

## Chapter 1: The Troopship Queen Mary

*7 December 1942*

I struggled up the gangplank of the *Queen Mary* with my heavy suitcase in one hand, a small make-up case in the other, a gas mask and musette bag crisscrossed over my chest, my brown purse hung from my right shoulder plus a canteen filled with water, and a flashlight attached to the wide web belt around my waist. As we filed past a ship's officer, he handed each of us nurses a card with the number of the cabin we would occupy. A crewman led us up the many flights of stairs to our assigned cabins on the main deck. I was surprised to see the cabin filled with rows of bunks lined up in tiers of four, nearly touching the ceiling, with just enough aisle space to pass between the rows. There were twelve bunks in my cabin. Anxious to loosen the attachments that had weighted us down all day we dropped our gear on the bunks and settled after shoving the suitcases under the lower bunks to clear a pathway. There would be no supper tonight, since the ship's halls were crowded with fifteen thousand troops treading the twelve decks to their assigned area. I was hungry, and remembered the sandwich that we got at Camp Kilmer for the road. I climbed to the upper bunk in the semi-darkness with my life preserver, fumbled for my flashlight and started reminiscing about the events of the past few weeks.

I wondered what my sweetheart was doing tonight and how this separation would affect our lives. I missed the companionship and devotion we had shared and wondered if our love would survive the war. I remembered the last kiss when we said goodbye and his wave just as we rounded the bend. Thoughts raced through my mind. Was it a mistake to have joined the Army? I was filled with misgivings about what lay ahead. How long was

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*Nurses Asselin, Radawiec, Keyes and Huntington, at  
Leon & Eddie's, New York, before sailing*

this separation going to last? Bob and I had been very close with plans to spend the rest of our lives together. Surely our love would last no matter how long we would be apart.

My mind wandered back to the Roosevelt Hotel in New York where I had stayed a week with seven nurses while we were being inducted. We rode the subway to the Port of Embarkation each morning for physical examination, orientation, and injections against typhoid, malaria, cholera, and tetanus. Then there was the tedious chore of filling out army forms in quintuplicate.

We spent our evenings mesmerized by the bright lights of Broadway, Times Square, and Rockefeller Center. We ate at the famous Leon and Eddy's and other night clubs. On stage we saw Helen Hayes in "Arsenic and Old Lace," Frank Fay in "Harvey" and the "Rockettes" at the Rockefeller Center. We were anxious to see everything we could in New York before the war took us away.

Bob telephoned frequently. He wanted to come to

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New York to be with me, in spite of final examinations that were soon due in Medical school. I was gone all day, but most of all I dreaded another parting. I was now in the army “for the duration plus six months.” I thought the six months was a long time. I was sure the war would be over as soon as the Americans landed “Over There”.

About the time our uniforms were issued and our shots and orientation completed, we were ordered to report to Fort Dix, in New Jersey. There I heard that the University of Michigan Unit, the reason I had joined the army, had sailed without us. We felt betrayed! Inducted into the army under false expectation! We also realized that since we had taken the “Oath”, there was not much we could do about the situation. I was now Second Lieutenant, N731714 ANC, Army Nurse Corp. We were placed into a pool to be assigned to any group that needed nurses.

In the meantime, we were assigned to temporary duty at Fort Dix. At the Fort we took care of not very sick GIs who played poker a good part of the day. Our primary responsibility, it seemed to me, was to prevent gambling. Our evenings were spent in the officers’ club playing bridge, dancing at weekend parties or driving to the nightclubs in Wrightstown with the newly commissioned infantry lieutenants we had met at the camp and who were expecting to go overseas, as were we.

### **The Third Auxiliary Surgical Group**

On December 5, 1942, we seven Michigan nurses who had missed sailing to war with the Michigan Hospital, now called the 298th General, were assigned to the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group, along with 105 nurses from Camp Kilmer. We heard that this group would operate near the front line to save the lives of seriously wounded soldiers who might not otherwise survive. The Surgical Group consisted of 216 officer surgeons, anesthetists, dentists and 227 enlisted men, and now 112 nurses. We represented every state in the Union, a group of

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strangers with whom our lives would be intermingled for the duration of the war, “plus six months.”

Camp Kilmer was a staging area camouflaged to match the mud where rows of drab wooden barracks were separated by rows of soggy paths. The overcast gray sky and snow flurries with intermittent rain made it a dismal site. Inside, canvas cots lined the huge barn-like quarters as far as one could see in the semi darkness. These dismal quarters were barely lighted by bulbs dangling on an electric cord hung high in the rafters.

Our day started with roll call at seven. I guessed that this was to be sure no one had gone AWOL, as well as a testing period to weed out timid souls. The dining room, with its rows of rough wooden tables and benches, was bedlam when hundreds of women gathered for meals. The din of chatter, the background noise of pots and pans, dishes rattling, and the stomping of boots as we shook off mud and snow upon entering the huge mess hall was enormous. Nurses wore various conglomerations of army and civilian clothes, creating a disheveled appearance. The food was unappetizing; the coffee unpalatable. After a late lunch one day, I watched a GI use the tall galvanized coffee pot as a basin to wash the rough wood table with a muddy looking rag. Small wonder the coffee tasted so bad.

On December 7, 1942, one year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, we got orders to pack. We were excited and anxious to leave this dismal camp; anyplace else would be a welcome change. We rushed from one barracks to another through the mud and snow to mail our last letters, sign last wills and testaments and powers-of-attorney. We rolled up our bed rolls, packed our suitcases and metal lockers, crammed the last minute PX purchases into our musette bags and made ready to leave the staging area at Camp Kilmer. Then we stood around and waited for hours. When the two-and-a-half-ton trucks arrived we marched toward the rear where a GI handed us a sandwich in a brown paper sack. I tucked mine into my musette bag

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and was boosted into the truck with the helping hand of another GI who steadied us as we climbed on to the high tailgate step and settled down on the benches that lined both sides of the truck. We were on our way at last!

At the station we formed into a long queue and waited our turn to board the train. As we settled in our seats, we were surprised to hear the strains of “From the Halls of Montezuma.” Looking out the window I saw snowflakes gently covering a small band alongside the tracks. A thought flashed through my mind! Is that where we were going or was there no significance to the words of the song, “to the shores of Tripoli?” With a shrill whistle and the screeching sound of steel on steel, the wheels of the train began to turn, and we were off to war!

We left the staging area at Camp Kilmer at eight o'clock p.m., and arrived at the blacked-out port in Weehawken where we boarded a ferry silhouetted against the foggy winter sky. Lights were dimmed and conversation muffled as we settled on cold benches with our paraphernalia at our feet. It took two hours to travel from Weehawken to Manhattan where the *Queen Mary*, the largest, fastest and most luxurious liner in the world



*The Queen Mary, before donning her wartime coat of grey paint*

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was anchored at Pier 90.

It was the *Queen's* first voyage since October 2, when she had collided with the British cruiser *Curacao*. She had the right of way, and the cruiser was in her lane of traffic. Although the cruiser was cut in half, with the loss of 338 lives, the *Queen* continued on with part of her bow torn away. Had she stopped to rescue survivors she might have been sunk by the U-boats that stalked ships in the Atlantic. She had lain in Boston Harbor's dry-dock for the next two months while the damage was repaired.

The *Queen* had been stripped of all the luxurious embellishment that had attracted royalty and wealthy travelers when she crossed the Atlantic in four and a half days, and had been converted to accommodate an entire army division plus a crew of 2000, totaling 17,000. Her precious oil paintings, thick rugs, furnishings, draperies, and crystal chandeliers had all been removed. In spite of her war-time coat of grey paint, however, she breathed affluence and splendor.

In the distance, the silhouette of the Statue of Liberty loomed against the dark sky. Battleships and destroyers on either side of the *Queen* kept watch over her as planes circled overhead. It was known that Hitler had posted a \$250,000 reward to anyone who would sink her. The *Queen* was the largest ship ever built and was easily identified by her three smoke stacks.

Now, lying on a top bunk on the crowded *Queen Mary* with my diary and pencil in hand, I remembered that I had been too distracted at ten o'clock to concentrate on my fiancé, as we had pledged to do. Our minds were to transcend time and space, to be together in spirit, wherever we were. I wondered if he remembered. Was he as lonesome for me as I was for him, despite my being surrounded by thousands of people? I tucked the flashlight under my pillow and closed my eyes. Tired after all the activity, I fell asleep quickly in spite of the chatter in the surrounding bunks below me and on both sides. I tossed

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from side to side on the narrow bunk. Finally I covered my head with my pillow to stifle the sound of marching feet past our cabin door and above me as the troops loaded throughout the night.

The vibration of the ship's engines awakened me at six-thirty the following morning, and as the ship began to get under way its seams creaked with all its weight. At seven, we descended many flights of stairs to the dining room for breakfast. Meals were being served around the clock in shifts. After a delicious breakfast of bacon and eggs, juice and coffee, we nurses went topside, where we could see a vast array of vessels as far as the horizon. I heard that the enlisted men, because of limited hammock space, slept in relays, rotating every eight hours. The rest of the time they spent in boredom in the hold of the ship.

Destroyers on either side of the *Queen* kept watch over her. A blimp hovered overhead, and planes circled over the entire fleet. Battleships surrounded other merchant vessels loaded with thousands of troops. As we sailed, I saw ships changing position at a given flag signal. The maneuvering was to reduce the risk of getting hit by a torpedo. Nazi U-boats plied the oceans and had sunk many Allied merchant ships close to our shores. These were dangerous waters. Planes checked on the fleet from a distance. Later in the day when I went on deck I discovered that the *Queen* had left the convoy and was traveling alone, as she would be easily identified among the other ships and was zigzagging every eight minutes to avoid being struck by a German submarine, as it took that long for a submarine to get into a firing position.

When transporting luxury travelers before the war, her commander, Sir James Bissett, had broken all records for crossing the Atlantic eastbound—three days, twenty-three hours, and fifty-seven minutes. The *Queen* had carried millions of passengers on round trips commercially prior to the war and would transport 810,000 troops during World War II. We had heard that

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Hitler had already announced the sinking of the *Queen Mary* to the German nation. German prisoners aboard the *Queen* en route to internment camps in Canada did not believe they were aboard the *Queen* despite seeing her name on the bulwark. They said the nameplate was subterfuge, that Hitler had declared that she had been sunk. It was probably because she had lain in dock for the two months it took to repair her hull after she had rammed the British cruiser *Curaçao*. We were her first passengers after she was seaworthy again.

Nurses and Red Cross women were assigned cabins on the main deck, fifty feet above water. Our first abandon ship drill was called by the blast of the klaxon. We formed into queues and quickly climbed the many flights of stairs to an assigned place on the deck where, in the past, passengers had played tennis. There were several lifeboats suspended on davits above the deck. When a crewman overheard someone refer to the *Queen* as a "boat," he promptly announced: "The *Queen* is not a boat; she is a ship." He then pointed to the life boats suspended above, "Those are boats. I might as well tell you now that the boats will accommodate only twenty five percent of the ships passengers. The rest of you will rely on rafts or May Wests. In December, survival in the North Atlantic is about seven minutes before freezing numbness sets in. You must carry your life preservers at all times along with your water-filled canteens attached to your canvas belt."

We were also warned that should anyone fall overboard, the *Queen* would not stop to look for them. A British officer crewman told us the fifty-foot drop from the main deck would result in a concussion and would break one's neck. The sun deck where I spent most of the day was a hundred feet above the sea.

A meeting for all Third Auxiliary Surgical Group officers was called at two o'clock. This included nurses, since we were officers in the Army Nurse Corps. We were told to meet in the small lounge where the troop



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commander issued the following orders: “There will be absolutely no smoking on deck at blackout. Positively no flashlights are to be used outside of the enclosed areas. If anyone has a radio in his possession it will be confiscated for the duration of this voyage.”

He repeated what we had heard earlier: “Should any of you fall overboard, this ship will not turn back for any reason. You should also be aware that Hitler has placed a high prize to any of his seagoing vessels for sinking the *Queen Mary*. I remind you again that you must have your life preserver, your canteen full of water and your survivor rations on you at all times. Boat drills will be called by the klaxon at any time of day, and you must go to your designated areas as quickly as you can, short of running. You will never know when it is the real thing. No one is excused from participating. Thank you for your cooperation.”

When the troop commander finished, Lieutenant Colonel Fred J. Blatt, the commanding officer of the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group, stepped forward to address us. He explained that our organization was an “experiment in this war.” We would be closer to the front line than any hospitals in previous wars and would endeavor to save the lives of the severely wounded soldiers, those who would not survive any delay. We would operate as soon as the wounded were carried from the battalion aid station to the field hospitals close to the Front.

This was the first time we got a good view of our Commanding Officer. Lieutenant Colonel Blatt was of medium height, handsome, heavysset, with clean-cut features. His husky build made him look strong, his chin determined. I guessed him to be about forty-five years old. His dark brown eyes greeted us with an expression of reserve, almost shyness. This was the first time we were together in an area where we could all look each other over. At Camp Kilmer we had met only a few of the executive officers in the dark barracks, lighted by a dangling bulb hanging from the rafter, when we had to fill out forms or

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get instructions. I looked about me and wondered what alliances lay ahead in this conglomeration of strangers. I knew that it would not involve me, since my affections were for my fiancé to whom I would be true.

Colonel Blatt then introduced Major Clifford Graves who stepped forward to greet us with a broad smile. He expanded on the goals of the “Third Aux,” as he abbreviated the title of our organization. The major appeared slim in comparison to the colonel, and younger, possibly in his late thirties. His light brown hair receded above a high, wide forehead. His square jaw and expressive face commanded our attention as he spoke with clarity, enunciating words as an English professor might. His eyes searched over the sea of faces before him with confidence in a relaxed manner. He also told us that it would be our duty to staff the ship’s infirmary. That meant we would be working while traveling.

Next, Officer Frasier, one of the *Queen’s* crew, added a few reminders: Nothing was to be thrown overboard—papers, cigarettes, anything—that could leave a trail of the ship’s passing. Garbage was disposed of during the night so that by daylight the current would have dispersed it and the ship would be far away. The exits from the interior of the ship were hidden by double tarpaulin passageways to avoid any light showing outside the ship. We were advised to go through them carefully to avoid light exposure. We were to be in complete blackout. Portholes were covered and bolted shut.

As I looked out to sea a fellow passenger greeted me with a friendly smile. “Hello, see anything interesting? I’m Ed Donnely, from Detroit.”

It was instant camaraderie, as one feels when traveling and meeting someone from near home. “I have watched you as you look out to sea so intensely. Are you part of the crew in disguise or a fellow passenger like myself?”

Looking up at his chuckling face and flashing blue eyes, I could see that he was teasing. “Yes, one might

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think I was part of the crew, with all the time I spend on deck searching the sky and sea. I guess I'm doing it because I'm curious, and I don't want to miss anything."

We looked up at the anti-aircraft guns on swiveling bases located above us, and noted the precautions the ships were using. Navy gunners on duty in the gun nests were constantly searching the skies for enemy planes, ships or submarines in the horizon. As we strolled along the deck we discovered a large cannon on the main deck, pointed out to sea. When the cannon fired, to make sure it was in working order, the entire ship vibrated. Captain Donnely said it was an eight-inch gun. Others were three inch and the anti-aircraft were 20mm and 50 caliber. Torpedoes rested on a lower ledge on both sides astern of the ship, just above the water line. Somewhere below there were depth charge bombs that would be discharged if a submarine were sighted.

We spotted one lone plane in the distance, checking on us from afar, we figured. A fellow passenger said that we had planes based in Iceland. A short time later, I saw a tiny moving object sweeping down out of the sun, and stared at it, fascinated. Suddenly, all the anti-aircraft guns opened fire in the direction of the sun. The puffs of anti-aircraft gave the appearance of more planes in the distance. The *Queen*, with 17,000 people aboard, would shoot down any plane that came within range of her guns.

Donnely and I spent much of our time leaning on the ships rail, exchanging bits of news with fellow passengers as we kept watch and passed the time away from our crowded dark cabins. At night the phosphorescence in the ship's wake fascinated me as we watched it churn. Looking up into the dark moon-less sky filled with sparkling bright stars, we searched for familiar constellations: the Dippers, the North Star, and a few more distant ones we could barely identify. At ten o'clock, Donnely escorted me to my cabin, and as we parted said, "I'll be looking for you tomorrow."

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The *Queen*, traveling between thirty-two and thirty-four knots, began to creak from the stress of swinging from side to side and changing her course every few minutes, or when she fell forward into a trough as the waves of a developing storm slapped against her hull. She raced through the waves and rough sea as if someone were pursuing her. I almost fell off my bunk in the night, but fortunately was awakened by the blast of the big cannon and caught myself just in time. In the morning we were told they fired the gun to test and clean it. I wondered why they did it at night, awakening us.

I gathered information from various sources: a fellow passenger who joined me at the rail, a friendly crewman who was knowledgeable since he had sailed this ship for years, or someone who seemed to have an inside track on what was happening. I jotted these things in my diary at the end of the day, but some information came through the rumor route, often exaggerated. I tried to sort it out as I wrote.

The weather turned mild on the third day at sea because the ship had altered her course, and we were now sailing a southerly route to elude the U-boats that continuously prowled the North Atlantic. The *Queen's* radio was silent but she received coded messages by radio if she was in danger. Her route had been planned so that her exact position was known at every turn.

While eating dinner I heard and felt the ship shudder and the muffled boom of an explosion. I gulped down what was in my mouth, and looked at the women seated around me at the table. Everyone put down her fork and looked at one another. "Was this it? Was our ship hit?" Alarmed, we began putting on the May Wests that hung on the back of our chairs. Later, we heard from passengers who had been on deck at the time of the explosion, who said they saw oil on the surface of the sea. We also had heard that if the *Queen's* sonar instruments detected a submarine, a depth charge bomb dropped in the vicinity would destroy the underwater vessel. The explosion we heard was that

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of a depth charge. Afterwards, there was a skirmish of activity as the ship's crew made a surprise search of our cabins and staterooms searching for a radio. None were allowed to use a radio. It could send off electronic beams that the enemy could detect.

We practiced abandon-ship drills each time the klaxon sounded and wore our May Wests at all times, along with a canteen of water, as we familiarized ourselves with the route to abandon this behemoth just short of running, then stood beside our assigned life boat until the clatter of the klaxon dismissed us with an "all clear."

In the afternoon an English film was shown in the lobby. It was a warning titled, "Too Much Talk."

"A dreadful catastrophe will occur lest one is mum. The enemy is listening."

It was a reminder for us to be wary of the enemy at all times.

By now many of the women had paired off with officers. There were British, New Zealanders, Aussies, Royal Navy men, and merchant seamen returning home from torpedoed ships. Poles, Scandinavians, Fighting Free Frenchmen, newspaper correspondents, Canadian Nurses, ATSS, Wrens, WAVEs, WAACs and Red Cross workers added to the variety of uniformed personnel. I was getting acquainted with people in my organization as we gathered in the lounge to learn more about what was in store for us in this experiment we were to undertake. A concert was scheduled in the lounge after supper to lend some levity to the long evenings.

Colonel Blatt, who was Regular Army, joined me on deck afterward, and we leaned on the rail and exchanged bits of news. He asked me what I thought about being in the army, and commented on my being on deck a great deal of the time.

I replied, "Well, so far, it's been a great adventure. I am enjoying the experience, and I hope it will continue

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to interest me. As for being on deck, I prefer that to lying on the bunk in the semi-dark crowded cabin listening to the retching.”

I guessed he knew I was a civilian, as were most of the nurses. We felt fortunate in having a commanding officer who seemed to be accepted by the entire group with considerable rapport. Since it was teatime, he asked me to join him in the lounge where many of us gathered in the English tradition of “tea at four o’clock.” It provided an opportunity to get acquainted in a friendly atmosphere.

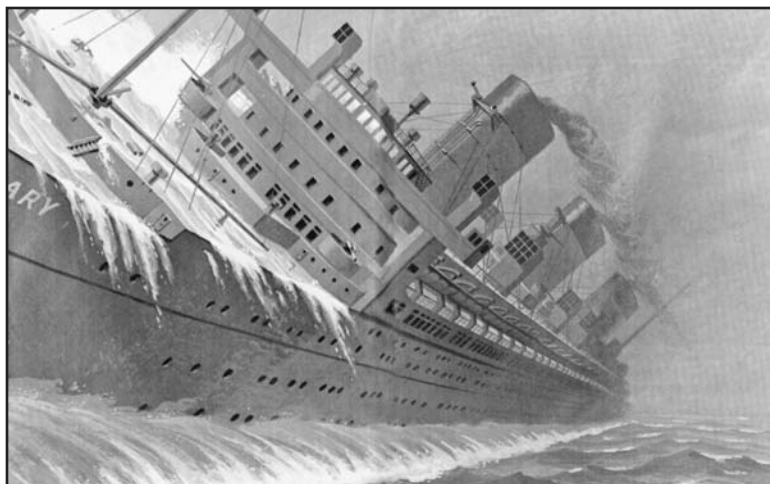
On the fourth day at sea the ship began pitching as a squall started to develop. Undaunted, the *Queen* kept speeding ahead despite the huge waves that sent her up to the crest of a wave then dropped her into a trough where she trembled in every joint as the waves receded. She began to roll from side to side as she strained to regain her equilibrium while zigzagging. The howling wind made eerie sounds through the cables and superstructure as the sea tossed her about like a cork.

The squall developed into a hurricane. Waves encountered waves from the opposite direction and crashed at their height. The ocean churned white, frothed in anger with the wind.

On the fifth day the howling wind raged with such force that the ship shook and creaked in all its seams. It tore at the life boats, swinging them precariously while we drilled. The fierce gale bent cables and tore at the superstructure. Waves sprayed so high they washed over the top deck, a hundred feet above water. The ship tilted forty degrees. (A crewman said nearly forty-three degrees, as the foaming sea fought the gale force wind and rain.) In the dining room, chairs slid across the floor, dishes crashed to the floor, people were tossed about and injured. Port holes were smashed, and water flooded the cabins.

The transport commander swaggered into the dining area and jokingly announced, “The best way to keep your balance is to hang on to the floor with the balls of your

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*The Queen Mary nearly capsizes in the storm on December 11 (From Pierre Mion painting, published in Smithsonian Magazine, February 1978—used with permission of the artist) feet.”*

As he sat down to his breakfast, his chair suddenly slid out from under him and he went rolling across the room, followed by his two poached eggs. He sported a black eye the rest of the journey.

Many people fell. The ship's hospital began to fill with the injured as well as the seasick. Our medical officers, those still on their feet, were busy taking care of the injured. Nurses went on duty around the clock in the infirmary.

While on the top tennis deck, I watched nurse Birdie Mayes, Major Thomas, and several male officers sitting on a bench go sailing across the deck when the bench broke loose from its bolts as the ship rolled precariously. Fortunately, it rammed into a metal guard fence on the opposite side; otherwise they would have continued into the foamy sea. During the night the ship continued to lurch and many passengers fell off their bunks.

A porthole blew open in Lieutenant Tella's cabin while the men slept. Although they were forty feet above water level, the huge waves gushed into the cabin,

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frightening its occupants. The lieutenant was sure the ship was sinking. Alarmed, he woke his bunkmates and instructed them to put on their life belts.

“We’ve been torpedoed!” he said, keeping his voice as calm as possible.

“Shall I take my gas mask?” asked one of the sleepy men.

“To hell with your mask! You won’t need it in the middle of the ocean!” The water was ankle-deep as Tella led his men out, prepared to abandon ship. But, instead of seeing the decks awash, he was greeted by a perfectly dry alleyway with an MP looking on as if nothing had happened.

“Which way do we go?” Tella inquired.

“Go where?” asked the puzzled MP.

“To the boats, of course.” Tella did not have to ask further. The expression on the MP’s face was enough. Sheepishly, the men went back to mop the floor.

The *Queen* battled the fierce storm for three days. At times the ship lifted so high on a wave her huge propeller blades were exposed. Several British seamen manning the crow’s nest high over the deck were swept away. The *Queen* came within inches of capsizing in the raging sea.

Despite the storm, the passengers who were still on their feet promenaded the deck. They were forced outside by the retching of seasick passengers in the cabins. Patients were admitted to sick bay by the dozen. Some were so dehydrated that it was necessary to hospitalize and revive them with intravenous solutions. Time dragged endlessly for those lying on their bunks retching each time the ship hesitated on the crest of a ten-story wave then plunge forward into a void. Storage walls crashed, spilling fixtures into the aisles. We were in that most ferocious area of the Atlantic known as the “Devils Bowl.”

To top it off, Captain Ralph Coffey was faced with having to operate on a fellow traveler with acute appendicitis. Basins containing antiseptic solutions



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splashed, trays with instruments slid about, surgeons' feet tried hard to cling to the rolling deck. Ether splashed over the gauze-covered cone, and when the anesthetist gave the sign, Captain Coffey picked up the scalpel, and holding firmly onto the operating table, proceeded with the surgery as the ship rocked. Miraculously the patient survived.

On duty at sickbay, Nurse Evelyn Hanley remarked to the doctor making rounds that one of her patients had symptoms that she attributed to meningitis. He promptly admonished her for having the audacity to make a diagnosis and denied that it was meningitis. The patient was buried at sea three days later. It would not do to have the *Queen* quarantined for weeks.

I overslept on the sixth morning, because the ship's rolling and creaking had kept me awake most of the night, and missed breakfast. The swaying sideways and dropping into troughs made me feel queasy for the first time. Since we slept fully dressed it did not take me long to splash water on my face and dash up the many flights of stairs to the tennis deck. Refreshed by the gale and the spray against my face, I felt better.

We heard that we would be aboard an extra day because the *Queen* had been diverted far to the south yesterday because of the danger from U-boats.

*Sunday, December 13*

Captain Donnely joined me at church services in the big lounge. We were the hardy ones, still on our feet. The lounge seemed almost empty since many sick passengers were confined to their cabins. There was more space to roam, to gather in groups and play bridge, poker, cribbage or solitaire. We walked the decks and found shelter from the cold spray on the stern of the main deck under the huge cannon.

Donnely lighted a cigarette then, pointing to my diamond ring, asked, "Does that mean what I think?"

"Yes, I'm engaged. My fiancé is in school. He'll have

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to join up as soon as he gets his degree. What about yourself?" I asked.

"As for myself," he said, "I am a widower. I have two little girls, nine and thirteen. They are being cared for by their grandmother and a maiden aunt while I'm away. Of course I miss them, but they are in good hands. I was just thinking that we might plan on meeting again, somewhere."

I was unsure about what to say, but finally replied with a non-committal, "Oh, that would be very nice."

His casual repartee during our week of friendship had amused me as we promenaded about the decks and stopped to scan the horizon whenever an object caught our attention. Everyone was on alert for periscopes, particularly at dusk when they were hard to detect. We walked the deck at night searching the sky identifying familiar constellations and discovering new ones, then went to the stern and leaned over the rail to watch the ship's wake as she sped across the ocean.

On the 14th, the storm began to subside. Sea gulls circled the ship, indicating that we were nearing land. As the *Queen* approached the Firth of Clyde, planes approached in the far sky, then battleships crossed the horizon, followed by destroyers, minesweepers, and converted yachts. The planes wagged their wings in greeting.

The convoy that had been sent out to escort the *Queen* into the harbor had had difficulty in locating her, causing them considerable anxiety. We were two days off schedule. They guided us through the submarine net into the estuary where we were greeted by blasting horns and raised flags. There were minesweepers, aircraft carriers, submarines, sleek destroyers, battleships, the troopship *Empress of China* and many smaller craft jammed into the harbor. The *Queen* raised the Union Jack as guns roared. She had survived one of the worst storms in her career.

Later, we were told by Englishmen that the ninety-

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mile gale was the worst storm in living memory. We also learned that German submarines did spot the *Queen*, and one even launched a torpedo, but the distance was too great, and the torpedo exploded some five hundred feet short of the mark.

On the port side, through the hazy atmosphere I saw Scotland, and to starboard, the Hebrides. It was a beautiful sight.

The sun peeked out from behind the dark clouds for a short time, as if to join in the celebration, and then disappeared. We remained aboard for another night, since it was too late in the day to debark. In mid-December the sun sets soon after four o'clock in that part of the world. The following morning, weary, pale-faced young men staggered from the bowels of the ship, seven decks below main deck, where they had eaten little in the past eight days and had lain in cramped, foul-smelling surroundings where in one moment the ship's floor was where it should be, and then the ship listed until the wall became the floor and the floor the wall.

Captain Donnelly came to my cabin to say good-bye before he debarked with his Infantry Company. He had been teaching me French phrases such as, "*bon jour*," "*au revoir*," "*comment allez vous*," "*je vous s'aime*," along with the card game called Patience. He said, "Perhaps we can meet in London or Paris eventually." He would write when he had an address. Nobody knew where we were going from here. He took my current APO number.

After four o'clock tea I gathered my belongings and struggled to jam the accumulation I had bought in the NAAFI (English for PX) into my already-full suitcase. I heaved into line with the other nurses weighted down by various bags and body attachments, gas mask, musette bag, web belt with mess kit, and canteen with cup attached, spotlight, purse, make-up bag and bulging suitcase. I staggered down the many stairs, and boarded the lighter that transported us to the dock in Scotland. We had been at sea eight days.