

LIFE IN A FORWARD AREA.

By Miss V. Kelly, I. M. N. S. (T), Sister in Charge C.C.S.

Life in a forward area is packed full of interest. There are not nearly the number of hardships that many people seem to expect, and though there is always plenty of hard work there is also pleasure, entertainment, and enjoyment of a rural kind for all who look for it. Life is by no means dull because one happens to be buried in the country, or literally away in the blue up in the hills. It has a fair mixture too of thrills and excitement, and above all from the point of view of work it is the most satisfying I have ever experienced. The life is mainly a very healthy one with the exception of malaria, but if one adheres closely to the anti-malarial precautions, though not infallible, it can be largely excluded.

Work in these areas is spasmodic, although always the number of authorized beds are more than occupied, battle casualties come in batches in accordance with what is happening in the front line. We usually find that these casualties are either severe or minor cases, and it is surprising how few out of the total are really severely injured. Malaria is always the most prevalent case we treat, but in a C. C. S. we do not usually keep them to the end of their treatment except in cases where it is absolutely necessary that the patient be returned to duty at the earliest possible moment. Other cases are transferred to General Hospitals as soon as fit to travel. This C. C. S. is entirely under canvas in other respects, work and life in the ward are similar to that of other hospitals.

Off duty cannot be regular since it is controlled mainly by the admission state which is very variable.

Sports in C. C. S. are very much up to scratch. P. T. takes place at 6 a. m. in the summer, and somewhat later in the winter months. For those who take the trouble to go it is great fun; usually it commences with a short cross-country run, followed by exercises, and afterwards by summersaults and games etc. It is not too strenuous, and a good start for the day except that I have never yet found it easy to get out of my warm bed. In the evenings one can usually join in a game of hockey or watch a foot-ball or volley ball match. In the warm weather it is our practise to take all available staff and fit patients down to the river for a swim or to catch fish, on Sunday afternoons.

The road to our area passes through most beautiful country, but not everyone considers it thrilling to travel along its precipitous windings. During the monsoon it is extremely muddy and a little hazardous whilst in the dry season the predominant feature is dust; travellers usually arrive smothered in a thick layer of fine dust.

For my part I never got tired of our wild surroundings, and 'close to nature' life. We have lived in grass huts which we were able to make very comfortable; we now live in tents to which we have also brought the homely atmosphere. The art of improvisation is a great asset, for example, we have had ash trays and flower vases made out of bamboo and have furnished our Guest room entirely with home made bamboo furniture. We have also provided ourselves with luxurious full length bath tubes made from ground sheets strung on to bamboo frame work.

There is no lack of floral decorations, for in season we get butter cups, wild roses, orchids, lotus flowers and innumerable others I have never seen before. Sunset seems too colourfull to be real, and moonshine and star light a thousand times more enchanting.

Our rations arrive regularly except during occasions when the road is closed owing to wet weather or other conditions, but since we always keep a large reserve of food supplies to meet such emergencies we do not suffer from any serious shortage. Owing to a frequent scarcity of fresh meat supplies we consume large quantities of Bully Beef, corned mutton, soya links, and dried meat. One cannot deny that is a far greater variety to choose from than the continuous Bully Beef of the last war. As for ourselves we have been equal to the occasion by having really super ovens constructed, from which issue, daily, appetizing and attractive dishes which would not otherwise be possible for patients or staff.

Work necessitates an 'Early to bed early to rise' life but we have also social occasions when we are invited out to dinner and sing around a camp fire or dance on

chattai or a tarpaulin. There are also occasional B. E. S. A. shows, and the mobile cinema comes at intervals when we provide our own seats and sit out in the open. The first cinema show I saw seemed the most impressive. It was held in a jungle clearing on the hill side, the moon and stars were brilliant, and whilst we watched Stanley searching for Livingstone in an African jungle it was difficult to keep our attention away from the magnificence of the many jungle fires blazing on the hillsides.

Wild animals are not uncommon. Some of us have seen leopards, and there are also monkeys, barking deer; and occasional tigers in the vicinity. Snakes are common. Our servants killed a cobra in the kitchen one day and on another day when I was sick in bed I looked up suddenly and saw a large snake coiled up on the beam immediately over my head; incidentally I discovered I could still move very quickly.

There was a great excitement in our quarters one night, but being a sound sleeper I missed it. One of the sisters suddenly had her mosquito net wrenched up and her leg violently pulled; she shouted for all she was worth and the nearest sisters sprang from their beds and all joined in a search for the man who had dared to play such an unseemly practical joke, but no man was found. A guard was put on a ten minute patrol of the sisters quarters. On hearing the story in the morning I investigated and discovered no manly foot prints, but only that the noisy door had remained closed and the widows open which led to the solution that a large black monkey which had troubled the patients for sometime had ceased to bother them. The monkey scampered over our roofs for four nights afterwards and then disappeared.

At Christmas time, though we had such a large variety of animals we had no reindeer to bring Santa Claus to our patients, so we hired some buffaloes and a wooden sledge from the locals. We decorated the sledge with pine boughs and loaded it with Father Christmas and bags of Red Cross gifts and with a jingling of bells (also Red Cross) and with the stamping of hooves, at slow Ox-Trot, the patients received their Christmas presents.

"We are Seven" but we have three cats to keep the rats away; six ducks to remind us we can have fresh meat whenever we want to, a cock and a hen for production and one dog to protect us.

For those who are prepared for hard work; are willing to forgo some off duty during rush periods, and do not dislike a rough country existence, there is no more happy and satisfying life than that which I have briefly described.

By Miss F. M. Branch, Sister, I. M. N. S. (T).

Peace Station or forward Area. Which will you have?

After 4 months in a forward area with an Indian General Hospital (Combined) I feel in a position to say to myself, "I have enjoyed my time here and I think I'm doing some really useful work in helping battle casualties to return of their former state of health."

Work. Yes there is plenty of it and it is at really strenuous times that team work between the Medical and Nursing Services is so essential. In a forward area the team work and co-operation is seen at its best advantage everybody pulls their weight and get the job done.

Yes, that's work, but do we ever play?

Like anybody else we have our off duty. Home to us is the Sisters Mess and it is a real home from home.

On our evenings off we can either relax with books, magazines or the wireless or as often happens we are invited to neighbouring Messes for the evening. These invitations are far from infrequent and our hosts go out of their way to make it a really enjoyable one. To return their kindness we have Badminton and tea parties once or twice a week, so we combine sports with social graces.

And now what about the item that looms so largely in the minds of the Nursing profession.

Yes, You've guessed it. FOOD. Here we have ideal combination of cheap but good messing. Army rations enhanced by extras such as sauces, chutneys and articles of diet of a rather more dainty type than that which the Army supplies.

Well which will you have? Peace Station or Forward Area. I'm playing my part in this war I feel, servicing in the forward area, it's hard work and uncomfortable at times, but I love it.