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He certainly kept us busy doing all sorts of jobs some we thought to be ridiculous. Anyway it certainly kept us out of mischief. We blanched our webbing green and we blanched them khaki and then we scrubbed them white. We had to dubbin our boots, and the days of shiney boots were over for us; a sure sign that we were bound for some battle area abroad. Of course the rumours were rife. Stalin had been agitating for the second front. There placards all over the town stating 'we want the second front now' These placards were of course communist inspired. For the Russians were getting a hammering at Stalingrad, and they wanted us to start something to take the heat off them.

It was at Limekilnburn that we mobilised for overseas. We left for Gourock and then on to Liverpool by train on the 23rd of Oct 42. On loan to 78 Division we embarked the following day on M/SDempo a former Dutch liner. Sailing on the 25th Oct we arrived at the Kyles of Bute early next morning where we joined a convoy which sailed out into the Atlantic on the 27th Oct 1942 to some unknown destination. This convoy was the largest to leave the shores of the British Isles up to that date.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN.

The journey was long and tedious, due to the fact that the convoy took lengthy detours out in the Atlantic to avoid enemy submarines who were playing havoc with our shipping at the time. On board were some contingents of American troops as well as our own infantry, artillery and pioneers. The journey lasted two weeks, but was not until we approached Gibraltar that we were told that our destination was Algiers. During the whole journey we, the No 1 C.C.S., were never out of denims. We had to do all the chores aboard ship that our commander Col Day could find for us. Our spare time was spent getting rid of our English money playing cards or barter for American cigarettes, Why they should want our English money I do not know?

When we arrived at Algiers Harbour the news of the invasion was being broadcast by the B.B.C. before we had a chance to get ashore, hence the welcome by German soldiers. Our well kept secret had become public knowledge to

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... world. I think that they were a little bit premature with their disclosure. It was discovered afterwards that the Germans had been waiting for us at Malta and due to the news broadcast they gave us a hot reception at Algiers; they did not have far to go for the reception. Although we were like sitting ducks in the harbour, the gunners on board ship did a marvelous job of work. I counted fourteen shot down in one raid.

The thrill of the invasion as men climbed down the rope ladder down the snips side into the assault craft below. The naval action against the fort of Algiers, The feeling of relief on the ultimate landing on Nov 11th 42. Our unit was the last to leave the ship. I particularly remember our being like sitting ducks and the anxiety every time the Stukas came over and subjected us to their dive bombing. I never thought that I would be envious of the Americans and the other forces going ashore in assault craft. We had been left on board for three days after the main party had landed. During that time I recall an amusing incident. I and four of my colleagues were on picket duty, armed only with a 'stick' when Jerry came and dropped a stick of bombs across our bows. I dived for cover down the nearest gangway, where the duty sergeant was sheltering. He berated me for leaving my post. My reply was 'did you expect me to knock them back with my truncheon, a remark which could have had me put on a charge. But I think that the sergeant saw the funny side of the situation for he just laughed, after all it was a ridiculous state of affairs. I failed to see the logic of doing picket duty during an air raid.

The name of the allied invasion of North Africa was 'Operation Torch'. There were three areas of operations. The Western Task force sailed direct from the United States of America and went into landings at three places on a two hundred mile front around Casablanca. There were 35,000 troops from the U.S. 3rd armoured and part of the 9th infantry divisions. General Patton commanded the ground forces. The naval forces included two battle ships, one fleet of four escort carriers and numerous cruisers and destroyers led by Admiral Hewitt. The centre Task force landed

and was led by Gen. Fred. Endall and Commodore Tronbridge. There were 39,000 troops from the first infantry and armoured divisions. The naval force included two escort carriers beside many smaller ships. The Eastern Task Force landed at Algiers and was led by Admiral Burrough and Gen. Ryder. There were 52 warships and 33,000 soldiers. The troops were from the 34th U.S. infantry division with parts of the 9th and 1st armoured div. were also present. The only large British Assault Force the 78th division landed at Algiers. In support of the whole operation and on guard against the still formidable Italian fleet was the British force 'H' from Gibraltar, with three battle ships, three Fleet carriers and a strong force of destroyers and cruisers.

The landings at Algiers made rapid progress and quickly captured the town, but it must be said that the Vichy French put up only a token resistance. Admiral Darlan, who was there on private business, was also captured.

At Oran the landings were not so successful, an attempt to crush the harbour cost us two destroyers. By nightfall the landings were well established and the airfield was in our hands. The fighting was fiercest at Casablanca. However the French were sympathetic to our course, this help was most affective in Algiers. After we had landed we marched through the town and spent the night in the sports arena near the Zoological Gardens.

After a few nights sleeping on the concrete steps of the sports stadium we developed calouses on our hips. We left Algiers on the 17th Nov. 42 and travelled across the Atlas Mountains to Bone. It took us two days to reach Bone arriving on the 19th Nov. I well remember the journey, we travelled by cattle trucks, (thirty men with their kit, eight horses to a waggon.) I also remember the wayside halts and the 'brewing up' the bartering of bully beef for oranges. Our stay at Bone was just over night and leaving on the 20th Nov we proceeded on our way to La Calle. It was here that we set up our Casualty Clearing Station. We took over from 217 F. We opened up to receive casualties from 78 Division in large numbers of casualties by day and evacuat

night, this made the station a very busy one. It was at La Calle where I received my first experience of war surgery. I well remember the first operation, it was an amputation of the leg. Guess who had to hold the leg, yes, you've guessed it, it was yours truly. The surgeon went through the whole procedure of an amputation, suddenly, without warning, I felt the whole weight of the leg in my arms. I stood there immobile, frozen to the ground so to speak, when I heard the surgeon say 'alright Abram take it away'. On one occasion, while we were stationed at La Calle there was a panic in the camp. Some uniforms which were beyond repair having been cut from some wounded soldiers were put in the incinerator. Some one realized too late that there was a hand-grenade in one of the uniform pockets. The ensuing devastation was somewhat spectacular to say the least. Fortunately no one was hurt. Quite a few who realized what had happened broke all records in their flight for cover.

On 26th of Nov' there was a general stand to for all the units in view of an enemy parachutists landing in the area. Happily the 76 division rose to the occasion and rounded them all up. The Unit stayed at La Calle until the 13th Dec'42 when we packed all of our equipment ready to move on to a little mining village called Djebel Hallouf. However the operating team of which I was a member, instead of stopping at Djebel Hallouf with the rest of the unit, had to go on to Beja.

We set up our theatre in a school room. We worked in relay with two other surgical teams, (A parachute surgical team, and a team from No 18 C.C.S.) We worked a rota system. We took the first hundred casualties, the parachute surgical and the 18 C.C.S. surgical team each taking a hundred in turn. Very often the other teams finished their quota before we had got through ours, which meant that we were on reception continuously for two hundred casualties before we could stop for a rest. very often we had to work 48 hours at a stretch, stopping only for short periods for something to eat. On one occasion we worked for 75 hours except short intermittent breaks for meals. some times act

falling asleep on our feet, We thought that they were never going to end we were so inundated with casualties. It was here that we recieved our allocation of 'blood tears and sweat' promised to us by Winston Churchill.

Rommel was giving us a hard time and was trying to surround us. On one occasion while we were there, Major Ruscoe Clarke, our surgeon asked us ' If we would like to join a guerrilla band, or be in receipt of Red Cross food parcels.' I think that he was trying to cheer us up, or was he trying to tell us of the possibility of being taken prisoner... although there was a possibility, fortunately it never happened as the 76th division managed to push Jerry back again.

There were times, of course, when we would go days without any casualties. It was then that we made up dressing and replenished our stock and catch up on our correspondence. During the times that we were operating we saw some gruesome sights, often heart breaking if you allowed yourself to become emotionally involved, which we dare not do as this would lessen our efficiency. It is not that we were devoid of compassion, on the contrary we were appalled at the disgraceful waste of life and the maiming of thousands of young lads, some barely nineteen years of age. It makes me cringe when I hear people talking of the glories of war. On the monument in the Hay market in Newcastle you will find these words: "Dulcet Decorum est Pro patria Mori". Which roughly translated means " It is sweet and Glorious to die for one's country". Is It?. We once had a young lad brought into the theatre who was the only survivor of a gun crew. He could not have been more than twenty years old. He had lost both of his legs and one arm. He was virtually only a torso. Apperently a shell had exploded in the breach of the gun he and his mates were manning. We literally poured pints and pints of plasma into him with no avail. He lost blood faster than we could replace it.

I was once wheeling a guardsman into the theatre. He was crying, I tried to comfort him, when he said

"I am not crying for myself but for my mates who did not make it". I could enumerate many such incidents that portray the horror of war. As we know, the Liner S.S. Athenia was torpedoed off the North West coast off Ireland by a German U. Boat at the beginning of the war. There were 112 dead including 28 American civilians. At that time 39 of the German fleet of 58 U. Boats were at sea. Allied shipping losses amounted to 53 ships of which 41 were of 153,000 tons, all sunk by German U. Boats. Sometimes our sailors were fired upon whilst they were in the water.

We eventually left Beja on the 10th of Dec' 42 and joined our parent unit at Djebel Hallouf. Our stay here was rather prolonged. We alternated between acting as a Casualty Clearing Station (which was our true role) and a Field Hospital. Djebel Hallouf was a mining town in Algiers. It was here that we joined five Corps. The station was partially under canvas and we encountered some hectic moments.

On the 9th April 1943 a fierce gale swept over the area and all hands were called upon to man the marquees. The night was black and the transferring of stretcher cases to every place available in the building was a mammoth task. Although we had periods of relative quiet, generally speaking Djebel Hallouf was quite a busy station.

During the slack periods we entertained ourselves with concerts and spelling bees, brain trusts etc. We once put on a panto mime called 'Babes in the woods' army version. I was cast in the role of one of the babes. My friend Ronnie was responsible for the lyrics and much of the production.

Such personalities as Major Ruscoe Clark, captain Faux, and Capt' McDonald of Tunisia, will always be remembered. We left Djebel Hallouf on the 23rd April 1943. We opened up a camp at Oued Zarga. No tropical kit had yet been issued and we pitched our tents in the blazing sun. Casualties were received the same evening. Numbers and Eighteen Casualty-clearing Stations opened on the