras like that, he inspects the Orderlies every morning, and sees that each one is clean and tidy — with properly brushed hair — before going on duty in the Wards. If not, they are in for a permanent wave where they least expect it!

"Garlick" is a Dorset man, and used to do the bakers round in Blandford. You'll now find him in the Reception Department of one of the General Hospitals, where he is the "A & D" Clerk.

It is largely on the accuracy of his entries that the Daily Bed State of the hospital is worked out. Still, he says, patients are much the same as loaves — except that loaves haven't got any equipment to lose.

His one regret is that he hasn't seen much brown bread since coming to Malta — judging by his figure, this is perhaps just as well! He knows of a cosy little oven, back home, that would take Master Hitler nicely!

"Snowy" is Day Orderly Sergeant at a General Hospital. In peacetime he was a warehouseman up in Manchester.

Malta, he thinks, is a cushy place, and we could be a lot worse off in other stations. Still — he's looking forward to going back home again soon, seeing as how we've got Gerry pretty well whacked.

In the course of his work as Orderly Sergeant, he has to know the names of, and be able to recognize all the R.A.M.C. personnel in the hospital. He says he is now memorising each man's Army number, and hopes to get a job on the Staff after the war as a second "Batus"!

Such are the men who go to make the R.A.M.C. in Malta, — thrown together by the fortunes of war, and now putting their backs to the common task with a will.

After that satanic pair, Adolf and Mussolini, have had 'what's coming to 'em', they will all melt away again and bury themselves, each one in his peacetime occupation, — be it coal mine or department store. But until that day comes, they are here — and they know it — to put into practice the words of that famous motto, "IN ARDIUS FIDELIS" — in other words, "Stick to it, through thick and thin!"