

The call had been sounded from every town and city of dear old America and every patriotic son rushed to enlist. The sorrows caused by the breaking of those home ties can never wholly be wiped away until the overwhelming joy of their reunion is experienced once more.

From Recruiting stations we were rushed to Fort Slocum the nearest mobilization point for our district and it was there we tasted our first bit of Army life. Being thrown in with total strangers and every type of human being that only America can produce we at first of course experienced all the pangs of homesickness and loneliness, but youth knows no such feeling for any length of time so we got acquainted.

On being assigned to a barracks we were formed into the Fourth Recruit Company, and verily no truer words were ever spoken than that word 'Recruit'. Some of us seemed to be of the impression that we were about to embark on some pleasant excursion and consequently we had blossomed forth in our best, and others knowing full well that Uncle Sam would take care of them in good time came in their worst. Even at that early stage of the game, trousers lacked their customary seats and coats and shirts were minus elbows.

As time wore on however we all gradually assumed a devil may care attitude and lived in today only letting tomorrow take care of itself. As we found out later on more things happened in one day than we could very well take care of anyway.

Our first Reveille was a gruesome affair to most of us, five o'clock being more like the time we were in the habit of returning home rather than just getting up. At last we weathered the innumerable examinations, jabs in the arms, vaccinations and last but not least the scathing tongues of the Sergeants who never lost an opportunity to impress upon us how absolutely hopeless and ignorant we were.

On August 1st, 1917 we were sworn in following which we were marched out to get our uniforms. Oh, what visions of natty military uniforms we conjured up in our minds and how soon they ^{were} dispelled. 'Size 8½ EE shoes, size 6½ hat, "Here 'em away," bawls a sergeant, and that comprised our uniform. Shoes too big and hat too small never mind your in the Army now.

In that semi-military, semi-civilian attire we started for Kelly Field, Texas, on the outskirts of South San Antonio where Aero Squadrons receive their training. Our first bit of excitement came sooner than we expected.

On embarking from Fort Slocum we were loaded into a sight seeing barge in which church picnics were wont to hold forth in all their glory but now dedicated to a more serious calling. Soldiers were loaded on until it seemed that another soul would surely sink her but at last the tug whistled and we started. Every ^{thing} proceeded peacefully until we rounded the bend ^{and} started up the North River where we encountered a stiff current. While our tug was manouevring to dock us the hawser parted and being entirely at the mercy of the current we gallantly started [a trifle sooner than the authorities had planned], on our way to France. Disdainfully disregarding all traffic rules of the North River. Another tug however with a large coal barge on either side of her intercepted our mad rush to the battle fields and allowing us to nose gently

into her bow held us there until our own tug made fast once more. After that everything went smoothly and we were soon entrained on Pullman cars and speeding on our way to the Sunny South.

That trip south with its continuous unfolding of new and strange scenes will always remain in our minds as one of the most interesting chapters of our army life. At Huntington, W. Va., and at Memphis, Tenn we allowed to get off the train and stretch our weary legs and incidentally march through the towns and display our ignorance of Military drill. For three days and nights we journeyed south and late in the afternoon of the fourth day, August 11th, 1917 we pulled into Kelly Field. It was dark before we were marched to our camp and upon our arrival at what was to be our Company street we were issued a blanket and an Army cot. Our first real savage encounter was with these same cots and many were the cries of despair and anger before they were assembled and made to stand on its six legs.

On August 12th we were organized into the 69th Aero Construction Squadron and from that date on if anyone dared to call us rookies his death was sure. For the following few days we did nothing but drill and received the last ever hated jabs in the arm. It was not long however before we received an all important gift from Uncle Sam -- namely a fatigue suit. After the issuance of these fatigue clothes we began to get our first suspicions that we not to be flyers but rather merely ground hogs and sad as it is to relate our suspicions were well founded for many were the days when the fighting 69th marched forth with picks and shovels and waged war on Texas soil.

Our soldierly abilities were soon recognized and we were detailed to take up our first Guard duty. We came very near losing our reputations as veterans on that first guard mount but we soon learned the manual of arms, General Orders and also that it was perfectly legitimate for the Officer of the Day to be out inspecting the Guard at night.

Up to this time we had several different men in charge of our outfit, mainly Sergeants who had passed required examinations and were waiting for their commissions. Later we moved into the Barracks from the tents and there we had our first real Commanding Officer. On September 19th, 1917 Lt. Thomas H. Jarrell took over the command. Everything went along smoothly for us then for some time, our duties being divided between guard duty, drill and the inevitable pick and shovel work. Drill probably played the most important part at that time and we did so many Squads east and west that we got to thinking these formations in our sleep.

On October 27th, 1917, Lt. Jarrell was relieved of the command and Capt. George W. Price, took over the Squadron. Capt Price was an old regular army man having seen service in the Phillipines and things began to happen to us from the day he took us in tow. We were relieved of the tiresome guard duty and took up the work for which we had been organized. This was straight construction work and many are the buildings at Kelly Field that our outfit had a hand in putting up. If you were to visit Kelly Field today the first thing that would strike your eye would be the beautiful arch over the entrance/fields #1, 2 and 3. This was built by the 481st, and as you progressed further you would see innumerable bath houses, fire sheds, latrines, machine shops etc. many of which were constructed by us. The task of enlarging Post Headquarters also fell to our Boys and instead of the small barracks-like building that served as Post Headquarters formerly

you would now see a much larger and more elaborate building with wings and corridors off which little individual offices led for the accomodation of the executive Officers of the fields. Further down the road you would come to the Y.M.C.A. in back of which there stands a large Post Exchange which was constructed by the boys of the Squadron.

It was in the month of October that we lost part of our personnell. The Balloon companies were in need of good heavy men at that time and several of our boys volunteered for this service and were accepted. Our Sergeant-Major also left us having been admitted to the ground Officers training school. He won his commission and today is Commanding Officer of a Squadron of his own now serving in the A.E.F.

On December 22, 1917 Capt Price was ordered to Morrison, Va., to supervise the construction of that field and low indeed were our spirits when we heard the news. Under him we had done remarkably well, both in military experience and construction work so that it was with heavy hearts that we saw him take his leave.

On Christmas day the Squadron was formerly turned over to our new Commanding Officer Lt. G. J. Carlson, and we all celebrated in the Mess Hall with one of the best banquets that a man could wish for with all the fixings including after dinner speeches and cigars.

Up to this time we had had several officers attached to us for duty but as things were far from settled they came and went as the need for them elsewhere became apparent. These Officers were: Lt. James J. Fitzgerald, Lt. L. W. Suckart, Lt. Nicholas Mitchell, Lt. W. D. Baker and Lt. J. L. Nix, all attached, for construction work but later transferred to other organizations.

On January 12th, 1918, Lt. William E. Kapp, was assigned as Construction Officer and Lt. A. G. Byrd as Medical Officer on January 19th, 1918. Soon after the assignmend of these officers we were moved out of the barracks and back into the tents again where we were put into quarantine preparatory to leaving the field for overseas service. Activities for the next few days for us could easily be summed up in the one word: EXAMINATIONS.

We had lost considerable men by transfer and consequently we had to bring the command up to strength of 150 men before we could leave. This was done by transferring some thirty odd recruits from the Recruit camp and maybe we didn't hustle some to get these fellows outfitted so that we might get away. Finally the order came to pack and on January 27th, 1918 we marched to the train behind the Post Military Band and started for Morrison, Va.

The trip North was an hilarious one as every fellow was in high spirits. We stopped at towns and cities along the way to stretch our legs and on these occasions we made a much more creditable showing than we did on our way South some five months before. Everywhere along the route we were received with joy. Arriving at Morrison, Va on February 1st, 1918 our spirits took a drop along with the temperature for the most dismal sight one could imagine met our eyes. Coming from the land of the Sunny South we were suddenly dropped down into a marsh or swamp for really that was all Morrison was at that time.

Mud, mud everywhere, combined with an icy wind and snow flurries thrown in for good measure. Search as we might we could find no Morrison and later we ~~later~~ learned that the only Morrison that existed was the Station and a store and that we were expected to build a town there for Uncle Sam and call it Morrison.

After being assigned to barracks which were the most comfortable that we had yet occupied, ^{that} being the only redeeming feature about the entire camp, we dug in. Dig in is the only term to use for our work while at Morrison consisted mainly of digging stumps and grading roads. The Boys however soon became acclimated and our spirits soon took a rebound and we were once more the happy lot that had not long before been sporting around San Antonio in our kahki suits in the Sunny South. One distinctive mark which we left behind us when we left Morrison was the Bugler's tower which is located near Post Headquarters and commands a view of the entire camp.

At last orders were received to place requisitions for equipment to bring our supplies up to requirements for overseas service. The work of equipping was long and tiresome and many were the requisitions placed that were never filled. The Supply Sergeant was the King pin in those days and woe be unto the man that crossed his path while he was in the midst of packing. Some of the methods we used in obtaining lumber for our boxes might reflect on our characters so we will let those little incidents remain untold. All of our boxes were painted with a distinctive marking to facilitate the unloading on the other side and this idea later proved a valuable asset.

At Morrison our Officer personnel was increased by the addition of Lt. Ewing H. Miller and Lt. Kitchell M. Boorman who were assigned as Construction Officers on February 11th and 14th respectively.

It was at this camp also that we lost our beloved title of the fighting 69th and from then on we were to be known only as the 481st. Aero Construction Squadron. We also lost a few men by transfer but filled up again to strength with recruits and on March 4th we entrained for Newport News where our transport awaited us. After embarking and being assigned to bunks we all went up on deck to watch the loading of our supplies. They were piled on the dock in mountains and it certainly was wonderful that they could all be stowed away in the hold. We spent the first ^{night} tied to the dock but early the next morning we were towed out into the harbor proper and started North.

A few of the weaker spirits were seasick on that first leg of the journey but most of us weathered the short trip in true sailor fashion. Our transport was the MADAWASKA, a German ship formerly but now American and manned by American sailors. Abandon ship drill was started as soon as we were settled on board and it was surprising the short time it took to get all hands to the rails ready to go over into the life boats and onto the rafts. On March 6th we steamed up New York Harbor and anchored just off Staten Island. Many of our Fellows came from New York City and it was with difficulty that they were restrained from jumping overboard and swimming home. No shore leaves were granted. We were soon joined by the transports MERCURY, TENEDORES, and MONGOLIA and they also were laden down with troops and supplies like ourselves.

On March 7th, 1918 at 6:00 P.M. The Cruiser North Carolina, which was to be our convoy across headed out to sea and we followed in her wake. On our way out we passed a whole string of War ships at anchor and were given a rousing send off by the jackies on board while the bands played and colors waved.

And now we settled down to the real voyage. Strict orders were given out in regard to smoking after sundown and guards had instructions to shoot first and ask questions afterwards if anyone were caught striking a light at night. Printed instructions were issued to each man pertaining to life belts, boat drills and the pleasant piece of information that if anyone should be foolish enough to fall overboard while we were in the War Zone that the ship could not be expected to put about and pick him up. All of these orders were of course for the best and needless to say they were carried out explicitly.

Our Quarters were steerage and we happened to be situated about midships where as some brilliant individual told us the submarines always aimed for. We were all somewhat worried at first but after being out a day or two we found that submarines were the least of our troubles.

The sea started to kick up a fuss and Oh' what a sensation. Many of us sought the open decks for air and many were the times when we no sooner reached them than we heard the ships' bugler piping 'All hands to Quarters for boat drill'. It was while the boys were compelled to stay in that stuffy hold that many a man's face gradually lost its color and he was seen to make a dive for the nearest can, but can or nor can he made the dive anyway and let 'er go.

Lookout and guard duty were part of our duties while on board ship but most of the time we loafed luxuriously on the open decks. A crowd of colored troops were also on board with us and they furnished considerable enjoyment for the rest of us with their boxing bouts and funny remarks while they were sea-sick. One was heard to say) while he was feeding the fishes) that he hadn't heard the recruiting Sergeant say anything about so much water when he told him to sign here.

The formation of our transports was changed many times and it was not an uncommon thing to wake up, in the morning and find ourselves headed back for New York. But even with all this dodging around we made good time and the days passed pleasantly. March 14th, was probable the roughest day we had but for those who had retained their sea legs it was a pretty sight to watch the other ships pitch and toss through the waves.

On March 16th we entered the War Zone and from then on we slept in our clothes all the time with our life belts for our pillows. Needless to, say our life belts were never very far from us since the day we stepped on board. On March 18th our convey arrived. They were beautiful little boats with high bows and highly camouflaged sides. They were very speedy and kept up a continuous circling around the Transports. On March 19th we had our first submarine scare. It was in the middle of abandon ship drill that the excitement started and most of our outfit were lined up on the side nearest the scene of activity. The Mercury was almost directly opposite us and suddenly she veered sharply to one side in a wide curve.

Immediately the destroyers rushed to her rescue and dropped several depth bombs which caused the water to rise in great spouts. The submarine failed to put in an appearance however nor did it launch its torpedo, or at least we never saw it and after the destroyers circled the spot several times watching for a glimpse of her they joined us once more and we proceeded on our way.

On March 20th we sighted Belle Isle off St. Nazaire and maybe we weren't a relieved bunch when that old land grew larger and larger to our visions. Passing Belle Isle we sailed up the harbor to St. Nazaire. On March 21st, we passed through the locks to the piers and disembarked. From the docks we were marched through the town to a rest camp a few miles away. Whoever named that place a rest camp made an awful mistake for it was there we were first introduced to the double deck bunks with nothing but slats to rest our weary backs on. Some may have slept well that first night but the next morning there were none who did not have long red marks down their backs from the cruel slats.

Our stay here however was very short for we left on the 22nd bound for no one knew where. We traveled 1st, 2nd and 3rd class and fed extravagantly on corn willy and jam. On March 26th we were piled off at a station with the peculiar name of Romorantin over the door. From the station we marched about three miles to the camp which was to be known as Air Service Production Centre #2. On our arrival there we threw our packs and after a hasty dinner we pitched in and helped complete our future home which was then about half finished. The job was finished late in the afternoon and we moved in.

This camp was destined to be the scene of our activities for the duration of the war. We were all dissatisfied that we were not going closer to the Front and we lived in hopes from day to day that we might sometime move up near the lines and have a share in the big work.

Air Service Production Centre #2 was to be the source of supply for the various Air Depots at the front furnishing them with planes, spare parts etc. It was also destined to be the assembly point for Liberty Planes from the States. Here they were to be unloaded, tested and put in condition for active duty on the lines.

During our stay here we were engaged in every kind of construction work imaginable. Some of our men were detailed to special duty in their various trades as blacksmiths, teamsters, plumbers, chauffeurs and clerks at the different plants and warehouse around the Post, but most of us went out on straight construction work. Our men played a big part in making the flying field the beautiful rolling stretch of land it is to-day. When we first arrived there was nothing but woods, puddles of water, swamp land and even houses were on the tract of land that was to be the Flying Field. After the woods had been cleared, great net works of ditches were dug and the water drained off. It seems a little undertaking when put down on paper but to perform the real work is a different matter. In addition to our work on the flying field our boys helped to construct large aeroplane hangars, warehouses, balloon hangars and innumerable barracks. Some of the structures were of steel and some were of wood but it mattered little to us what they were made of and buildings continued to go up with surprising rapidity. Another big undertaking was the supplying of this camp with water and the plumbers surely proved their worth in this job. There was plenty of work for everybody and after putting in a ten hour day at hard labor under conditions none to favorable we were always ready to hit the hay long before taps sounded.

Details of all the various forms of construction would make a somewhat lengthy history in itself so we will confine this short article to the nature of the work done by this organization.

As time wore on and still we did not move from the field we gained the distinction of being old reliables and mainstays of the camp having been here almost since its very start. Many were the outfits that came and went but we were always on hand to build and build until the signing of the Armistice stopped all operations.

We were unfortunate enough to lose three of our Officers during our stay here, Lt. A.G. Byrd the Medical officer having been transferred to the 56th Division Engineers, Searchlight Section, Lt. Ewing H. Miller leaving to take a course fitting him for an observer and Lt. K.M. Boorman joining forces with the Engineers of the Second Army.

Several of our Boys won commissions and others were transferred into other branches so that our ranks at this time are rather sadly depleted.

Taking all in all we have not had a very glorious history but we have done that to which we have been assigned and our work has been good in the eyes of the authorities so we can safely lay back now and view the result, content with the thought that we have fulfilled the purpose of our organization to the best of our abilities.