

Task Forces, ANC

By MARION E. THUMA, R.N.

HERE THEY COME! Uncle Sam's Army nurses! All are volunteers; all are qualified registered nurses who give skillful nursing care while they receive training in military hospitals. Confidential and secret orders assign them to hospital trains and ships, surgical and air evacuation units, field, evacuation, station, and general hospitals. In accordance with War Department plans, task force nurses (nurses being sent overseas) are alerted—requested to be ready to move to a port of embarkation in forty-eight hours. Physically they are practically perfect; mentally they are eager and alert, ready to comply with orders. There must be enough nurses and on time!

At long last the movement orders, "Will proceed without delay," are received. Final destination? Secret! Only Uncle Sam's War Department is informed and it really safeguards military information. Home posts are cleared and hundreds of members of the Army Nurse Corps, in all of the service commands, are on the move. "This is a permanent change of station." Most of the nurses travel by rail. When time is limited, army transports fly them to the nearest airports, or priorities on commercial planes are obtained.

If the nurses reach the last stop before the port of embarkation during the daylight hours, they are impressed with the beautiful setting of the camp. When darkness or pouring rain veils the surroundings, they climb more hurriedly into the big six-by-six army trucks.

A general hospital has just arrived via troop train at the railhead where the camp medical authorities determine the health status. De-training is permitted and the billeting officers escort the guests to their respective areas.

The truckloads of nurses are greeted by Lieutenants Pullen and Ford who have been expecting them. "Most of your group can be accommodated in building 205, the remainder will live in 206," announces Lieutenant Pullen, the billeting and custodial officer of her area. While the chief nurse signs the property slips, Lieutenant Ford leads the way and the nurses, dietitians, physical therapy aides, and Red Cross workers explore their new homes, then quickly choose their rooms. Two army cots, mattresses, pillows, folding chairs, and an open wardrobe seem luxurious after the long,

cramped train journey. Not a sheet is in sight but presently government-issue khaki blankets, clean heavy muslin mattress covers, and pillow cases are distributed.

Everyone is invited to have coffee and a snack in the mess hall where field rations are served per schedule, but mess kits are not used. Refreshed, they return to their quarters to discover that hand luggage practically fills the first-floor corridors. The valises and suitcases are quickly claimed and traffic is resumed as the nurses exclaim happily, "Won't it be wonderful to take a hot shower?" "What luxury!"

Before Lieutenant Ford, the inspecting officer, bids the chief nurse goodnight, she suggests that they had better settle down and turn in, for tomorrow they will be busier than bees getting set for showdown inspection.

Gradually, quiet descends on 205 and 206. Practically all the lights in the barracks have been extinguished, but a glow is still visible through the drawn shades in Lieutenants Pullen's and Ford's rooms. They watchfully await more guests.

"Thank goodness, the chief nurse assigned to ——— has reported," remarks Lieutenant Ford. "The acting chief nurse got them off to a grand start. The requisitions are about ready for the supply officer, but she is more than willing to hand the responsibility over to the chief nurse."

"Sshh!" After listening intently for a moment, Lieutenant Pullen peers out her window, "Oh, I suspect those three small units are arriving," and hastens out to tell them they will be billeted in 210. "They are fortunate. They were activated several weeks ago and all of the nurses are here," she continues, as the sounds of the trucks fade away. "Now I hope ——— will come soon so we can crawl into bed."

Hours later, more weary and travel-stained nurses jump off the trucks. As they are guided to 207, hushed voices inquire, "Isn't it a beautiful moonlight night?" "Is this the port of embarkation?" When the hostess duties are fulfilled, Lieutenant Pullen, stifling a yawn, says, "Now that all the reservations are taken, let's try to get some sleep."

Bright and early the next morning the more energetic souls begin to clean up, get oriented and organized; soon all of them are following the age-old routine of nurses. Washing appears on lines stretched from the oak trees in the side and back yards of the camouflaged barracks.

FIRST LIEUTENANT THUMA (Johns Hopkins and Teachers College, Columbia University) was chief nurse in charge of processing task force nurses in a staging area at an eastern port. In November 1943, she was assigned to the Los Angeles Port of Embarkation.

What seems like tons of luggage keeps rolling up on trucks. But the sergeant and his men finally manage to deposit all of the trunk lockers and bedding rolls in the rightful owners' rooms.

Registration commences for those who have not signed in; everyone begins to get better acquainted.

"All of my papers are in my trunk. When do you suppose I can expect it?" asks a second lieutenant whose luggage has not arrived. Lieutenant Pullen looks astonished, recovers, and replies, "I certainly hope it gets here soon."

"What about mail?" "Where can I get a shampoo and wave?" "Where is the PX?" A constant barrage of questions bombards Lieutenants Pullen and Ford who smile and good-naturedly suggest that the information will be forthcoming in due time. Lieutenant Pullen points out that the maps on the bulletin boards show the boundaries of the nurses' area which is restricted and guarded. "Nurses are permitted to walk on the main roads only," she cautions. "And the nurses will be available for processing until it is completed," warns Lieutenant Ford. (Processing is the final preparation for movement overseas.)

The telephone interrupts and Lieutenant Pullen checks with the administrative nurse, personnel section at post headquarters. "Yes, all units are in and the count agrees with the authorized strength figures. I think you can plan to have a conference with the chief nurses about 9:30."

At the conference an attempt is made to introduce the chief nurses to the new situation confronting them. A routine which includes recommendations many others have found helpful is suggested. "You may be dependent upon our hospitality for forty-eight hours or two weeks, perhaps longer," explains the chief nurse. "Time is the unknown quantity here, however, so this 'final preparation for movement through a port of embarkation has for its object rapid and orderly processing with all records complete.'" She continues, "Forget for the time being your unit designation. To us you are shipment number ——— and ———. Yes, the appropriate prescribed uniform should be worn in the area and elsewhere on the post. That's correct, all of you will be completely outfitted in the snappy new olive drab issue—the Surgeon General's orders. You must also possess every item you are required to have according to current tables of allowances and directives—our commanding officer's orders. We will check all of the letters of appointment, and they must be brought up to

date before you leave. Your quarters are approximately two miles from the station hospital. Immunizations will be given at the dispensary located in your area, sick nurses will also report there."

When the chief nurses assert that at the moment they can think of no other questions, the chief nurse at post headquarters assures them, "We all want to help you; we'll do our best to try to answer questions and to assist in any way we can."

Looking somewhat bewildered but resolute, they dash off to confer with commanding officers and assistants, to arrange for personnel work, dental surveys, immunizations, visits to the quartermaster, and to attend to the countless details for which they are held accountable in this final preparation.

Intense activity and inspired teamwork become the order of the days and nights. Clothing, equipment, chemical and medical needs are requisitioned, if necessary. The quarters become warehouses—trucks laden with supplies back up to the doors continually, are unloaded, and somehow distribution is successfully accomplished. Now the nurses are in the trucks, being transported to chemical warfare to have gas masks fitted, adjusted, and inspected.

The all-important "paper work" consumes considerable time and energy. Rosters, check lists, emergency addressee and embarkation cards *must* be complete; accurate information *must* be recorded on identification tags; "AGO" (officer's identification), pay data, Geneva cards (cards required of noncombatants in accordance with the Geneva Convention), and immunization registers, which *must* be in each nurse's possession. They usually have arranged for deductions for war bonds et cetera. If not, they are urged to authorize government insurance and "Class E" allotments (money sent directly to banks, et cetera).

While individual clothing and equipment are being assembled, dental surveys are made and immunizations are given as indicated according to existing army regulations. Ordinarily the nurses have been assigned and alerted for weeks so there are few requests for dental work and glasses.

In a day or two Lieutenant Ford informs the chief nurses that the inspection orders have been published, calls their attention to the schedule, and demonstrates how the clothing and equipment should be arranged. And it's "Attention!" when the official inspection is being conducted. No detail escapes the officers. "It gives us a feeling of confidence and se-

curity," say the nurses, "to know that we are fully equipped with the best that Uncle Sam can provide."

When the necessary alterations on the "OD's" are finished and each item is marked, the "blues" are packed ready to be shipped home or turned in to salvage. The nurses proudly step out clad in the new uniforms. They are delighted with them and often exclaim, "Just think, two smart suits and perfect accessories that match."

A detail (group of enlisted men, bless them!) stencil the names, rank, serial, and shipment numbers on all of the equipment and luggage. Into the bedding rolls and trunk lockers or "B" barrack bags goes what will not be needed until destinations are reached. Inflammables, liquids, or breakables must not be stowed in hold luggage, and, just to make certain, some of the bedding rolls are spot-inspected. If tents are part of the equipment, shelter halves, tent pins, blankets, and mattress cover are packed in accordance with approved methods. A detail very often helps with the rolling and packing. The suggestions of the nurses on duty as inspecting officers who wear African-American campaign ribbons supplement the directives issued by the chief of operations. Protective clothing and tents, sometimes overshoes and raincoats, slacks and sweaters, and possibly field uniforms are put into "A" barrack bags. Suitcases are packed and repacked. Finally the musette bag, in which is carried the mess kit, is filled to capacity with overnight necessities. "A" or hand luggage is trucked to the piers and placed in the nurses' compartments on the transports.

When processing is complete, the training program is continued or instituted under the direction of members of the Army Service Forces Command Group who also act in an advisory capacity on all matters pertaining to their particular branch of task forces.

Calisthenics, military and gas chamber drill, lectures, particularly on censorship and safeguarding military information, training films, hikes, climbing down the landing net, and so on, are scheduled. One chief nurse breathlessly murmured, as she scanned the outline handed to her, "Eight to five—but, don't we eat lunch?"

Then there is the business of policing the quarters, during their stay and upon departure; inspection may take place at any time. Generally, charge of quarters is a rotating assignment, each nurse responsible for her share.

Perhaps you would like to meet a few of our groups. Here's one that really boasts a drill

"sergeant." When some distinguished visitors came to see our camp, the lieutenant (ANC), to the familiar "Hut, two, three, four!" "By the right flank, harch!" "To the rear, harch!" "Eyes, right!" proved that nurses appreciate the military and soon develop into well-disciplined soldiers.

Over there are some nurses rolling and pitching tents—just in case. That formation coming up the road is returning from a climb down the landing net—if you read communiqués or listen to radio reports, you'll understand why they have been practicing.

These slender young officers are air evacuation nurses who proudly wear well-earned wings. Special training has been their privilege and with just pride they display their special uniforms and equipment. You recognize their task—nursing casualties who are evacuated by air.

Meet ten casuals (replacements) who were among the first graduates of the nurses training center in an eastern service command. They proved the value of their intensive training for they completed processing in record time with a minimum amount of guidance.

These were among the first nurses to wriggle through an infiltration course. Tough? When they finished, two of them went to the chaplain and asked to be baptized!

More replacements! Nurses from several stations and service commands are rapidly welded into a united group. The acting chief nurse quickly earned their confidence and respect. One lieutenant (infantry) who supervised their training program said, "They are the best soldiers I've ever seen."

Sunday mornings the nurses stroll up the hill to services in the little white chapel. An indispensable PX serves them, and in the adjoining WAC area is a beauty shop they are invited to patronize. Conveniently located is a theater where the latest four-star movies are shown, and nearby is the hall where famous entertainers delight large and appreciative audiences at least once a week. A library is within walking distance. The nurses are cordially welcomed at the Officers' Club where they find recreation and romance.

There are problems, incidents, and unhappy moments to be sure, but what a task, what an experience! Task force nurses work hard and faithfully to achieve their objective. "The board is cleared," indicates that processing is complete. Twelve-hour passes signed by their commanding officers are in order. Away they rush, to visit surprised families and friends, to have a last fond glimpse of the cities, to shop

if they can. They may be spotlighted in some famous eating place—when they are applauded they blushing rise to the occasion.

This account of unchanging good spirit midst strenuous 'round-the-clock activity would be incomplete if we failed to speak of the help given by the Red Cross Nursing Service and Red Cross workers. Their thoughtful consideration and enthusiastic support has resulted in innumerable tangible benefits to thousands of nurses. They have been instrumental in stimulating the interest of many who willingly supply such conveniences as irons, ironing boards, and non-GI shower curtains; they have furnished most of the day rooms. Waiting is difficult and relaxing in an easy chair with a magazine or book eases tension. Unoccupied minutes tick away faster when diverting radio programs are available; excess energy is happily expended dancing, singing, or playing ping-pong.

Last minute shopping for articles that cannot be obtained at the local PX is a real service, and is deeply appreciated by nurses who cannot leave the post.

"Units _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ are alerted." This is really it. Out go trunk lockers, barrack bags, and bedding rolls amid great excitement. The last physical inspection is followed by sighs of relief. Entraining orders are published and instructions governing departure are included.

"Ditty bags" sent by the American Red Cross Nursing Service are distributed, to the general delight of the nurses. "Christmas at this time of the year?" "Just what we need to slip into our field bags." "How thoughtful!" "To whom are our thanks really due?"

Quietly, outside their quarters, they line up in passenger list order, wearing strictly GI uniforms: helmets, olive drab blouses and skirts, khaki shirts and ties, russet gloves, bags, and shoes. Precious gas masks are tucked under left arms; bulging field bags, overcoats folded over them, are slung from carrying straps. Securely hooked to web belts encircling their waists are scrupulously clean canteens filled with fresh water (not to be used until ordered) and first aid pouches containing unopened first aid packets (for personal use only in an emergency).

Tomorrow or the next day at 1330, 1550, 1720, 1940, or 2100, according to schedule, we shall see them in the same formations, impatiently awaiting marching orders.

They step off smartly at the command, "Forward, march!" and swing along to the railhead. Earnest determination is written on

their faces—they have a duty to perform for their country. Fighting men all over the globe have priority on the most skillful service their heads, hands, and hearts can render.

Patiently now they await their turns to board the train. They invite us to join them, but alas! we must clasp their hands and wish them the best of luck and safe landings!

On the piers to greet them and to wish them well are members of the Red Cross Nursing Service and volunteer workers. Though official, their good wishes are heartwarming and long remembered by nurses embarking for theaters of operation.

They are checked on the passenger lists as they move up the gangplanks. Their thoughts? They are probably thinking in terms of stern reality. "Leaving home." "This is my contribution." "What lies ahead?" "A supreme opportunity for real service."

Their services may be needed during the voyage. "Yes," a chief nurse informs the chief nurse stationed at the port of embarkation, "the transport surgeon has requested that nurses be assigned to duty in the infirmary."

After they locate their quarters, unload, and do a bit of investigating, we find a large group of them on deck, harmonizing. How we do admire their undaunted spirits and high courage! They interrupt "So Long for Awhile" to give us a smart parting salute.

There they go! Forces of Uncle Sam's Army nurses, trained and equipped for the greatest task in their lives. We are confident they will loyally uphold the highest ideals and finest traditions of the Army Nurse Corps.

Reconditioning of Soldiers

THE ARMY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT is developing a program designed to put a wounded soldier in the best possible physical and mental condition upon his dismissal from an Army hospital.

The program is called "reconditioning." It begins the minute a soldier is convalescent and is carried through until he is returned to duty or is released from service to return to civilian life.

One phase of the program is designed to reorient the more seriously handicapped to their new situation in life. The blind, deaf, and crippled have to make adjustments before they can again carry on normally in their communities—or at least as near normally as possible. . . . The reconditioning program is also given to those who are not incapacitated for return to duty. It is based on the theory that medical aid isn't enough to condition a man who has been wounded in action to return to combat.—Office of War Information release on Care of the Wounded, November 17, 1943.