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WHAT ABOUT NORTH AFRICA?

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(Written at Allied Field Headquarters in North Africa)

THE long spray-washed jetties at Oran were jammed with tons of equipment for the American Red Cross when convoyed ships reached that North African port with their tremendous cargoes in late February.

In their bulging holds they brought the largest shipment of Red Cross supplies to arrive at this point of allied operations in North Africa.

One million paper handkerchiefs, two million packages of American cigarettes, hundreds of cases filled with supplies, from shaving cream to phonograph records, waited transportation to remote outposts of Americana cropping up from one end of North Africa to the other.

With them came a group of American citizens wearing the insignia of the American Red Cross on their new uniforms. Eighty-nine of them, men and women, stepped from gangplanks onto well-ordered docks in the African sunshine. Their arrival nearly doubled the force of Red Cross men and women working night and day at tasks that engulfed them from the rocky coast of Morocco to the barren



An American Red Cross mobile kitchen brings hot coffee and American-type food to outpost Yanks somewhere in Tunisia. In the Clubmobile is James E. Snyder, ARC



Rita Hume, the author, discusses an ARC broadcast with Charles Collingwood, radio commentator from Washington, D. C.

plateau of Tunisia.

There were only nine to land that first day in November. They were field service men who came in under fire with the first troops to set foot on African soil. Four of them came in to Oran at the port of Mers el Kebir, four more were with the invasion forces a few miles east at Arzew, and the ninth landed a few miles beyond at the outer point of the three-pronged attack. Each was assigned to an individual unit.

They came on "D" day with the American forces, but they came without guns. They were the shock troops of the American Red Cross; as field service men they were the advance guard of field, hospital and club lines, the immediate contact between folks at home and their men at the front. They are hard-living, action-loving

men, bronzed from their outdoor life following the Red Cross roads of Africa. When they came, it was to a strange country of strange customs. Much of the groundwork of future Red Cross operations was theirs to lay with all the resources at their command.

Three of the men, Fincke, Sifford and Snyder, found themselves stationed in Oran where, after the first few days of fighting were over, large concentrations of troops were suddenly freed from action. There they went to work.

"We knew we had to do something to get the boys off the streets," says lean, energetic Al Fincke. "Through the help of a French interpreter we found an empty automobile showroom in the center of town." With chairs,

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tables, books, magazines and a piano, ransacked from every available source, the first Red Cross club in North Africa had its beginning.

Whenever a boat landed the resourceful trio would purchase anything in the way of toilet articles, books, food and other supplies that were available. It was both unsafe to drink the water in Oran and to eat most of the native prepared food, so a restaurant was opened for enlisted men who, visiting the town from outlying areas, would not be assigned to one of the established army messes in Oran. As for drinking water, soldiers filled their canteens from the pure supply available in barrels at the club.

The first day after Fincke, Sifford and Snyder arrived they also managed to get in a visit to several hospitals, bringing cigarettes and toilet articles to men who hadn't had a cigarette in three days.

Meanwhile a Milwaukee man, Talbert D. Jessup, Red Cross Field Director assigned to Jimmy Doolittle's 12th Air Force outfit, arrived with his unit. On the fourth day, when fighting had ended, the place was suddenly invaded by a casual unit of 1,800 hungry American men.

"That was the day I 'borrowed' two truckloads of food off the docks at Oran," chuckles Jessup as he recounts the way he and a G.I. driver commandeered the urgently needed rations from an army supply dump. Jessup was formerly State Supervisor of Wisconsin's Educational Board and a soldier in the First World War. Those first few weeks in Africa were hectic ones when bases were being established and all the machinery of an invading army was getting under way. Quick action was the thing that counted.

"Mail just didn't get through those early weeks of the invasion unless we went after it," recalls Ralph Studebaker, field director from Jacksonville, Fla., where he worked with the state board of education.



Red Cross (two at left) and the Army talk things over at the new ARC club recently opened in Algiers

Meanwhile Jessup went on to Algiers where a headquarters and club had already been established under the direction of William E. Stevenson, prominent New York attorney and former Deputy Commissioner for the Red Cross in England, who had come to head the organization's activities in North Africa.

While Stevenson set out to mobilize the entire Red Cross field and club operation in Africa which included the multitudinous details of clearing supply lines and transportation requirements for equipment and personnel, Jessup set up the machinery for field operations.

The situation that confronted field service operation in Africa was what is commonly called a fluid front. As the allied army took over new territories and expanded its operations during December and early January, vast concentrations of troops were moving rapidly from one area to another.

Field men, stationed with these individual units, moved with them. They were the advance guard of Red Cross club operations, setting up day rooms and recreation centers in towns and camps. They brought cigarettes, magazines, recreation and countless comfort supplies to the men in their units. They were the contact through American Red Cross cable communications between soldiers and their families in case of emergencies.

But scattered along the rapidly expanding front were small units of men isolated from their divisions. Many were without equipment, cigarettes

and reading material for days. Obviously a traveling Red Cross unit operating out of advanced supply bases was the answer. Jessup, who had been working night and day on the field setup, took a quick survey tour of the eastern area. A conference with unit field men located with the advance troops resulted in the decision to open new headquarters as close to the Tunisian frontier as possible.

Into this job pitched George "Red" Munson, whose yen to get into the fight had taken him from his wife and two small sons and a job as district director with the National Youth Administration in Ohio. Red Munson was a catcher with the St. Louis Cardinals and before that a varsity fullback at Ohio Wesleyan, for which distinction he was the first and "to date" only Red Cross man to make the cartoon feature of the North African published *Stars and Stripes*.

Munson started out on a sixteen-day tour along the Tunisian front, surveying advance bases of operation. He slept at an advanced airport on bedding rolls spread over G.I. cans. "Every time you heard a plane overhead you dived for a fox hole," Munson recalls. Those were the days in early January before any large con-

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Left: Reading room at a Red Cross club in North Africa, with Yanks devouring "home town" newspapers—right: ARC worker hands out some of 150,000 French-English dictionaries it printed for American soldiers



NATURAL disasters in the United States during the month of March affected over 7,000 families and found Red Cross Disaster Service available in its three stages: preparedness, emergency care and rehabilitation.

Indicative of constant preparedness planning were three conferences at National Headquarters—for case-work supervisors, representatives of Disaster Nursing Service, and a joint conference of the latter with Directors of Medical Service. These conferences will be repeated semi-annually.

In order to appraise the present degree of completeness of nation-wide Red Cross disaster preparedness, questionnaires have been sent to all Chapters on which to report their resources. Reports from two Areas, though incomplete, are significant. In Eastern Area, 210 of whose 1,417 Chapters had responded, there are shelters available for 461,169 persons, feeding centers for over 300,000 per hour, and facilities in mobile canteens for an additional 20,000 per hour. Pacific Area summary for 227 of its 330 Chapters reported shelter capacity of 919,542, feeding centers able to serve 9,756,500 every 24 hours, and mobile canteen with service for 91,350. The aim is to maintain current reports of the resources of all the Red Cross Chapters.

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Of the disasters calling into action local Chapter resources, the dread *spring flood* tops the list in numbers made homeless. Revealing their comparative destructive powers is the fact that the month's tornado relief costs nearly equaled that of the month's flood relief costs, although floods affected more than ten times as many families.

The field office for relief in the "Ohio Valley Flood" of December 30th had been closed only a few days when the "Lower Ohio Valley Flood" of March 20th sent Red Cross representatives to danger spots and kept all Chapters alert to possible flood trouble. In 3 counties there were 2,367 families affected. The March 21st "Floods in Southern States" (Louisiana east to Georgia) affected 3,000 families. March 25th announced the Missouri River Valley Flood. Reminiscent of floating burning oil tanks was the brief sight of a flaming straw-stack floating down the Red River.

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On April 8th, Omaha, Nebraska, was threatened with the worst flood since 1881. Local Chapters demonstrated readiness for any eventuality—a shelter in readiness for the fairly certain 1,000 refugees, 1,000 cots and 2,000 blankets sent to Omaha from Midwestern warehouses. A break in the dikes caused flooding in north and eastern section of Omaha where 1,000 families were affected. In Iowa 1,200 families were evacuated. The entire disaster service staff of Midwestern Area was assigned to the flooded and flood-threatened area. Priorities for rehabilitation have been obtained from WPB. April 11-13 added a list of tornadoes to April's disasters. In Lefflore, Oklahoma, 40 families were affected, while in the adjoining county of Arkansas lesser damage was done. A tornado struck across Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Florida, injuring about 50 people.

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The Clallam County Chapter of the State of Washington is rejoicing that they had the right supplies in the right place on April 2nd when a Russian ship was wrecked on the rocky coast near La Push. The Coast Guard had recommended that disaster equipment be placed in this isolated, densely forested coast area, and so it was that emergency equipment at the Forks Branch, clothing and shelter supplies at Kalalock and La Push, and blood plasma at Port Angeles were available to the survivors.

It is safe to assume that the appreciation expressed in the following excerpts from a letter was felt for Canteen Service at each of the eight fires occurring in March:

"I am a fireman and have been fighting fires in all kinds of weather and under all kinds of conditions for a good many years, but I can't let up because most of our younger men are leaving for Army or Navy duties. Last night we were on the scene of a fire till morning. A little after 12 o'clock I heard somebody asking if all the families were all right and if anybody needed help, and saying the Red Cross women were on their way with coffee and sandwiches for the firemen and policemen. Let me tell you we've wished mighty hard for a miracle like that."

That ration books have been blown away in windstorms and food supplies been lost in floods, has presented the potential difficulty of meeting emergency food needs. Cooperation of local rationing boards with Red Cross Chapters is a new and definite feature of disaster relief. Conferences between OPA, Department of Agriculture and Red Cross officials have been held, with the result that necessary provisions for securing food in disasters are included in General Ration Order No. 5.

The first occasion for use of this provision was in North Dakota, where the rationing board issued a certificate for an allotment to cover emergency food needs.

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Once a strange intrusion in disaster relief routine, the influences of war are more and more becoming accepted features of natural disasters, such as censoring of weather news, priorities for restricted materials, food rationing. So, too, are there new sources of help which are the outgrowth of war. The latest is Red Cross Volunteer Dietitian's Aide Corps which, with Volunteer Nurse's Aide Corps, will be an asset in disaster emergency. In the recent floods, USO units provided for sleeping quarters for soldiers. Saturday nights were utilized temporarily for flood evacuees.

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Rehabilitation after the spring floods produces stories of unusual situations.

Whether or not to restore a flood-wrecked confectionery store, in these days of rationed sugar and restricted parts for machinery, was a problem left by a spring flood. It had to be decided against a background of the need of an elderly couple who had worked years to establish themselves in the only type of business they knew and had hoped, when their business should develop to reasonable security, to adopt the child to whom they had given a home. The Red Cross decided to repair the building and ice-cream freezer and replace the stock on the basis of the owner doing 50 per cent of the volume of business he had done before restriction of supplies. The independent old couple felt gratitude for the opportunity for self-support in proportion to the self-reliance which had hitherto affected it.

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centrations of American troops had poured into the Tunisian front. One never knew what might happen next. There was the morning, for instance, when Snyder and Munson woke in their combination tent office to find two 12-man German gliders nearby. Their human cargo had vanished without a trace, and after that the men never knew when they might be confronted by a roving band of German paratroopers.

Meanwhile Fincke, Snyder and Sifford, the three advance men who had started the club in Oran, traveled by land convoy to Constantine, where they arrived the middle of January with advancing army units.

There they worked with Munson in setting up new advance bases. Three cities were selected as the headquarters for Red Cross operations along this moving front. Munson stayed at Constantine to set up a regional headquarters through which the constantly changing groups of field men could operate. Alfred Adams of Chicago went on to establish a base at Souk Ahras and Al Fincke went to Tebessa, in charge of operating a supply center for the clubmobile drivers Sifford and Snyder.

The clubmobiles were Bedford trucks, into which were loaded supplies of cigarettes, reading material, copies of *Stars and Stripes* and all kinds of comfort articles. Their base was a tent headquarters outside of Tebessa, and it was from here that the clubmobiles set out to bring supplies to isolated units and hospital evacuation stations.

Al Fincke, a sun-tanned vital man who loves his work, tells a story which speaks for itself.

The other day, he said, I drove up to a large hospital tent station out in the middle of nowhere. I stuck my head in the nearest tent and called out, "Hey, how're you fellows fixed for smokes?" Not a word from anyone of the cots. I turned to the man nearest me. "Hey, don't you need some cigarettes?" The man barely stirred—moved his hand to point to a box filled with packages of cigarettes. Fincke looked. They were all English smokes. "Say, how about some American brands?" This time the soldier turned and surveyed his visitor and the cigarettes he was holding. Suddenly the tent was filled with an excited roar!