1945

Alum Dietitian Directs Army Kitchen in Wales

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Alum Dietitian Directs

Army Kitchen in Wales

Lt. Mary E. Skoltock, '40 describes work of a Medical Department Dietitian overseas

"Our unit landed in Scotland the Fourth of July, 1944, and five days afterwards we were in operation in our present set-up, which is located in the country in North Wales. We are 15 miles from a town about the size of Nevada, Iowa, and so, even when we are fortunate enough to get transportation into town there's scarcely anything there. The second day we were in the British Isles, most of us purchased bicycles and have made good use of them. During the summer months it was daylight until almost midnight and so we were able to cycle about the countryside to our hearts' content after supper. In this manner we have been able to see most of the country within a 15 mile radius.

"I left the Santa Ana, California, Army Air Base in May, just after having been promoted to First Lieutenant, to join the 129th General Hospital at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. For several weeks I was the only woman in the unit. The other two dietitians and two physiotherapists and five Red Cross workers joined us just before we sailed. We came over minus nurses whom we picked up here after General Hospitals had been cut from 100 to 83 nurses.

"Most of the time since we've been in operation things have run smoothly for our department, although we have had our ups and downs. Fortunately we have a good group of enlisted men to work for us and our Mess Officer and Chief Mess Steward are particularly capable. As you no doubt know, we have very little control over menu-planning. Usually we don't know until noon or after what we are going to serve the following day, and then we plan our meals merely around the food issued to us. Sometimes we shudder at the meals we are forced to serve. Nutritionally speaking, there is nothing wrong with our food, if the patients will eat everything we serve, but there we have a problem because most of our vegetables are unpopular ones such as sauerkraut, beets, rutabagas, turnips, parsnips and a peculiar variety of cabbage. We have been quite fortunate in having apples, oranges and grapefruit in reasonable amounts, from the States. Fresh (or rather, whole) eggs are practically non-existent except in the small quantities which we obtain for our special diets.

"Two weeks ago we went through a hectic week which I hope never to experience again. During some sub-zero weather, which is rather uncommon here, in which we had quite a bit of snow, practically all the water pipes in the hospital plant froze and a great many of them burst. For several days there was no water in which to wash. We had to heat water on our kitchen stove for dish-washing and we didn't even bother to scrub the floors. There also was an acute coal or coke shortage and we were not permitted to have fires in the huts where we live. The fuel shortage became so acute that we hardly had enough for cooking purposes. One morning I found the cooks trying to prepare breakfast by using small amounts of coke and the rest wood, neither of which are suitable for use in the type of coal stoves we use. In addition to these physical disabilities, most of the vegetables, including potatoes, which were issued to us had been so badly frozen that they were inedible. We really 'sweat out' each meal, praying that there would be sufficient food to go around and some days the meals were pretty scanty. However, no one starved and I think the Mess Department was the only department which really suffered, and theirs was mostly mental agony.

"A few weeks ago I requested a transfer to the Continent and in reply to my request I was told that I would be sent to Paris. The new job will mean transferring from the Medical Department to be assigned to the Quartermaster Corps. I think it's a rare opportunity for some very good experience in institution management.

"Major Robert Swatosh has been a patient in our hospital since November first, and he and I have had some good times discussing our Alma Mater and mutual acquaintances.

Major Robert Swatosh helped to organize and activate several rehabilitation companies at the hospital in which Lieutenant Skoltock is located, the drill and exercise putting him back in fighting shape. His wounds were not serious and he was able to return to the continent in January. He took a week's short course at St. Andrews University in Scotland as a part of the rehabilitation plan. In September Major Swatosh won the bronze star for his work with the infantry as an artillery liaison officer.