

Indian Nursing Service with the Indian Victory Contingent at the Victory Celebration in England.

By Principal Matron M. M. Willmott, MBE., RRC.

No better example of the friendliness of Nurses in Britain for nurses in India could be quoted than the warm welcome extended to our party from India, who went to England to take part in the Victory Celebrations. The hospitality we received, the keenness of everyone to see that we saw all there was to see, and the consideration everyone gave us combined with the occasion, one which will linger in our memories for a very long time.

From Delhi our party of 30, comprising of 10 I.M.N.S., 5 A.N.S., and 15 W.A.C. (I), arrived in Bombay on the 7th May, and embarked on the 32,000 ton ship S.S. Mauritonia we soon settled ourselves in and everybody was in good humour.

On the 8th evening H.E. the Governor of Bombay and party of high officials; visited the ship; the whole of the Indian Contingent paraded and we were all wished good luck and a happy trip. To some of our party it was their first sea trip, so everything was thrilling and strange. The sea was calm, the food excellent and there were plenty of games. Several of our party were fortunate enough to win money prizes on the tote of the ships mileage and in games competitions, etc.

The frequent calls to "Attention please" on the loud speakers during the day were extremely useful as they were either to give us orders, or to tell us of the places we were passing which were of historic interest going through the Suez Canal for instance. Some of the party learned for the first time, that you can actually see the curve of the earth's surface, for after passing the Bitter Lakes and entering the narrow strip of water in the canal, you can actually see the surface curving down to meet the waters of the Mediterranean--which was as blue, blue as and as it was cold. We soon got into our woollies.

The Mediterranean as we all know was one of the most dangerous seas during this War where many a battle was fought. The many Islands each have their own history--Malta and Crete which was badly bombed and scared and where remains of many a burnt out and sunken ship can still be seen.

We were disappointed at not seeing Gibraltar, but, this was unavoidable as we passed through on both occasions during the hours of darkness.

Onwards and finally we reached Liverpool on 22nd May at 3-30 p.m. the docks were bedecked with flags, the ships' sirens sounded, bands blared forth as we approached the quayside. Hundreds of people gave us great cheers, some were waiting for their dear ones to land who were being repatriated. It was a bright, sunny day. Here again Officials and the Principal Matron Miss Watson, Q.A.I.M.N.S., came aboard to welcome us. We entrained for London the following morning by special train. On the train we were all given tea, a packet of cigarettes and chocolates each. The well upholstered railway carriages appealed to us, and the speed of the

train, and the absence of crowds on stations were other features which struck most of us. The countrysides we passed were looking their best the beautiful green English fields with the fat and sleek cattle. The green crops, the neat and tidy farms, the fine farm horses, the lines of little houses with their red roofs each with their little gardens, looked so small in comparison to the houses in India.

We arrived at Kings Cross London at 4-15 p.m. Here again there was the Chief Principal Matron Miss L.M. Hunnings, from the War Office and the Principal Matron Miss Percival from the London District, and a couple of Officers from India Office to welcome us to London. Pressmen and Photographers were in evidence and several photos of our party were taken.

We were told we were to stay in the Sisters Mess at the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich—a hospital which has close associations with Florence Nightingale. Here we were given a warm welcome by Principal Matron Miss Murphy and Home Sisters and soon comfortably settled in our rooms, and then began our round of pleasures. Sisters were never failing in their kindness taking some of our party to their homes and sight seeing.

Our conducted tours of London started two days later—luxurious motor coaches collected us from Woolwich, from where we drove to Radnor Place, London, to meet the W.A.C. (I) who were a part of our party, on all occasions. We were all upset over one of our party having fallen ill; she had to be admitted as a patient so she missed all the treats we had. To travel was a great treat the moving stairway (Escalator) down to the tube trains under ground for the first time was a thrill to many, and it needed persuasion to keep some of the party off once they got used to it.

I'll name some of the places we visited and enjoyed very much St. Pauls Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Tower of London, Houses of Parliament, the British Museum, Madam Tussands, Hampton Court, Windsor Castle, Kew Gardens, the East End of London which was a sad sight as the damage was great, but, with all that the people were cheery and still carrying on. The Picture Palaces and Theatres were lovely and we enjoyed many a good show.

While I went to Portland to see my relations, the party went to Brighton which was a popular seaside resort. The Mayor of Hove welcomed the party and took them around and showed them the Royal Pavilion with its eastern style of architecture and elaborate interior decorations of Indian, Chinese and Japanese designs which were of special interest.

Unfortunately the weather was wet but the party drove round in a bus and saw the beautiful downs.

London shops were a grand sight, full of lovely clothes, shoes, etc., prices were high, but unfortunately we were unable to buy anything as we were not given any coupons.

The day of the Victory Parade arrived on the 8th of June. We started out early (and each of us had our packet of sandwiches etc.) as the roads were being closed to traffic after a certain time. The crowds of people to be seen on all the roads were great, and many had spent

the night out so as to get a near view of the parade, but it was well worth it. We were allotted seats in the stand on Constitution Hill near Buckingham Palace; opposite us sat the Chelsea Pensioners in their smart scarlet and black costumes and a bright and colourful spectacle it was. They were very interested in our party and some gave up their seats to the smaller ones and came back so that they could get a better view. It was a thrilling and exciting moment when the State Landan passed with their Majesties the King, Queen and Princesses, who greeted the crowds with smiles and the roars of cheers, from the spectators sounded for miles. Then followed all the Chiefs of Staff etc., and each one received the same great welcome. I will not attempt to describe the thrill of the parade—the scale and size of which had never been seen in London before. Mile upon mile of Tanks, guns, and mechanised equipment of all descriptions passed by; then the grand marching columns led by their bands and Regimental Colours, which was just grand, and we reserved a special cheer for the Indian Contingent. The Women Services in the marching column were just as good as the men, and we were very proud of them.

Evening found some of our party waiting for the fireworks display on the river Thames, a display on a scale never before seen; some of my party joined with the thousands who stood on the Victoria Embankment and watched the fine display. What was so fascinating was the way the riot of colour changed the colour of the grey waters of Old Father Thames to red, green and blue; the 'V' sign in the sky showed Victory was ours.

One has to be tough to be in a real London crowd, and it was not long before the girls became separated, but tired and happy they finally made for Charing Cross Station and home to Woolwich. The London Policeman never failed to give his traditional help to the visitors. Whether one of our party wanted to be directed to any particular street, or building, or whether she merely wanted to cross the road, he could always be relied on.

A special request to go round one of the hospitals was arranged by the Chief Principal Matron Miss L. M. Hunnings, with kind permission of the Matron of the London Hospital in White chapel. Here our party arrived at 2-30 p. m. and were met by the Asstt. Matron who very kindly showed us around many of the wards and various departments. All most interesting. We saw the damage caused by the Flying Bombs where some patients lost their lives. The Nurses quarters, sitting room and dining room were very comfortable, and an excellent swimming bath where the water was warmed by hot pipes, was very inviting and appealed to us very much.

The Sister Tutors had prepared the lecture hall with all equipment etc. laid out on tables for the practical examination for the Nurses to be held the following day. This was interesting to the A.N.S. (I) who could see exactly how things were done, and some expressed a wish that they would like to return to London to finish their training.

We were then entertained to a most refreshing Tea in the Sisters dining Hall, after which we bade one and all good bye.

And on to London our party went as we were invited to an At Home by the Royal College of Nursing. Here we met several old acquaintances, many who had been in India with us and a most enjoyable evening was spent.

The following morning at 7-15 a.m. the party left for Scotland where they were guests of the A.T.S. in Edinburgh. This was a short visit, but nevertheless greatly enjoyed. Edinburgh Castle is a real old majestic fortress standing on a hill overlooking the world famous Princes Street, at the foot of the hill there was a lovely garden which was a mass of colour, contrasting with the green slopes.

The Firth of Forth Bridge is a marvellous piece of workmanship and looking from below one could get an idea of its size.

Some of the party met students from India who were studying in the University and they will all remember the friendliness and warm welcome they received from everyone.

Back in London we were guests at Victory Tea Party held at Kensington Close given by the three Chiefs of the Nursing Services:-

Miss M.H. Goodrich, CBE., RRC & Bar, Matron-in-Chief QARNNS. Mrs. L.J. Wilkinson, CBE, RRC, Matron-in-Chief, QAIMNS. and Miss Taylor, CBE., RRC., Matron-in-Chief, PMRAFNS.

Here we met many of the Nursing Sisters of the British Empire who took part in the Victory Parade; it was just grand meeting so many and exchanging views and ideas. Ten of our party wore the most beautiful and colourful Sarees which made a great contrast to all the uniforms there and I can say without exaggeration, that our little party lacked nothing in its visual appeal!

Many old acquaintances were renewed, many met former Matrons under whom they had served in India. Mrs. Wilkinson, now Matron in-Chief at War Office and Miss L. Hunnings, Chief Principal Matron, both of whom we have served under in India.

Last but not least, the evening before our departure was the farewell party given us by our Colleagues, the Matron and Nursing Sisters QAIMNS of the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich, where we were staying. This was a lovely party and one and all of us appreciated and enjoyed the same very much. We gave the Sisters Mess a souvenir of a pair of silver sweet dishes in remembrance of our most enjoyable trip to U.K.

We sailed from Tilbury on the 29th of June on the S.S. CARTHAGE for our return to India, all feeling sad that our holiday had come to an end. We called at Malta, Naples and Port Said the weather was warm and the sea rough, but in spite of all, the usual games, dancing, concerts and cinema shows were greatly appreciated and enjoyed by all.

At Bombay we were given a very warm welcome back. The Alexandra Dock where we berthed was decorated with flags, two bands played and the G.O.C. Bombay, General Goddard and Adm. Miles came aboard to welcome the Indian Contingent back to India.

and gave us a most impressive message from H.E. the Commander-in-Chief. After this was over, the whole of the Indian Contingent were entertained to lunch upstairs NO.16 Alexandra shed, which was excellent and exceedingly well arranged and served. Many of the ladies and W.V.S. of Bombay were in attendance, all of whom were very interested in all our doings in U.K. Lunch over we all returned to the ship ready for disembarkation. We bade farewell to all our friends, many of whom seemed happy to return to their relations and so is the end of a very happy time spent in U. K. One and all of us were exceedingly lucky to have been chosen and given this grand opportunity and most enjoyable trip which has been greatly appreciated and never to be forgotten by all of us

My Sea Voyage from Calcutta to San Francisco on the S. S. Marine Lynx.

On the 10th July, 1946, about 140 Passengers left Bombay by special train for Calcutta, where on arrival we were told that the S. S. "Marine Lynx" had not yet arrived. After almost daily visits to our shipping agents, we were finally told that we would embark on the 28th July, as the Marine Lynx "Missing Link" as someone called it, was due to arrive in Calcutta on the 26th. I must mention that she is a converted troopship, and contains cabins, with from six to thirty-eight berths for women and children, and from a hundred or more for men.

I had my first experience in Community living as I was allotted a berth in a cabin for 38 women and children on B deck. Being very hot and airless down below I spent most of my time on the boat deck. However after Singapore, I managed to get into a ten berth cabin on "A" deck with two portholes, and I certainly felt much happier.

We had on board 964 passengers of 21 different nationalities, out of which 378 were British Indians, and 350 Americans. Of the British Indians 312 were students proceeding to the States for studies. There were several refugees, eight of whom were Stateless.

The passengers all seemed nice and friendly, and we somehow managed to walk around in the little deck space we had.

On the 30th July we got into the rough seas of the Bay of Bengal, and consequently the dining rooms were fairly empty.

We reached Singapore Harbour at 9 p. m. on the 2nd August, and anchored for the night. In the morning we could see a few remnants of ships which had been sunk during the war. Much to our disappointment, we were not allowed ashore, and so were glad to proceed on our voyage on the 4th afternoon.

While sailing in the South China Sea all was calm and quiet. On the 9th August we arrived on the Yangtze River, which is very wide and the water a muddy colour. I took a few pictures with my cine camera as we pulled up the river towards Shanghai, which we reached on the 10th morning and docked at the pier. We were