

Twenty Months in France with the New Zealand Stationary Hospital and an English Casualty Clearing Station

Our first two days in France were spent in Boulogne, and never were days so packed with interest and uncertainty. The quaint old town, the people in their native costumes, the French soldiers, our own khaki men, and the general air of bustle and alertness were a delightful change from the peace and quietness of the desert in Egypt and the forest at Brockenhurst.

Orders came for fifteen of our staff to entrain at 9.30 p.m. for an English hospital at Abbeville, and the rest of us left at 7 a.m. the following morning. A few of us brought a little fruit, and what a blessing we did. We expected to reach Amiens



Hazebrouck

at midday, but owing to an air-raid we took all day to reach our destination, and there we were, sixteen hungry women, stuck for twelve hours in a train without food. We asked some French soldiers on the train if we could get food anywhere along the line, and they brought us their own rations of bully beef and bread, but, of course, we would not take theirs. For they, poor things had just come out of the line and were going home on leave.

We found our unit, the New Zealand Stationary Hospital, in possession of half a huge convent and a large school, with an English matron and sisters who belonged to the staff of the former unit, which had moved on as a casualty clearing station. They rejoined their unit soon after we arrived, and our own sisters, who had been lent to a British hospital for a few weeks, rejoined us.

We spent ten very happy months there, though very busy through the Somme "push," Sometimes working forty-eight hours with only intervals for meals, and perhaps only two hours' sleep in that time. Our recreation was boating on the Somme, walking round the Boulevards, and visiting the wonderful Cathedral of Amiens. Hazebrouck was a delightful change for us all. Our home was splendid, nice airy rooms, and a big private garden, with green lawns, trees, and fruit. So spacious was the garden that our O.C. and matron decided to give a garden party in return for all the hospitality shown us on our arrival. And a great day it was. Our N.Z. Divisional Entertainers' Band, under Captain Dave Kenny, came and played selections. We had a tremendous crowd of people, and some of our most distinguished men—General Alex. Godley, General Russell, General Fulton, Colonels Begg, McGavin, Hardy, Neil, Matthew, Holmes, and McLean of our field ambulances, and many officers of the division, the O.C., Matron, and sisters of the British C.C.S. which worked in conjunction with us, and several British officers. We had tea out on the lawn, and the afternoon turned out perfectly glorious, and was voted a great success.

Our stay in Hazebrouck was short, only a few months, but it was full of interest. We were very busy most of the time, acting as a C.C.S. and taking in every twenty-four hours in conjunction with the British C.C.S. Also, we did most of the head work for the 2nd Army, and it was a wonderful sight to look down the head ward of sixty beds. Apart from our work we had the joy of seeing our own New Zealand men, and as most of us had brothers or relations with the division, we were never without visitors when off duty.

Picture us with a brother or friend straight out of the line, and the pleasure we had in hunting up new socks and underwear for them. This was easily done owing to our plentiful supply of Red Cross goods,