

# N. H. Nurse Tells Gripping Story of Invasion of France

## Describes Condition at Battle Fronts Near Beaches

Special to The Union

HAMPTON, July 9—Believed to be the only New Hampshire woman serving with the rank of captain in the invasion forces in France, Capt. Elizabeth Hay, ANC, was one of the first Army nurses to go ashore in Normandy on D-Day, letters to her husband, James E. Hay, of Dearborn street, reveal.

Captain Hay, 42 and a native of Windham, is in charge of three field hospitals in France. A graduate of the Lawrence, Mass., General hospital, she is a former school nurse for Hampton and Rye.

She is well known in fraternal circles here, having been a past worthy matron of Orient chapter, CES of Exeter, and a past noble grand of Winnicummatt Rebekah lodge. She entered the Army Nurse Corps in January, 1943, and was stationed in the South before going overseas last February to England.

Excerpts from letters written in France June 11, 17, 18 and 20, illustrating conditions under which the ANC is doing its part, follow:

June 11

"We cannot write very much but this is just to let you know that I am still OK although dirty and tired. This is the sixth day that I have not slept undressed and if you can imagine sleeping in two sets of fatigues and our long underwear and helmets. I have learned to love my helmet and treat it as my friend. I never move without it.

"For six days we have had very little sleep and in spite of all the inconveniences we are getting along fine. I have learned to sleep in naps between the serenaders but we are within sound of the heavy activity. We arrived here wet and cold as we had to walk over the beachhead and it was certainly some experience.

June 17

"I have tried for days and days to get a note off to you, but these days are very busy ones. We work all day and up until late at night as long as it is daylight. We have no lights in our tent and writing is impossible.

"Well, we are here and there is so much that I could write only I do not have the time, but I did want to let you know that I am OK and well. We were the first nurses to come over the beachhead and we were surprised that our hospital had not arrived, so we went to work in another field hospital until their nurses got here. It was a long hard stretch and we worked like dogs, but there was a lot of satisfaction in knowing that we were really doing something at last.

"We came over, leaving England on D-Day and were a long time en route. It was quite a crossing and we did not sleep at all. When we landed we climbed down over the side of the Liberty ship on the big



CAPT. ELIZABETH HAY

rope nets to the landing barge, the kind that open on the end. It drew up as far as it could on the beach and then we had to wade ashore in water almost waist deep. We walked quite a ways and finally were picked up by a 'duck,' one of the amphibious boat-jeeps. From there we were driven in about seven miles and we went right to work.

"We have not been undressed since we left England and we will not be for a while, as long as things remain as hot as they are. We sleep on the ground under a tent, but most of the night is spent in our fox holes as we come under fire. The guns go off all night and we have a continuous drone of planes overhead. At night there is very little sleep for anyone so we are getting pretty weary.

"Now we are back with our own outfit and we are functioning full blast. Everything is going very well and we are all well. We do get very tired but that is to be expected. All the nurses are taking it well. I often think of the black-outs that we experienced at home and how we sat so calmly in our houses and just waited until it was all over. Here, we are really blacked out and if you think it is any fun trying to go about from tent to tent and find your way, you are mistaken. We do have lights inside the ward tents, but we can use none outside. We have moved several times and will probably move up again shortly. We are directly behind the lines and of course have all kinds of patients—American, French, German prisoners and a few Russians who have been captured by the Germans and made to fight on their side. It is quite a conglomeration to say the least.

"All of the bathing that I have done has been in my helmet after dark with cold water but we think we have been lucky to get that much done. We are still eating K-rations, plenty to eat, but we get tired of it. That will all be changed as soon as it can be. I really am very happy in my work and will write more of the details later. I do not have even a cold or a cough, and when I can get enough sleep, I will be just grand. I would not have missed this for anything. It is not a pretty mess and we see some bad sights, but we really are doing a lot. It is much more interesting here than in any other type of a hospital.

"Mail came yesterday and I sure was glad to get it as we had not had any for so long. I got your letter May 31 as well as others.

JUNE 18

"This is a bright sunny day in Northern France and I can only compare the countryside with many parts of New England especially the northern part of New Hampshire. We have not had any time to get about to see what is around us but as yet I have not seen anything spectacular. Today we have not been so rushed and last night we had more sleep. We have six operating tables going in two operating rooms and that keeps us on the hop. The after-care is tremendous but as soon as we can we send them back to England by air we do. One of my platoons is at the air field for the moment. I thought that I had better get this off now as I do not know when I will have time again.

"I took time off and did a little washing. I had not done any since I was at the Castle and it sure had piled up. We have a washing machine along with the outfit and when I was not busy this a. m., I got a few minutes to dump in a few things. I did it out in the middle of a field and then hung it up to dry on the ropes of my tent.

"It seems as though I have not done a thing today except give penicillin hypos and Sulfa drugs all day long. They are certainly doing a lot with penicillin and it is saving a lot of lives. We had mail again today and I had a letter from you telling about the new kitchen curtain. They sound very pretty. I wonder now when I shall ever see them again. It seems so far in the future."

JUNE 20

"I have just had a bath and have put on clean clothes, have combed my hair and really feel like a million dollars. We had a very quiet night last night and we all had a chance to get some sleep. Today we are evacuating all of our patients out by air to England so we will pull up stakes and move on probably tonight or tomorrow.

"Yesterday was a nasty day here. It rained all day and the wind blew so that it was pretty unpleasant at times. Last night Major Jobe and I took a jeep and went over to where the second platoon are and gave them the once over. They are about five miles away. My first platoon is about 30 miles away so that I will not have much chance to check them very often. I always stay with the Headquarters group regardless of what platoon they are with.

"I went through a village last night and there was not a thing left in it. It was a nasty sight. That was the first time that I had been out to see anything. We are not allowed to go anywhere because of the mines. So far the roads have been cleared so that they are safe for vehicles. We are to have some

fresh meat for dinner today. One of the cows in the pasture next to us got accidentally (?) shot so we expect a treat. We are to have dehydrated potatoes and biscuits. That will be our first real meal"