

Christmas, Christmas, Everywhere!

How Army and Navy nurses spend Christmas overseas

PEARL HARBOR

IT WAS Christmas Eve in Pearl Harbor, 1941. We had been working very hard all day.

About five, we were called to the operating room. You can imagine our disappointment—Christmas Eve and more operations! Would things ever slow up?

When we walked into the operating room, we thought it strange the boys were not hustling around to get things ready. As we came to the workroom, what a sight to behold!

The cupboards were covered with sheets, and the worktable looked like a dining-room table. In the center was a Christmas tree with all the decorations and lights; at either end of the table was a pan of nuts and candy. Under the tree, were gifts. Around the table stood our corpsmen and at the end, Corpsman Robertson was playing softly on his violin, "Silent Night, Holy Night."

Tears came. We felt proud that we were Americans and that we were in a position to work with and for these boys.

We sang Christmas carols, opened presents, and had a grand party. But it was short lived. Word came that a thousand battle dressings had to be made, wrapped, sterilized, packed, and ready to leave for one of the islands by ten o'clock the next morning. Needless to say, we didn't sleep that night. In packing the dressings, boxes of candy were placed between the layers in the hope that they might add to the Christmas of those less fortunate than ourselves.—LT. LILLIAN M. BANKS (NC)USN.

NEW ZEALAND

I owe a "Thank you" to the Navy nurses who spent Christmas 1942 in New Zealand. They decided that one holiday season with butterflies and roses on the tree was enough. Their New Year's resolution brought tinsel and colored lights, from home for Christmas 1943.

After a wonderful American Christmas dinner (I say American because we had turkey and not mutton), I rushed into Wellington to see a cricket game between the North and South Islands. I knew nothing about the game, but a member of our party explained it very carefully.

After the match, we accepted an invitation, to tea. It was a family reunion with all present, from ninety-year-old granny to the wee great-grandson. The parents felt fortunate to have their boys in uniform at home. Parlor games were played, and later everyone sang. New

Zealand people enjoy music and never allow a group to disband until a few songs have been sung. It was then time to eat again—the family has supper before retiring; and train time for me.—LT. THORA WELLMAN, (NC) USNR.

AFRICA

The chief thoughts of all the nurses were for our soldier patients and the possibility of making the day pleasant for them. Laying aside our brown and white seersucker and the slacks that were necessary in rain and mud, we appeared stiff and starched in traditional white uniforms that were hurriedly unpacked from bedding rolls and barracks bags and pressed for the occasion. How our "whites" lightened the stone and tent wards!

A simple, impressive ceremony was held at the cemetery for the members of the Army Nurse Corps who are buried there. Our nurses are buried beside our men on a wind-swept North African plain, white crosses marking their resting places. The barrenness is beautified by hills, palms, cacti, and distant olive trees. We stood with bowed heads and full hearts while wreaths were placed upon the graves and taps were sounded.

In the evening we were invited by a French family to join in their Noël celebrations. It was a gay and happy evening with gifts in wooden shoes instead of our traditional stockings.—CAPTAIN SUSAN W. LAFRAGE, ANC.

THE ALEUTIANS

An abundance of snow seemed the only material characteristic of Christmas on the remote and barren station in the Aleutians where I spent last holiday season. Ten days before Christmas, the chief nurse called the staff together to learn what we were planning. The Red Cross was importing some Christmas trees, for you may be sure there were none growing on that desolate island, and the nurses' quarters was to have one! This brought all sorts of suggestions and, as the meeting progressed, a very busy and festive program resulted.

One of the plans was to make candy for the corpsmen who worked with us in the dispensary. In a few days delicious looking plates of candy of all kinds appeared in every available space in the house. In spite of a lack of some ingredients, very fine fudge, divinity, mints, and dipped nuts resulted. It was during this process, I think, that the real Christmas atmos-

sphere developed. It reminded me of many occasions in my childhood when all the family, even the men, had turned out to make candy for the holidays.—LT. (JG) MARIE H. GRIGGS (NC) USNR.

NEW CALEDONIA

A year ago, I was in charge of a 32-bed surgical ward which consisted mostly of boys from combat zones, with a few appendectomies from our Island. Towards the last of November, the boys were talking of home and Christmas. We had to do something or have a lot of homesick boys on our hands. Miss Coriney, the nurse who worked the opposite watch, and I decided to interest the boys in candy-making. We made fudge over canned heat. Peanuts from Ship Service, cereal from the galley, and a few English walnuts from home were put into our fudge. After watching the candy for an hour and a half, each person took his turn at beating it. Every piece was wrapped in wax paper, placed in tin cans, and put away until the eve of our party.

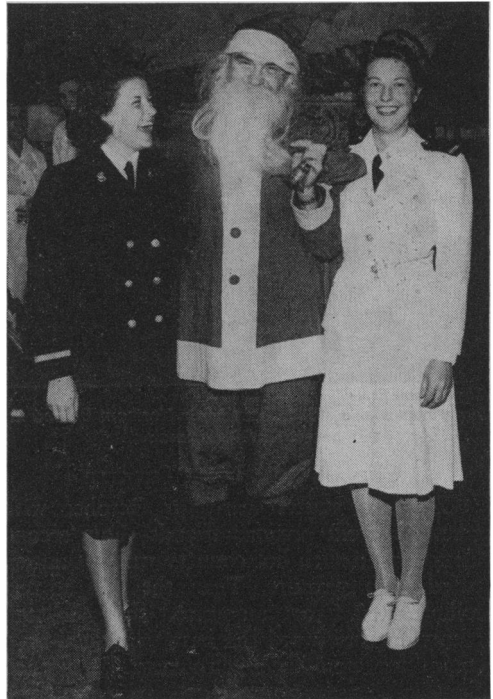
Two weeks before Christmas, two of the boys brought in a small tree which stayed green until after New Year's. They also had branches with small red berries resembling holly. By putting everyone's ideas together, we decorated the little tree. We put on three strings of popcorn, which had been dipped in red ink, and in blue ink; one we left white. Cotton powdered with starch was used for snow; tinfoil, from x-ray films, for icicles; gum, cigarettes, colored candies, and anything with color, for decoration. All in all, we had a beautiful tree.

We bought small gifts at Ship Service and wrapped them in paper napkins so that each patient might have a present in addition to those from home and from the Red Cross. Christmas Eve we turned out our lights, lighted candles, sang carols, passed presents, and had our precious candy and one boy's fruit cake from home.

That evening at the midnight services, the wounded went to the altar and knelt with us. We all thought again of why we were fighting this war and thanked God for giving us a nice Christmas. After services, several of us went swimming in the ocean with a beautiful star-filled sky overhead. Even the Southern Cross was very plain that early morning.—LT. ORA L. CARY (NC) USN.

ISTHMUS OF PANAMA

There we were, surrounded by green jungle and yet nothing that looked like an evergreen. Our ingenuity was challenged, so a party of



Father Michael J. Doody plays Santa to Navy nurses at hospital in Pearl Harbor.

nurses donned dungarees and went tramping through the brush looking for trees the proper size and shape. As foliage withers within a few days, the trees were stripped and the Red Cross recreation hall was turned into a paint shop. With the help of patients, corpsmen, and our faithful Red Cross worker, the trees were painted white. We had only a limited amount of green crêpe paper but, even so, it made miles of trimming when cut into strips and fringed. The trade winds were no help in keeping the paper and other handmade decorations on the trees.

Just before Christmas, one nurse exclaimed, almost in tears, "Oh, heck, we have no mistletoe, and who ever heard of Christmas without mistletoe?" One of the nurses sought out her brother in desperation. He was stumped for only a minute, then triumphantly said, "Now you know, sis, how things grow here on the Isthmus—all out of proportion. I have an idea." He returned in a few minutes with a cluster of five huge grapefruit on a long stem, draped with green leaves from the grapefruit tree. The reasonable facsimile was excellent when the dangerous appendage hung from an overhead pipe in the nurses quarters.—LT. (JG) MILDRED M. RHYNE and MARY T. DELOACH (NC) USNR.

DECEMBER 1944



Signal Corps Photo
Army nurses in a station hospital in Northern Ireland rehearse Christmas carols.

CHINA-BURMA-INDIA THEATER

Christmas started early in October with greetings from anxious friends. Our second Christmas in such hot country was not anticipated with pleasure. Then the ball started rolling. Red Cross announced that the staff trimming their ward the best, as judged by a committee, would be given a party. We cleaned the small bazaars of green and red paper, even of chartreuse and orange. Between our daily routines, we were constantly called to admire or give advice on decorations. The corpsmen scouted the desert for a nice bushy thorn tree, the only kind in this area. For tree decorations, the patients cut birds, stars, and curls resembling icicles, from empty tin cans. Others made paper daisy chains. The nurses supplied and applied the soap flakes for snow. The patients drew circles on old cardboard boxes, with a bucket as a guide, then cut out wreaths for each window, forty-two in all. The cardboard was wrapped with red or green ruffled paper, and a silver star hung in the center.

When the great day came, everyone was on pins and needles. The decision favored the neuropsychiatric ward. As these patients were seldom permitted to leave their ward unattended, the party was more than appreciated.

Christmas Eve we attended a real manger scene with live camels, burros, and cows. One of the nurses was the Madonna. The chaplain read the Christmas story. . . .

After dinner we retired to the theater area to await Santa. A group of Polish children were our guests. Some of the little tots came on the shoulders of the soldiers. A cry went up, "Here comes Santa!" There he came, riding a camel, bowing and calling to them. With great excitement, Santa was led to the platform where he spoke to all of us.—LT. SARA M. RAYMER, ANC.

"DOWN UNDER"

The Christmas season "down under" was unusual—midsummer in December with the people vacationing at their batches by the ocean. The countryside was beautiful with red flowering native Christmas trees, *Pobrutukawa*, their main Yuletide decoration. Could this be Christmas with the usual holiday spirit? The mail came through, laden with many packages. The Red Cross obtained pine trees for us.

On Christmas Eve the patients enjoyed the Red Cross party in the recreation hall and danced to the music of our hospital orchestra. Midnight Mass and Protestant services were attended with great spiritual feeling. The chaplains gave their devoted assistance to make everyone feel the everlasting and unforgettable spirit of this time.—LT. (JG) DOROTHY DIXON and MARJORIE CHENEY (NC) USN.

ENGLAND

Christmas was a gay time. We had choir practice for several weeks, and on Christmas Eve sang carols for the patients. Each of us held a lighted candle and approached the wards in silence. Then, the ward doors were thrown open and many of the boys came outside. At the mess hall, we had hot coffee; some of our officers and enlisted men sang with us. We made the place ring! After coffee, we sang at the Protestant services or at Midnight Mass.—LT. ALICE HEANEY, ANC.

SICILY

We did all right in Sicily last year. Our outfit was set up in buildings which were easy to decorate. We got loads of fir boughs, holly, and even a little mistletoe. Streamers were arranged artistically from the ceiling and at the windows. Make-believe wreaths peeked out between the drapes.

We dressed our dormitory room for the holidays, pasting snow balls on the windows. The collapsible tree, which I brought along in my bedding roll, was decorated with cotton snow and sprinkled with colored papers.—LT. MARGARET CALLAHAN, ANC.

INDIA

Patients, nurses, and other personnel made wreaths on wire frames from the leaves of the mango trees—thick, dark green leaves, rather like those of the orange tree, but much larger. Berries were cut from red felt bandage; these and red felt bows trimmed the wreaths. They were hung against the whitewashed walls of the wards, dining room, and over the two fireplaces of the nurses living room.

Our own celebration, a dinner and formal dance, came on Christmas Eve. The captain in charge of supplying meats found us a turkey which was cooked by the chief nurse. A festive fruit cake, obtained by a medical officer in a near-by town, finished off the dinner.—LT. GENEVA CLAY, ANC.

BURMA JUNGLE

Several weeks before Christmas we began to plan. We had only the natural resources of the jungle and the salvage of discarded hospital supplies to work with. Our isolated location made ingenuity and adaptability our most valuable tools.

Everything was in readiness before the day! Royal palms provided effective wall borders and back drops in the bashas—wards, mess halls, and recreation huts. Each ward and hut boasted its own tree, selected for its resemblance to our scrub evergreens. The branches were covered with feathery fronds.

Ward decorations included festive bows of red flannel hung about conspicuously, Christmas stories told in paintings on the unprinted sides of large cardboard cartons, red brick fireplaces complete with mantels to which were fastened G.I. socks for ward patients (constructed of carton also), a tiny manger made of Indian figures and cattle sheltered within a desolate looking shed.

Our tree ornaments included: a silver star fashioned by our plumber from discarded tin cans; ornamental "balls" made by inflating the fingers of worn-out surgical gloves, cutting them apart, and dyeing them in blue or red ink, mercurochrome, or gentian violet (undyed "balls" appeared silver or pale gold); festoons of native peanuts strung and dyed, or of discarded bandages, laundered and dyed.

The Christmas-day feast, for us, came from tin cans!—LT. AMELIA STORCH, ANC.

DUTCH HARBOR, UNALASKA

We shall long remember Christmas on our small island. Lots of packages and many more letters were coming in. Then a few days before Christmas, real evergreen trees arrived and,

before we knew it, we captured the holiday spirit. The Red Cross was on hand with trimmings and with gifts for all the boys. Nurses planned tray decorations, made candy, and strung popcorn.

There was the usual snow but on Christmas Eve one of our famous williwaws started. All night long, the snow fell and the wind blew, until finally even the snowplow could no longer make its way through. Christmas morning came clear and quiet. A small pathway was made to the dispensary. On with the parkas and fourbuckle artics! To duty!

Christmas presents preceded routine. By noon, we straightened our wards and dinner was served. Our commissary had gone all out and our meal was as good as any in the States.—LT. (JG) NORMA V. STICKLES (NC) USN.

NEW CALEDONIA

Our mobile hospital was located in a park on a south sea island. Roads were lined with coconut palms, and scattered over the entire compound were huge flamboyant trees in full bloom. Ten days before Christmas, a party of corpsmen went up into the hills and brought back enough evergreens for all the wards. These trees were a poor relation to our beautiful evergreens but they were Christmas trees and that was all that mattered!

Our shopping was limited. There was little of value to be purchased in the small French town near-by. Many of the sailors and Marines made jewelry of cat's-eyes (a stone-like shell found on the beach), carved coconut, and old discarded pieces of metal. We had many laughs over the strange presents we exchanged.

There were midnight services Christmas Eve in the beautiful old cathedral. Some attended the native mission, where High Mass was sung by children. Christmas Day, services were held on every compound.

Then in the evening there was music in the movie area followed by a show. All movies are held in the open and many times it was difficult to see the screen because of that very special moon, which belongs only to that part of the world.—LT. (JG) P. HANWELL (NC) USNR.

Christmas

*The old year draws to its end in sorrow
And stumbles out with its grief and pain.
But our hopes grow strong of a glad to-morrow
As the Child shines forth for our joy again.*

—ALBERTA VARDON, R.N.