

# I Wouldn't Have Believed It and Still Don't!

BY THE OLD GRAY MAJOR

To us in Sicily came some bulletins from AFHQ (Allied Force Headquarters) which pleased me very much. One of them stated that only two officers in the whole North African Theatre had been demoted, and the general who wrote the bulletin stated he knew there were many, many officers who had ranks over and above their cranial capacities. I had believed this a long time, and was happy to hear that those who were supposed to have brains had discovered it.

The bulletin ordered that the various and sundry C. O.'s get busy and demote officers to their proper rank. AFHQ should have made a few demotions on its own staff to show how it was to be done, but it didn't.

The other bulletin stated there were too many officers in the theatre. I agreed; took AFHQ at its word and wrote my C. O. quoting said order, asking to be sent home.

The C. O. pinned my ears back for even thinking such a thing, let alone putting the request on paper. We had quite a discussion, but the result was the same: (1) the bulletin was correct; we had too many officers; (2) I could NOT go home.

With the conquest of Sicily completed, because of the recommendation of the Commanding General, Military Railway Service, I was ordered to proceed by air to La Marsa, near Tunis, to be Rail Bombing Officer for the North African Air Force.

In addition to my particular job of railway bombing, a number of us had a special assignment quite frequently. After each bombing of Rome, aerial photos were taken of the Vatican, and we were instruct-

ed to look them over particularly carefully to see if any bombs had fallen within its confines by accident. Because of the military installations nearby it was necessary to bomb Rome quite close to the Vatican, but the flyers were to be very sure that none dropped in the Holy See itself, and we never found any bomb craters there.

The jeeps at Air Force Headquarters had names as well as long army numbers. Mrs. Frequently, Miss Carriage, Dry Run, 8-Ball Jr., Back Door, Groucho, Zilch, Foite Moitle. Constipated, Can't Pass a Thing. None of which are as funny as a jeep I saw in Assam Province of India: "My Assam Dragon."

The drivers of the general's cars around the MacNaff Command Post always amused me. About half the cars were driven by G. I.'s and half by Wacs. Kay Summersby, the English girl who chaffered for General Eisenhower, didn't, as far as I could see, have much to do with the other chauffeurs. She wasn't snooty, but after Ike went indoors she usually stationed herself in the hall to wait, and just before he came out, she would trip down the stairs and station herself by the car door.

Each driver was supposed to keep his or her car polished, and the G. I.'s always polished theirs while waiting. I never saw a Wac put a polishing cloth on her car. Always they would resist that impulse until a G. I. was about through polishing his, and then the Wac would put on an act, in a helpless sort of a way, which always brought a G. I. over to show her how a real he-man would do the job. A car each, the regulation stated, but always a G. I. would polish two cars, a Wac's and his own.

When we left Oran for the invasion of Sicily we put most of our clothes in a box for storage, with the proviso that we could get it back when we wanted it, and so, with cold weather coming on, I went to El Ouina every week and sent a wire to the Quartermaster at Oran, to which nobody paid the least attention. A month later, when I mentioned this to him, the Commanding General of the Military Railway Service told me to wire Captain Jerrod at Oran, which I did, and he, in person, got my belongings to me by air freight. Strange as it may seem, even in the Army you often have to "know somebody" to get back your own clothes, bought out of your own salary. My heavy clothes, including my overcoat, reached me just in time, because I was sent to Italy, where it was colder.

At 5 p.m., after a three hour flight from Tunis, I was at the Parco Hotel in Naples. This gave me just enough time to wash up for dinner, which we started, and then the sirens blew. We left everything and went to the air raid shelter back of the hotel. With the front only a few miles north of town the bombs began falling in a few minutes, and with old Mt. Vesuvius belching fire all night, the German planes could hardly miss Naples.

We finished our dinner after the bombing, and then, oh happy day! Imagine sleeping in a real bed and bathing in a real tub! For five straight months my poor old carcass had been either on a canvas cot with no mattress, or on the hard ground of North Africa and Sicily; not to mention what had happened to the old anatomy in Alaska and the Yukon, in Burma and China, and, when the carcass was younger, in France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. How long, oh, how long before we can sleep in real beds every night, and not just a few nights a year!

Overseas Americans were not very romantic, to my way of thinking. The boys seemed to think it was

very romantic to sit around in hotel lobbies with the gals and light cigarettes for them, a practice to which I would never be the party of the second part because of my suspicion that their school-girl complexions might suffer. Smoking, of course, does nobody any harm whatsoever, and yet, "Science gives you less nicotine, less throat irritating tars than any other brand."

And anyway, my idea of romance is to help a girl adjust her garter, or something like that, which science also offers proof positive has been known to improve the complexion of both parties.

But to each his own. Others romance their way; me mine.

And while I didn't think that Americans were romantic enough, I thought the Italians were too much so.

In Naples there wasn't much for the people to eat. In fact, there wasn't much of anything, except the people and the flowers they bought from carts. We didn't buy any flowers, having no one to give them to, but many Italians who had little money, almost no food, and who "didn't have a pott to phil," bought flowers and took them home to their wives.

It's all right to be romantic, but if the people in some of the countries in Europe raised fewer flowers to smell of, and fewer grapes for wine, and got right down to business and raised more food, we wouldn't have to break our necks every few years to keep them from starving to death.

You can eat your way to health, but science offers proof positive, you can't drink or smell your way there on an empty stomach. Nothing but food can make this statement.

Leaving the Parco one morning, Life photographer Margaret Bourke White and I happened to be passengers in a jeep going to town. I asked her where George Roger, also of "Life," might be. I said I last saw him in India 18 months before. She said he wasn't in India now,