

Chapter 2: North Africa

Our arrival in Liverpool, England, was after dark for purposes of secrecy and protection from the Luftwaffe. Believe it or not, there was a band there to serenade us as we disembarked directly to waiting railroad trains. The rapidity of our disembarkation and our immediate departure from Liverpool was somewhat surprising to me until I realized abruptly that Liverpool was obviously a preferred target for the German Air Force. (At any rate, the British certainly through us through with real dispatch.) We did not know our destination in England until got on the train and were advised by the American Railway Train Officer (RTO) and the British train crew. The RTO told me that we were headed toward "Cyrenseister." (The British said that we were going to, it sounded like "Sister." The assistant conductor informed me that we were headed for "Sesister." I was totally confused, as was the staff, and we finally resolved this unknown and confusing destination by collaring a British liaison sergeant, who broke out laughing and said that we would have to get used to British pronunciation. He informed us that all of the pronunciations meant the same town. I was tremendously amused by our first British Liaison. He had a real sense of humor, as did most of the British when we got to know them. I guess after what they had been through, they needed one.

Actually, when we reached Cyrensester, we were not really at our destination, as it was a debarkation point from the train to trucks and jeeps. Our final destination was really the village of Fairford, in Gloucestershire County, about two hours from London, and in proximity to Oxford. It was truly a typical English village, with the manor house of the Palmer estate as my headquarters. The manor house also provided sleeping for my staff and for myself, and without any doubt, it was the coldest, draftiest place that I was in while in England. There was the typical English village pub, named the Bull Inn. The management really turned it over to us as more or less our own little pub. It was delightful.



Eating beans in a halftrack while on maneuvers.

My squadron was selected early for a special mission, location unknown. For special training we were moved from Fairford and sent to Shrivenham, which was a modern British army installation. It was here that we entered into what I call hard, unrelenting combat training, with no let up at all. This training was administered by ourselves and was realistic. The command, unfortunately, was not in the physical condition that was required for troops going into combat. About this time I was informed that my unit had been selected to be part of an invasion force—I did not know where—but the information spurred us on to more severe training. I felt sorry for the newer replacements in this training, but it was essential that they be fit, and this takes time, of which we had very little. All during this time I was blessed with an excellent staff, Col. McGarry and Col. Samsel, who were both prodigious workers and unrelenting in their attention to detail, which is so important in operations such as this was going to be. The

staff as a whole was an excellent team.



Col. Robert McGarry



I finally was informed of our objective, but was under strictest orders and could not divulge the target to any one. It was North Africa, scheduled for November 1942.

We were a unit of many vehicles, and consequently, we were a difficult type of unit to ship. At this point, we had the four-wheel scout cars, which, incidentally, were of questionable mobility and were designed to tow a 37-millimeter for anti-tank purposes. We also had the old light tank, and many of those workhorses, the half-track, with a great number of the jeeps and, of course, the six-by-six trucks, heavy maintenance trucks, and an assortment of specialty vehicles. Taking all of these together, it was quite a load to transport for a landing. For this reason, we were delayed in our scheduled landing in North Africa. The

assault by the main landing forces went on schedule, but we were delayed about six weeks and landed in Algiers January 2, 1943.

The harbor at Algiers sustained heavy bombardments every night, and we moved out of Algiers into a series of small villages and towns south and southeast of Algiers. These towns were populated, for the most part, by French Nationals, and their main occupation was wine growing and distilling. There were miles and miles of these vineyards. The importance of this territory to the Germans was the distillation of alcohol, which product was important to the German munitions industry.

Our first assigned mission was to the security command of Allied Force Headquarters, located at the St. George Hotel in Algiers. My own headquarters was located in a very nice village about 2 miles south of Algiers, named Douera. We had many missions assigned to us, including the safety of General Eisenhower at his forward Command Post and protecting his trips to the combat front and the safety of some other installations. We also were responsible for the maintenance of order in northern and eastern Algeria and for the security of the city of Algiers.

It is fair to say that the American army had its baptism in combat in North Africa, and its first real crisis of the war at Kasserine Pass, Tunisia. This shock was administered by Field Marshall Rommel and his Africa Corp. They were fine soldiers and were a proud group. The reverse side of that coin was the American army, green and suffering from mediocre leadership at the regimental and battalion level. Up to this point, there had been no opportunity to cull out the weak. Some of the weak leadership went higher and resulted in a change by the installation of General George Patton as commander of II Corp, the American tactical force in North Africa. One could be very sure of certain changes in the American forces under General Patton, and these were a reinstallation of total discipline, including combat discipline, and that the words "retreat" or "surrender " were stricken from usage at any time. I believe that more than any other one officer, George Patton provided exactly the qualities badly needed at that point in the blooding of the American army.



The 2d Squadron arrived in Algiers in January 1943 to provide security to Lt. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower's headquarters.

It seems that the public, quite naturally, is very cognizant of the combat troops, but I should like to point

out the fantastic accomplishment that was successfully handled by those in the logistical command. This command supplied an unbelievable amount of supplies, including ammunition, fuel, equipment, clothing, medical supplies and other varied and numerous items, which an army needs so badly. This group did this in North Africa, again for the first time the then American forces had these large requirements, and so I hope that those who read this will give tribute to our supply elements. In North Africa, the fronts were indeed a long way from the source of supply, but the Navy conquered these distances to their ports of discharge, but we also had another obstacle at the early part of the Tunisian campaign. This was the German Air Force, as it was some time before the Allied Air Forces were effective in the support of our ground elements. I remember on the road to Kasserine, on a long straight desert type road, even one jeep could be confident of being strafed. We used to call this "Messerschmitt Alley," and I remember seeing a painted sign put up along this road reading, "Messerschmitt Alley: Good Luck." The wag who wrote this was not fooling.

I remember receiving some long-delayed mail at the little town of Sbeitla, near Kasserine. Most of this mail was from my wife, and in one of the "V Mail" letters, Marie Lou said that an aunt had died and left us a few thousand dollars. Quoting the letter: "Dear Charles, since we had a few thousand dollars, I have purchased a lot in Short Hills, New Jersey, as I have faith in the Almighty, and your ability to duck." I read this letter to my staff with the remark, that there was no way that our wives could know of the recent reverses, but they still had confidence in our return to the life that we so dearly loved.

Sequel to the last point made: We built a house on that lot in Short Hills in 1946 and lived there very happily until 1953, when we built another home in Short Hills.

When the enemy opposition had collapsed in Tunisia in 1943, we still had our millions in Algeria, in addition to training hard again for preparations for future operations. However, there were several incidents that I feel should be told, and I am going to separate them into their own right.

The first one of the above might be entitled "Marrakech with Prime Minister Churchill." It was on December 30, 1943, when I was called to A.F. Headquarters, St. George Hotel. The message was cryptic. It said: "Report to General Rooks." General Rooks was the G-3 of Allied Forces Headquarters, so I knew that this was going to be an important operational discussion. Douera, my headquarters, was about 20 miles from A.F.H.Q., and it was cold and rainy. I made it as soon as

possible, and as I walked into the lobby of the St. George, a very large military police major saluted and said, "Col. Hodge, please come with me." We went directly to the war room, and meetings there meant something was up. General Rooks didn't even say "Happy New Year," or even "Merry Christmas," and I thought "What now?"

The following represents the one-sided conversation: "Hodge, the Prime Minister of England is recuperating from pneumonia in Marrakech. General Eisenhower has just departed for the United Kingdom, and he regrets that he is not here to give you the following orders himself. You may now consider that the following orders as coming personally from General Eisenhower. He wants you to know that he has confidence that you will do anything that is necessary in the accomplishment of the following mission, and there will be no further orders. Here it is: Take your unit to Marrakech immediately, and provide security for the Prime Minister, using any means that you may require. Move out immediately. Are there any questions?"

Following the Army custom, all I did was to salute and say, "Yes, sir."

As I walked out of the war room, I passed Bill Merritt, the secretary to the general staff, and decided that here was where I could get a lot of questions answered, but I decided to alert my unit first. I called Col. McGarry on our private field phone and said, "Bob, we are moving out on a special mission immediately to Marrakech, but I cannot discuss it with you until I get there." Never having heard of Marrakech, I was sure that it was in Algeria. I further told McGarry to start the advance parties immediately.

I then turned my attention to Bill Merritt, to obtain as much information as possible from this important source at the horse's mouth. While I was plying Merritt with questions, the telephone rang. "Important call for Col. Hodge." It was my exec, Col. McGarry,

His first words were, "Colonel, I have the map of Algeria on my desk, and Sammy (my operation officer) and I have gone over the map with a magnifying glass and cannot find Marrakech."

I turned to Bill Merritt and said, "Bill, where the hell is Marrakech?"

Bill replied with a calm voice, but a humorous glint in his eye, "I was wondering when you were going to ask that. It's about 150 miles south of Casablanca."

I nearly-flipped, and when I told McGarry, I thought that he had fainted, as there was no noise at all on the phone. Finally after a minute for recovery, I said to Merritt, "Do you know how many miles the tank tracks and

half-tracks will last?"

He smiled with that sweet smile of his and replied, "No, but then it's not my problem, is it?"

Not only was the distance 1151 miles, but it was right over the Atlas mountains, in the middle of the winter season and the roads were slippery. Under these circumstances, we could not take our tanks with us, so we left them at Douera, and to this day I don't believe the high command realizes that we were without the tanks. But the transportation of them to Marrakech was really an impossible act to conform with the time schedule.

When one receives an order such as I received from General Rooks, one thinks a great deal about it. Where do we get the fuel? It had to be a forced march, with well-planned stops for refueling; advance parties to alert the military police for fast escort through towns such as Sidi-Bel Abbes, home of the French Foreign Legion; Oujda, a very important point in western Algeria; Fez and Rabat, in what was then French Morocco; and then fast passage through to Casablanca, with all stops out. It must be considered that 200 vehicles attempting to refuel at one gas point would take approximately ten minutes per vehicle or two thousand minutes, divided by sixty, or approximately 16 hours. We solved that problem by sending an advance party ahead to arrange to have Arab laborers, instructed by the U.S. quartermaster troops, place four five-gallon jerry cans full of gasoline every 100 yards on the open road. By this procedure, the columns could pull up at each point and refuel, and the whole refueling process took only about twenty minutes. We did have one snarl, when an officer did not take the order seriously, and assumed that the order that had been given to him to spread the gasoline cans along the road must have been wrong and decided he would refuel us by a conventional pump. This was Oujda. I asked him, on my arrival at this point, to repeat the order that had been given to him by Col. Samsel on my instructions. He repeated the order exactly as I had given it to Samsel, but added that it seemed silly to him. This was corrected immediately. To make it worse, the only pump that was at that station broke down. The officer was court martialed, as he well should have been. Actually, we made the entire forced march in 51 hours by changing drivers every two hours, allowing the relieved driver to take intermittent naps.



The 2d Squadron takes a break somewhere in North Africa.

The unit was somewhat on the spot, as some of the British were a little put out that an American unit had been selected for this mission, and we knew that we would be criticized for every little thing that might go wrong. The command was tired from driving over the difficult terrain without rest and, of course, their appearance left much to be desired. However, each man had in his personal pack, a newly-laundered, pristine-appearing uniform by order. Twenty miles distance from Marrakech, we had a two-hour halt, the reason for the halt being to allow the command to change uniforms, shave and clean themselves up, and put their vehicles in proper shape. When we moved into Marrakech to the Cork forest where we were to bivouac, the units resembled a spit and polish combat unit, which indeed they were. I heard one high-ranking British officer remark that he really did not believe it, as he had checked them when we were on the move, and I suppose we looked tired and dirty. The mission that we were on, we knew would be onerous, because when one is on a mission similar to this, many things can go wrong and usually do.

The Prime Minister was staying at a beautiful villa, owned by an American widow by the name of Mrs. Taylor. The villa was most attractive and was on about four acres of beautifully-shrubbed grounds decorated with exquisite tropical plantings. Beautiful as it may have been, it posed some very real security problems. The entire estate was surrounded by a six-foot wall, which had an overgrowth of tropical vines reaching to the ground on the inside of the wall. One could have placed fifty would-be assassins in the recesses of the vines, and they would not have been seen. The entrances to the grounds were through two gates, one in the front and one in the rear. About 30 feet inside, both gates opened to face a large Banyan type of tree, each of which gracefully allowed its full branches to descend to ground level, thus practically providing an outdoor room under each tree.

Let me assure you that while we were impressed with the magnificence, we were not unaware of the possibilities of danger for which these trees could be used.

Upon arrival, we really took charge. A British navy captain was Sir Winston's main Aide at Marrakech, and he was at first my main contact. His name was Captain Thompson. He was a very pleasant man, but evidently had not been briefed on some of the fears that had caused our sudden move to Marrakech. I soon got his attention and informed him that the security that was to be provided by our forces would be very tight indeed, starting with a list from the British with the names of those people who were to be admitted within the gates, with a full description of each. I firmly

informed that if a name was not on the list, that person would not be admitted nor allowed to linger.

We established sentry posts at tea-yard intervals' under the overhang of vines from the wall. At the front and near gates, we placed 30-caliber machine guns covering each entrance. Furthermore, machine guns had been placed under the large overhanging trees described earlier. The actual sentries at the gates were covered by two other sentries, each armed with tommy gun. The only American military personnel in sight were the sentries at the gate. The reason for this was that after the sentries had been posted for the first time, they were seen easily, and Sir Winston and Capt. Thompson objected to seeing too many soldiers on duty. Typically, when the sentries were practically hidden, Capt. Thompson, not being able to see the guard, wanted to know if we were trying to get the "Old Man" killed by reducing the guard to nothing. And so it went.

One of the amusing moments in retrospect, but not amusing at the time, was the following incident. Each sentry at the gates had printed on adhesive tape the names of personnel to be allowed in in the gate. They also had a small flashlight, which would allow them to refer to and check the names. The instructions issued to them were to the effect that if a caller were stopped by a sentry and not admitted, then all the sentries were on alert, and weapons were trained on the caller and on the first sentry, if necessary. This alert included the machine guns located under trees and trained on the gate.

About 11:00 PM, cars drove up to the front gate with a party of people, including some military personnel in uniform, who were not English, American, or French. A tall officer dismounted from the first car and proceeded to the first sentry. The sentry naturally halted him and demanded identification. The General, as he turned out later to be, stated his name and informed the guard that in the second car was President Benes of Czechoslovakia, and that "the President was calling on the Prime Minister." The sentry had never heard of President Benes, and neither the name of the General nor of President Benes was on the list provided us by the British. The General became a little excited when informed he could not enter to inform the Prime Minister's staff that Benes was there. In his excitement he took two paces toward the sentry, who thereupon informed him that he really hoped the officer would not take one more step, because if he did, not only the officer but also the sentry would be shot immediately. I hope that you can imagine the flack the next morning, bright and early. The result of this story is that it never happened again, as the British knew we were not fooling.

Rather than bore you with all the details of the six weeks at Marrakech with the Prime Minister, there are "just-fc things, and then I will go on to other matters. Routine soon settled in, with tight security, with the main difficulties the visiting dignitaries. De Gaulle was an example, and when he visited Sir Winston, he suggested a ride down the broad avenue of Marrakech, with the snow-capped mountains of the Atlas range in the background. This was fine for General De Gaulle, but Sir Winston riding down those avenues in an open horse-drawn carriage sure sent the shivers down my back. We were close enough to the two VIP's to hear some of the conversation, and I must say that Churchill sure gave the "Grand Charlie" a hard time. It also seemed that the Old Man the P.M. seemed to enjoy giving us the evasive treatment by scooting put of the rear gate in a jeep, ten-gallon hat and all, heading for the Atlas Mountains to paint. There were many, many places where a sniper could have been very successful.

On the last Friday of his stay in Marrakech, Churchill gave a nice little cocktail party at Taylor Villa, to which" he invited me and a few others. This moment of pleasantry was made more pleasant by the presence of Lady Churchill and their daughter Mary. Sir Winston was to fly from Marrakech and then proceed to the U.K. by battleship. The airplane crew that flew his special plane was indeed a rare group. If I remember, the captain was an Englishman, the co-pilot an Irishman, the engineer, a Scotsman; and the navigator was a Welchman. They all had enjoyed heroic records in the. R.A.F., and it was typical of Sir Winston that he could have that type of men with him. The whole crew was at the cocktail party, and it was quite a party! They were serving in alcoholic French drink, called *eau de vie*, and frankly, was awful. Captain Thompson came up to me and asked me if I was enjoying myself. I responded by saying that the company was wonderful, but where in the hell did they get the liquor that they were foisting off on us? I then asked him to taste my drink, which he did, and from his face, he must have had quite a shock, I then queried him on what he was drinking. He said he was drinking Ballantynes Scotch and disappeared, but returned in a few minutes, with three fine bottles of scotch, I thereupon was surrounded by the complete crew of Sir Winston's airplane, and I assure you they were a real hearty lot, I loved them, and it was quite an evening. It was extremely late when retirement took place and with substantial understatement, I might say everyone was very happy indeed, aided by the Prime Minister and family's hospitality.

When the Prime Minister's party took off on the next

morning following the soiree, we arranged a provisional guard of honor lined up on the airstrip, as is customary. Sir Winston "trooped the line" with me and thanked us and was highly complimentary. The last communication I had with him bears repeating and was as follows: About two months prior to our mission to Marrakech, we had received the new six-wheeled armored cars, mounted with greatly-improved armament and vastly improved in mobility and speed. The British had a custom of giving our vehicles a name. For instance, they had given our [M3] light tank the name of the "Honey."



The 2d Squadron received its first M8 armored cars, which the British called the Greyhound, to replace its White scout cars. This one belongs to the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron—the reorganized 2d Squadron—in Italy.

Carrying out his complimentary inspection, Churchill said to me, upon passing one of the new armored car, "Col. Hodge, that is a new armored vehicle, is it not?"

I replied, "Yes, sir, and we have only had it a month."
He said, "Oh, yes. That's the Honey."

I replied by saying, "I am sorry, sir, but the official ordnance designation of this piece of equipment is the Six Wheeled Armored Car M-8. The new light tank is the one that the British have named the Honey."

Looking me right in the eye, with a twinkle in his eyes, he said, "Young man, we British are your best customers, and the customer is always right, so it's a Honey. Good luck and keep up the fine work."

That was the last time I came into contact with that wonderful man. There were many other happenings that I might expand on later, but at this point, with the departure of the Prime Minister safely from North Africa, our mission was accomplished. We sent the troops back to Douera, Algeria, on a slow march, with instructions to halt in the larger towns, to get as good a look as possible for their own education of some of the historic cities of the Mohammedan religion, such as Fez and others. The travel home was uneventful, and we were very appreciative that there had been no serious accidents during this tour. After being in Douera about two weeks, we were ordered to the Invasion Training Center at La Foret de la Stadia, on the beach at [Port Aux Poules]. Thus we were back in severe training, with our thoughts—as Mr. Churchill would say—on the soft underbelly of the Axis.

In all fairness, I must say that we received the highest of commendations from the British, and I am confident that they truly appreciated the efforts put out for their most important men.

In thinking of our duty in North Africa and upon our entering more training for future invasions, I believe it interesting to offer for the readers, the telling of some of our experiences, which stand out as individual happenings and are not particularly incidental to any planned tactics or strategy.

We had had as part of our mission, after the collapse of the German and the Italian armies in Tunisia, the training of, and the weapon and vehicle orientation of, the new French units and some of the old units, which were in the Algerian area. I might add that the professional French officer corps, for the most part, were of the finest caliber of men, and this group mainly represented the escapees from German-occupied France. Many had risked their lives to escape to North Africa to help build the new French Colonial Army. The patriotism of this corps of officers was, in reality, indivisible to their country France. It will be well remembered by those reading; from 1939-44, the debacle of Vichy France, with its play actors de Valle and the Vichy Admiral Darlan. Darlan was made the French commanding military chief of North Africa by Vichy, and was the one to order

complete resistance to the Allied landings in North Africa. I think that the reader can well understand the feelings of the corps of officers, escaping from France, toward the opportunists of Vichy. This group of officers were dedicated De Gaullists, as were many of the commanders on duty in North Africa who were patiently waiting for the opportunity to rid themselves of the traitors who were personified by Vichy and Darlan. It was true that the Allied command had agreed to allow Darlan to remain as military commander in North Africa, but no one really trusted this change-coat, including the French civilian nationals in North Africa. They were ninety percent De Gaullists, except for the ten percent who were profiting economically, from the German occupation in North Africa.

These conditions brought about some rather strange confrontations, and I am about to relate these to you. There were four regiments that I was particularly fond of in the colonial French Army: the Premier Spahis, the Troisieme Spahis, the Premier Souaves and the Cinquieme Chasseurs. All of these were old-line, proud French colonial regiments and were all commanded by friends of mine. As a matter of fact I had been made an honorary member of all of these regiments, which indeed was truly a complimentary honor. One morning, all four of these commanders dropped in on me for a call. I wondered what the purpose of this call was, as this was a great deal of rank calling together. I remember that it was about eleven a.m. Col. Hennoch started it off with pleasantries, and then explained what was on their mind. The rest of them quickly got into the conversation. Hennoch explained to me that they were all De Gaullists, anti-Vichy, and anti-Darlan. They said, "Charles, what we have to say to you is in no way to be considered by you as personal in any way." Believe me, it was no news to me that they were all strong De Gaullists, as I had information on them in my files. Col. Simon, a brilliant officer and, in my opinion, an outstanding man and human being, continued the conversation by saying that they knew that one of my missions was the security of Algiers itself, and that he hoped, if it came about, to be necessary for them to take or seize Algiers as the political feeling built up, I would understand that there were no personal feelings, nor any anti-American feelings, but that they were French officers, who dearly loved their country and might have to take steps that were necessary for the good of France.

I replied: "Gentlemen, I can well understand your love of country, but I must tell you, that it is not within my province even to comment on your remarks. I think that you know very well, we have been supplying you with new, modern equipment, including vehicles, and have aided you extensively in training your troops in the use of this equipment, so that you can once again have a military capability. We also have been providing you with the fuel necessary for your training, as well as the various ammunitions which were necessary for your weaponry training, I, of course, know how much fuel you have and how much ammunition you have on hand, pretty much down to the last round. I must say to you, having this knowledge of your capabilities, if you feel that you may have to take this action, go right ahead, and your units will be destroyed. I hope that all of you here are my

friends, but I am an American officer- and will act as one. There are no politics to be discussed here. I suggest that we go to my mess for luncheon and talk of other things. If you wish to continue any conversation along the political line, as an American officer, I shall have to ask you to leave."

Then I could not help but to add, "and Gentlemen, I am sure that as soldiers, you realize that there is nothing at all personal in this."

We went to lunch, and there was never any further conversation on the subject, on that day or on any other day. We remained friends, but nevertheless were understood.

I think that in all fairness I should dwell on the wonderful French family that I was billeted with in Douera. When we first went to Douera, the chief Gendarme, who was our guide in arranging the billeting for all of the units around the area, said that he had a perfect billet for me. We went to see it, and it turned out to be a villa owned by the then old-time movie actress, Francoise Rosee. It was a beautiful homeland one that was really that of a typical beautiful French chateau. It would have taken about four personnel to run it. We were not over there to participate in luxurious living. I took the Gendarme aside and explained to him that I did not want anything like that, but that I did want a single room for a billet, in a peasant family, with a good French family, not with the Nazi sympathizers. In other words, I did not want my throat cut some fine night. He placed me with a family by the name of Pithault. Pierre was a distillateur, peasant type. Madame Pithault was a wonderful French woman. They had a son, Pierre Jr., nicknamed Coco, a very nice young man. They also had a daughter who was married to Robert. They were just plain wonderful people. The house in which they lived was comfortable as those houses went, but far removed from modern conveniences. My bathing was accomplished in the barn via the barrel route. The water at times was heated on the wood-burning stove, but mostly it was just climbing into a barrel of very cold water. They were a close family, as most French families are, and they were wonderful to me. Madame Pithault was one of the really fine people whom I have met in my life. Pierre was a great guy too and a typical, hard-working, honest man. They were the epitome of gentility. They certainly took me in hand in French instruction, and I was able to brush up my college French to a considerable degree, even to a point where I could make speeches to the French military in French, which they loved.

I made some mistakes. I shall never forget that I was requested to speak to a group of French officers in French. I agreed, as I knew I could write it and have it gone over by some of my French friends, and then read it as perfect French. I had very little problem with the pronunciation. The talk was on technical subjects, such as weapons and tanks. Everything went just fine, except I had neglected to think of one important point: because I had read the speech precisely

correctly, the audience made the assumption that I really spoke French fluently. After I thought I successfully had concluded a brilliant move, or should I say that I thought I had gotten away with it, the audience started to ask questions directly related to some of the technical subject contained in the speech. I was in trouble at this point until one of my French officer friends who was fluently bilingual, got up, and with a great deal of humor, removed the embarrassment, confessing that we had taken a calculated risk, had failed to anticipate the question period, but would remain there exposed until all questions had been resolved. The French officers rolled off of their chairs laughing, and what could have been a rather awkward situation turned into a most congenial and warm wine party, with much joking and the feeling of comrades in arms

The next episode concerns our English cousins. The Eighth Army, which had fought all the way from Egypt, having evacuated from Europe through Syria to Egypt, were sent to training in our areas. Actually, they had evacuated from France in 1939, and this was 1943. Most of the personnel who remained alive had not been to England since those difficult days of '39. We were conducting a small-unit battle drill one day in our designated area, and the drill was what we called a live ammunition exercise. The training objective was to cross a 400-yard floor of a valley, to enter the wooded area on the other side of the valley floor. We had small arms targets in trees and one point of control, and were firing on the targets and moving to take the objective. My exec was with me observing the training, when much to my surprise I heard small arms fire snapping past me. When one hears it as often as a soldier does, one never forgets the sound. McGarry looked at me and made a humorous comment. He said, "Colonel, do you think someone wants our job?"

Then appeared from the other side of the valley, a typical British officer with a garrison cap on, shorts, and a cane with a white flag attached to it. He was waving the flag. We immediately gave the order to cease fire and moved down the hill to meet this surprise. Very calmly and respectfully, he said, "I say, sir, you are firing into us." Our reply was what you might expect, to the effect of what did he think that he was doing to us. It seems that the same maneuver ground for this type of training had been assigned to both of us. He then introduced himself and said that his name was Capt. Sheddin of the Yorkshire Dragoons, British Eighth Army. Immediately I inquired whether he was in any way related to Pop Sheddin of the British International Polo Team. He replied that Pop Sheddin was his father. At this point, a fine looking officer stepped out and introduced himself as Lt. Bruce Hobbs, also of the Yorkshire Dragoons. I said with a smile that they had been firing into the Essex Troop of New Jersey. They smiled, and Sheddin said he remembered his father talking about that unit when his father had spent some time playing polo in the States. We considered that the time was appropriate to adjourn to our little officers' club in Douera. Incidentally, this officers' club was an old adobe type hut which had been damaged severely, and which we had

rearranged a little bit by using a couple of light tanks to smooth things, out.

The name Bruce Hobbs struck a memory note in my brain. I suddenly turned to this attractive and fit looking officer and inquired of him if by any chance he was the Bruce Hobbs who had ridden the American Horse "Battleship" in the English Grand National Steeplechase and had won. He responded in the affirmative and from that time on we all got along very well. These British units were really the guts of the British Eighth Army, as were their companion units, the Twelfth Lancers and the Tenth Hussars, also having arrived in North Africa under the same circumstances as the Yorkshire Dragoons.

North Africa: Incidents

To attempt to record certain instances in the area of North Africa, these next incidents that will be related fall into a category of isolated incidences and are not connected in any way with other matters that have taken place in North Africa.

The first such incident goes back to July 4, 1943, when, at the railway station at Maison Carree, there was a brutal tragedy. There were two trains on the siding in the yards at Maison Carree, one train on number one siding track and one train on number three siding track. During the time these trains were parked on these tracks, each was carrying hundreds and hundreds of prisoners of war, back from Tunisia to Algeria, and many would be transshipped to other parts of the world such as Canada and the United States for imprisonment. While these two trains were stationary on one and three tracks, an ammunition train was pulled into the middle track, number two track. The ammunition train exploded, which was a major death-dealing tragedy, as you can imagine: two trainloads of human beings with an ammunition train in the middle blowing. It was disaster.

As you know, my headquarters was about 20 miles south of Algiers and about 25 miles from the railroad siding at Maison Carree. I heard the explosion, as everyone in a radius of 30 to 35 miles did, so that we knew that something major had happened. Within a minute, the telephone rang at my headquarters, and the word was given from Allied force headquarters in Algiers of a major disaster, to get down there and attend to survivors and to rescue as many from the holocaust as was possible. We had troops down there within 30 to 35 minutes, and the picture that was presented as a result of this explosion was fantastic in itself. There were burned bodies—human beings—all over the place, and I do not know to this day what the satire casualty rate was, but it was formidable.

I think it is worthy to note that while we were in the disaster area, we were joined by a British demolition unit. Their mission was to disarm the various live ammunition such as artillery shells, so that they could be moved with safety. The work of the rescue had to proceed during the period of attempting to disarm this heavy type of ammunition, so that I must say that it was a little bit hairy. However, work proceeded, and we eventually got the area under control and then began the roundup of the German and Italian prisoners of war.

I am going to insert another incident a little later in the experiences in Africa which will have to do with the mass surrender of Italian units and then later with the surrender of the German units of the Afrika Corp. However, at this point, it became apparent at Maison Carree that the feeling of the Italians for the Germans and the Germans for the Italians was one of deep hate. The Italians had, in effect, been ravaged by the "friendly invasion" of Italy by the German forces and in North Africa, after the two victories that they had in the beginning, it turned out that they really were not a formidable army. In addition to that, it is really my opinion that the Italians, at this point in the war, had no interest in fighting the Americans, I believe there were some good Italian units, but they were few and far between. The natural inclinations were toward the romances and music—the nicer things of life—and really not toward warriorship and savagery that is necessitated in time of war. Be that as it may, the Germans despised them and, in effect, at Maison Carree, would not drink from the same lister bag, a lister bag being a water bag holding approximately 50 gallons of water. The members of the Afrika Corps, which was a good German unit, just absolutely refused to drink out of that same bag the Italians were drinking from. There was very little to do about this except to get another lister bag, which we did.

There was no trouble rounding up the prisoners and securing them, as they all realized that this was the end of the road for them—that there was no place to go except to a prisoner of war camp—and, in effect, they behaved in a relatively well-disciplined manner and caused no real trouble. We were commended for our operation, and I believe the greatest feeling of accomplishment not only for me but for all of our personnel that were there was that we did save many human lives.

This incident is an attempt to describe the collapse of the Italian and the German armies, after the Battle of El Guettar and after the back of the German and Italian offensive was broken. The Allied air forces, at this point, had succeeded in attaining air superiority, which meant that

the receiving ports of Bonne, Philipville, and Tunis were under strong bombardment. The actual surrender by the Italians was unbelievably easy. They would come in and report by regiments, and we—and I mean the American forces—did not have the personnel to take care of them, nor the equipment, such as barbed wire, to fence them in. So what we did do was to get the senior officers in command of each surrendering unit and give them as much barbed wire as we could and told them to fence themselves in, which they did. Obviously, this was after they had been disarmed. The Italians did a good job of fencing themselves in.

On the other hand, the German forces were strictly a precise, exacting military group, and they would march up in orderly formation and surrender by battalions and by companies. They were under control at all times by their own officers and their discipline was exemplary. They received the same treatment as far as fencing themselves in as the Italians, but I believe a little more care was given to see that they were, in actuality, fenced in, and we did not leave them much room for a change of mind. There is no time that a prisoner of war, if he is a good soldier, is not thinking of escape and fleeing back to his own people.

Incident number three: North Africa

One of the most pleasurable sights that I observed in 1943 in North Africa was the passing of the Italian fleet just off Algiers, moving from east to west. They had surrendered. It was not without some pity, as the Italian Navy was a good navy. The Italians were excellent sailors, and the morale of the Italian fleet always had been high. Nevertheless, it was a good feeling, that such a milestone had been passed, when you saw that long line—practically the whole Italian navy—passing in review in defeat, in its last move in the act of war. I cannot help but look back with a source of satisfaction as this armada passed from battle into defeat and, in effect, eliminated the term, I believe forever, of "Mer Nostrum."

When the Allied forces invaded Sicily, the 117th Armored Cavalry, which was my unit, was supposed to go, but again there was not enough ship's bottoms, so we stayed in North Africa training. After the successful operation in Sicily by the Seventh Army, I received a call one day to report down to Algiers, which I did, and was told that there was going to be a mission in Sicily, and it was classified as top secret, but that we had to have a selected security guard to handle an important happening, and it could be an historic occurrence. This mission turned out to be the securing, guarding, and providing security, in Sicily, over the armistice, which was to be signed to cease the fighting

between the Allies and the Italian forces. A leak of information regarding such a mission would have been damaging indeed for a great many reasons, not the least of which would have been the treatment of the Italians by the German in Africa.

The French had many colonial troops, and one force was known as the Senegalese. The Senegalese were a tribe of black and large-bodied men. The French discipline applied to the Senegalese was very, very strict and sometimes very hard. These troops were human beings; on the other hand, they could be aroused to a point of danger, and the soldiers who knew of them would easily understand the term "Senegalese Fever." This emotion would get hold of them every once in awhile and removed all restriction on their emotions. The emotions of these blacks were revved up quite a bit by the intake of alcoholic drink. To add to this impetus of alcohol, it was well-known in Algeria, a wine-growing country, that the green wine made in Algeria, when not allowed to age, would almost set men crazy. When troops or a mob goes berserk, it is a horrifying sight, and it is a sight that defies the imagination in some cases. But the answer, unfortunately, is that it must be stopped immediately and ruthlessly. Otherwise, the veneer of us human beings would be peeled off quickly, leaving us nothing but the savage instincts of men of centuries ago. We had such an instance in Algiers, and, suffice to say, it was put down immediately. I personally blame completely the unusual intake of these Senegalese soldiers of this raw wine, which, in effect, did upset them. We were sorry, but it had to be done.

Before I leave this story of North Africa, I cannot help but to bring to your attention the beauty of the Algerian plain. In addition to its beauty, it is very fertile. A description of it would be a 35 to 45 mile indent into the escarped coast of Algiers, having a width of around 50 miles. In the background are the rugged and high Atlas mountains, a good many of which are really barren and uninhabitable. However, the plain of Algiers, moves from the foot of the mountains to the high ground near Douera, then gradually slopes in an undulating series of ridges to the sea. It was a sight. Many, many colored flowers, including millions of wild roses, gave one plenty of food for thought. You saw the beauty provided by nature and then looked again at who you were, why you were there and you had to think, certainly, of the vicissitudes of human beings and their seemingly unending engagement in warfare.

Incident number five: North Africa.

One of the difficulties in a unit our size was to gain the assignment of certain denominational chaplains. The most difficult to have assigned were the Catholic chaplain and the Jewish chaplain. Our unit, because I believed it should be, was a church-going unit. Each Sunday, when conditions permitted it, there would be a church parade through the little town of Douera, and those members attending the Protestant service would drop off at their church, and those members attending the Catholic service would drop off at their church. This effort of attending church served a dual purpose: in the first place, it

gave the personnel a quiet time to think of their homes and to meditate, not only on their homes, but also on what was in store for them, and a recognition of the different possibilities that might confront them. The other purpose was to give them an opportunity to look at themselves in their Sunday clothes, rather than in field fatigues. I have said before that this was a spit and polish unit, and it was, in all matters, including military salutations, the cleanest of weapons, and personal appearance. This instilled a pride in the unit, which is a tremendously favorable characteristic.

I had requested many times that we needed a Catholic chaplain, as we had the normal percentage of Catholics, and they missed their services. As you can well imagine, as we went into combat areas, the services were all said when it was possible to do so. Here in Douera, we normally had a training Sunday, and the opportunity was presented for church-going. The Allied force headquarters called me one day and said, "We have not got a chaplain for you, but we have a member of the Catholic clergy who will be glad to come out and provide his services as a Catholic chaplain, but he can get there only on Sundays." This was a good solution as far as I was concerned, and we welcomed him.

On the first Sunday that this priest appeared, I attended the Catholic services and, as most of you know, there was no breakfast by a Catholic priest until after the service. I stayed and wanted to thank him for his appearance at our services. I was puzzled, however, when I detected that underneath his vestments he had the normal clerical garb of a priest, and, at the same time, he had what was undoubtedly a little bit of a brogue, probably emanating from Brooklyn. When I had breakfast with him, I noticed he had a red border around his clerical vest and other typical appointments that assured him that he was a higher officer than the rank and file priest. He introduced himself as Monseignor Carroll.

Monseignor Carroll and I turned out to be the best of friends, and I believe a short synopsis of our relationship would be entertaining.

In areas such as Algiers at that time, one did not ask each other questions as to what he was doing and why. One might be asking questions that were out of order, and knowledgeable officers did not discuss this with a stranger. However, the friendship that built up between Monseignor Carroll and myself was, in my opinion, a great treasure for me. We had an ability to philosophize; we had an ability to speak of human beings and of the various human tangents; and he was, in my opinion, a really great Christian, and thought not only of Catholic personnel, but of all personnel. His ability to embrace the world with knowledge was really quite fantastic. He told me that he had requested to come to our unit because he understood we had had a lot of combat and were a real combat force, and that was where he wanted to say his services. This was a fortunate thing for us.

Monseignor Carroll called me one day and asked me to come down to have dinner with him at the officers' mess in Algiers. I accepted (with pleasure).

He said, "Charles, I'm leaving, and I want to say goodbye to you

and tell you what a strong friend you are to me."

I responded by saying, "Well, Monseignor, you yourself have been a fantastic, steadfast friend, not only to me, but also to our whole unit. They love you."

He said, "You have never asked me what I did, and I have never told you." But he said, "I am going to Rome tomorrow."

I responded by saying, "How in the world are you going to go to Rome, when it is owned, in effect, by the Germans?"

He said, "Well, I am the secretary of state for American affairs at the Vatican, and therefore I have what is called extraterritoriality rights and freedom of movement under the agreement."

"I want to tell you several things that you may or may not know, but I doubt if you do. I want you to believe it when you hear that there are atrocity camps run by the Germans. Believe me when I tell you it is true. You will hear of Shermeck, you will hear of Dachau." I had not heard of either of these.

He said, "Charles, it is true, unfortunately. I know; I am trying to do a lot of work to get some of these situations straightened out." He was working himself beyond reason for the Jewish people in Germany.

We went on to pleasant conversation, and finally in his parting words, he said, "I will see you in Rome in the spring."

This puzzled me a little, although I knew Italy would be one of our fighting areas. However, I just put it in the back of my mind.

We actually took Rome on June 4, 1944, and it was the mission of my unit to continue through Rome and keep in contact with the retreating enemy to the north. As a consequence of this mission, we passed right through Rome, over the Tiber and to the north side of the city, where I was going to set up my own headquarters with the various and required radio communications to other headquarters. We had just helped in the break out of Anzio and were, in effect, the first troops in Rome. Instead of garrisoning Rome and looking at the pretty Italian ladies and clean food, we continued our mission. As we stopped on the north side of Rome to set up our radios, a young Catholic priest came past my halftrack and said, "Do you know where Col. Hodge is?"

I guess I was pretty dirty looking, having been in reasonably severe combat for two months and I said, "I'm Col. Hodge."

This young man, who obviously was a student priest and American, said, "Monseignor Carroll says you're two days late, and he has hot-dogs and donuts ready for you and your staff right down the street."

I did not have the time to see Monseignor Carroll, but we went on and I did not hear until later that he had died. I am sure that his death was the result of the terrific work he had been doing, which cause his heart to fail.

Years later, Marie Lou and I came to Florida for holiday and attended a large party at Indian Creek Club

in Miami. One of the guests of prominent stature who was there was Archbishop Carroll, the Archbishop of Miami.

When I was introduced as General Hodge, he said, "You're not by any chance Gen. Charlie Hodge?"

And I said, "Yes, that's my name."

He said, "If you're the right one, I love you and our whole family loves you, because you were a dear friend of my brother Monseignor Carroll at the Vatican."

Well, I can tell you we had a very lovely time together. This was one of the pleasant meetings that recalled my friendship with Monseignor Carroll.

Transport to Italy

As I said in the last incident, we received our orders to embark at Oran for Italy in May, 1944. The initial landings in Italy were at Salerno, south of Naples. We initially were scheduled for that landing, and our mission would have been to attempt an end-run around Naples. However, the serious situation of the lack of ships again provided a delay to our move into Italy. That is why we departed from North Africa in May, instead of March or April. The materiel of our unit was sent on various freighter-type transports, accompanied with detachments from our unit, with the landing port to be Naples. The main body of the unit was embarked upon the British ship of the P & O line *Straithaird*. Inasmuch as we were the full unit aboard, I was the commanding officer of troops aboard, and I would like to say at this point, for those who are not familiar with the Army, that the senior combat officer, or as we call him Senior Officer of the Line, is in command. This means that a quartermaster or engineer is not considered in this particular rank or command.

When I received the troop list of the personnel to be shipped aboard this British lifter, it raised my eyebrows, because the following was typical of the troops to be shipped: 75 nurses; one battalion of the Goums (Les Goumiers); replacements for the infantry units fighting at that point in Italy; and about 100 wonderful youngsters who were fighter pilot replacements for the Air Force in Italy. The only unit under direct command was the 117th Armored Cavalry, and in the natural order of things, we had to control the ship from all angles, except the sea-going personnel of the P & O line and the British Navy.

The first trouble incident came about when I was shown to my quarters, which, incidentally, were magnificent compared to what I had been living in and with clean sheets, which was amazing. But, nevertheless, the incident came about when I asked my executive officer, Col. McGarry, to load the vessel with the appointed troops. He came back after about an hour of being away from the ship and said he had very serious difficulties, and this was because of the loading of the Goums. I think, as I mentioned before, the Goums were a magnificent fighting unit and always

were commanded by select regular French officers. McGarry said there was trouble in loading the Goums because they had women with them, and these women were not on the troop list.

I said, "Bob, if they're not on the troop list, they don't go, and that's it."

McGarry said, "Yes, Sir," and left for the dock.

About a half an hour later he came back and said, "Well, Colonel, if the women don't go with them, they don't load." I thereupon went down to the dock, talked with the French major in command of the battalion of the Goums, and said to him, "We have a rendezvous out in the Mediterranean in a very few hours, to join the convoy which will be escorted by navy and by air to Italy. I insist that you load your troops immediately."

The commanding major, with the typical French shrug of the shoulders, said, "Mon Colonel, ce n'est pas possible."

I demanded, "Why?"

He said the Goums, for many, many years, had had with them this type of woman, a woman who is not to be considered in the light of a pleasure for the soldiers, but in effect who are the cooks, the, tailors and the nurses. Actually they are some of the logistical support of this type of the Goum battalion.

He said, "I can assure you that if they cannot take these women with them, they will not load."

In the mean time, pressure was on me to get the troops aboard because of the rendezvous out in the Mediterranean. So I finally told the major that they could load the women, and we would assign them, to quarters. They did, and we never had one bit of trouble. They were meticulous, and it was a pleasure to have them aboard.

However, there was one incident which I shall never forget. The Goums are of the Mohammedan religion, and pork is, as the French say, "défendu"—but in English "forbidden"—in their religion. If I remember correctly, the first meal served aboard the good old *Straithaird* was pork, which was a standard type of menu for crowded troop ships. It only took the Goums about two minutes to realize they were having pork. I don't know how many mess kits went overboard at that time, but I can assure you there was not one Goum who ate the pork or one Goum who would eat out of the same mess kit which had contained pork. This was almost a humorous experience, but I think you can readily understand that to waste a whole meal of that much pork is a little bit devastating.

The trip from Oran to Naples, if I remember correctly, about eight to nine days, which is proceeding at a very slow rate indeed. However, again you can understand, the convoy could only move at the rate of the slowest ship, You could not leave a ship alone at that time in the Mediterranean, because

the German submarine service and the German air was very active.

Several other incidents happened which might be amusing, since they are the type that the normal civilian does not hear about, nor was there really any reason for a civilian to hear about them. However, these are the things which happen in the movement of men, or in the command of men, or in the association of men, which barely ever reach the public.

At my table in the dining salon, was my executive officer, my S-2 and S-3, which are the intelligence officer and the operations officer, and I might say the S-1, which is the personnel officer. In addition to this personnel, there was a retired British naval captain—a grand fellow. This was the custom of the British, that outside of the operating captain of the ship, there travelled with the troop a liaison British naval captain, each of them retired, to aid in whatever way they could in the transportation of troops. This captain was at our table. In addition to that, there was a quartermaster-colonel, who really had never heard a shot fired in anger and was, frankly, a difficult sort of a fellow, with a great consciousness of his rank, but who did not have any command.

As this voyage progressed, with the normal submarine and the normal air attacks, and, of course, with a very severe blackout discipline, the soldiers would crowd around the doors of the various dining salons and mess halls either to read or to write their letters to home. They would be lying around, stretched out on the floor to take advantage of the light emanating from these various rooms.

The quartermaster-colonel, in bold words one night at dinner, said, "I don't like the soldiers lying around outside this dining salon which we are using. I want you to know I object to it."

I think I did a very good job of holding my temper, because this remark was uncalled for, and he did not know at that time, but he was treading on thin ice.

The next incident, which caused me to be quite angered was the group of replacement fighter pilots. Now mind you, there was no alcohol aboard the ship. Maybe some of them sneaked a few bottles aboard, but alcohol was no one thing to be considered. But they were boys—sophomores, juniors or graduates of colleges—and a very clean-looking lot they were. A fine bunch of young Americans. The various tables would break out in song, mostly songs about their colleges or songs which they had picked up along the way into junior maturity. And I loved it.

However, when they did start to sing one song, this rather undesirable quartermaster-colonel threw his napkin down on the table and said, "I've had enough. I'm going to my quarters; I cannot stand this lack of discipline."

This was the straw that broke the camel's back with me,

and I said, "You have been a very difficult officer. You have no command. You have been obnoxious; conducted yourself as less than a gentleman. Stay seated, and I want to tell you something. And I want to remind you I am in command of the troops and you're one of them. I'm going to tell you what to do. You are going to your quarters, by my order. You are going to stay in your quarters, until such a time as I release you. And you will speak to me through my adjutant. Is that clear?"

He blushed and said, "I would like to discuss it with you."

And I said, "There is no discussion now. You go to your quarters immediately. I want to say this to you also, that those young men whom you have said are out of order and discipline are going into severe combat, which you will never see. You have made yourself the south end of a horse going north at this table, and you are dismissed."

He left, and when he did, the typical, old British austere naval captain who was sitting at our table, for the first time, broke into a great laugh, and said, "Colonel Hodge, I could see it coming. I knew what you were going to do to him. I have a little bottle of scotch, and let's go have a drink to it, because this man deserved it."

So everything was fine. We went ahead, with his lordship, the quartermaster-colonel, ensconced in his quarters by request.

I didn't dislike him; I just thought he was way out of place. But when he came to the deck rail at Naples, when the soldiers were all marching uphill full pack, he said, "I demand that I have a jeep come and get me and take me up to my quarters in Naples."

I said, "Come here, Colonel, I want to show you something. You see, there are four or five thousand men walking up that street with full packs, and that's the way you're going to do it. Now, go!"

And that's the last I heard of that man.

Another incident which was not too pleasant was that there were some French officers aboard, and they came to me one day and said, "Do you know that General De Gaulle's son, who is a sergeant, is aboard?"

And I said, "Yes, I do."

And they said, "We'd like to have him moved to the officer's sleeping quarters and mess. He may be a sergeant, but he deserves the right."

I replied by saying, "There's one way he can move to the officer's quarters and the officer's mess, and that is if you have the authority, to make him an officer. We probably have five hundred sergeants aboard, Americans, and whether his name is De Gaulle or it is Smith—and as long as he is a sergeant—he

will adhere to the transportation orders that have been issued."

We had quite a talk about that, so the end result was that he stayed where he belonged in the quarters that were provided for sergeants.

I hardly knew—in fact I would not recognize him if I saw him again—but this young man did insist upon coming in and strolling on the exercise deck with the nurses. I saw it one day, and I got to the senior French officer and left no doubt where Sgt. De Gaulle would exercise and live. The French officer actually agreed with me and told me later that I was one hundred percent right, and that he was sorry the incident had occurred. However, you do meet situations such as this, and I cannot imagine an American officer—a senior officer such as I was—providing special consideration for a foreign sergeant out of line with the way an American sergeant would be handled. If I am to be criticized for being small about it, so be it. That's the way it was.

I might say, having brought the nurses up at this time, that they were a wonderful lot of women. We never had a problem. And, as a matter of fact, while I'm on the subject, I think the American nurses, and I'm sure the nurses of other countries, were outstanding. Believe me, there were no people who served in combat zones who were treated and loved as much as those wonderful women. They gave of themselves, completely in their line of duty; working till they dropped, in combat areas. I don't think that in the history that I've read that enough credit has been given to that particular class of military personnel. When I say they were admired, they were loved by every soldier and by every officer who knew what they were doing, which was being a nurse, a mother, and a grief-stricken woman.