

The following is taken from a letter written to his mother, from France, by a young doctor in the R.A.M.C.

LIFE isn't too bad in spite of the intense cold, but I feel an older and wiser man since last I wrote. We occupied a village a while back, a nightmare village of sorrow and destruction, and I think we saw for the first time the full significance and horror of this war. The Germans had pulled out and we entered unopposed. Practically every house was a complete ruin and absolutely uninhabitable by normal standards; the only civilians we saw were mal-nourished and red-faced with weeping; the only sounds distant gunfire and the local crying of women. Clean fresh snow, bright sunshine, a clear blue sky and the exhilaration of a day's march through lovely country could do nothing to stop life being anything but foul. I don't think I've ever been so completely depressed as I was in that village.

ALMOST before I had got my post set up in what had been a grocer's shop, it was discovered that I was a doctor, and messages were coming in from civilians who looked to a doctor as someone who could help. And that was the worst part about it; I was numb and felt useless, completely and loathesomely selfish I suppose, and just longed to escape and get away from it all. That night I spent examining week-old wounds, foul and septic and untreated, examining them in dirty cellars amongst crowds of miserable people by the light of poor quality candles, or rather, I should say, candle, probably the last in the house. But the wounds were easy enough; I could dress them and get them away to a surgeon. My real problems were the sick; problems which in normal circumstances would be quite simple, and problems which at the time I thought I couldn't solve—and didn't want to; I wanted to escape. How vital it is to be optimistic in this world, how vital not to be too sensitive. Had I not "just hoped for the best," I don't think I could have got over the difficulties as well as I did.

ONE of my cases was a month-old baby; it was obviously ill, had a nasty cough, and was feverish. I realised straight away that I knew absolutely nothing about sick kids and only wanted to ask another doctor. But, of course, there weren't any. Well, I didn't think it had pneumonia, bronchitis or gastro-enteritis, but I found that it was being rubbed with dirty raw lard (a local cure-all apparently) and had got a rash from that. I discovered that 19 adults lived in the same filthy cellar the size of our dressing room and that the window only let in air because one pane was broken. With ridiculous assurance I told the mother there was nothing to worry about, to give the baby a warm bath, to apply no more lard, to clear out the other adults as much as possible, and to have the baby near the window. Oh, yes, I also simplified the diet. And went my way wondering if the kid would die in the night, and, feeling as useless as ever I've felt, I prayed hard that night. I didn't go to see the baby next morning, but by five o'clock I had plucked up

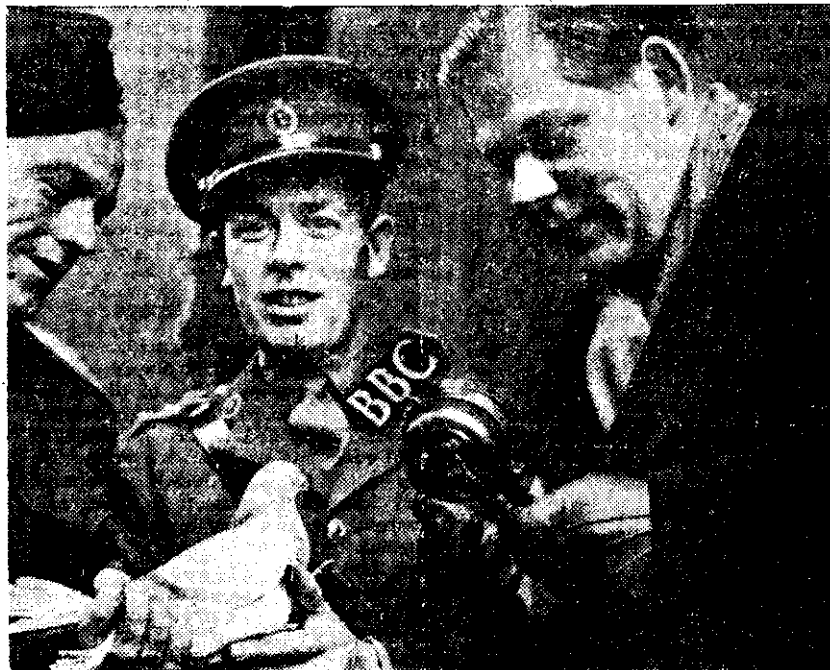
## Contrasts of War

WAR is misery, brutality, filth, lunacy. It is also heroism, selflessness, brotherhood, nobility. The two sketches given here present both its realism and its romance, and each would be false without the other.

enough courage. Isn't this a good tale? It lay on my knee and gurgled happily as I tickled its chin—as healthy a baby as ever I've seen in my life!

BUT I haven't told you the background to the tragedy of that village. On Christmas Eve the Germans had marched off all the young active men of the district and most of the young attractive women, the former for German labour camps, the latter for the brothels with which the Germans try to keep their labour camps happy and contented. Lord knows that was bad enough, but in that district the Maquis had shot up a Gestapo car in the summer and killed an S.S. General, so there were additional reprisals. Part of the village was pillaged completely, then burned down and put out of bounds to civilians. At Christmas there was a German celebration of the event on the looted wine and good things stolen. It wasn't until the Germans had been driven out that the villagers explored their ruined homes; in one cafe they found the bodies of 34 of their young men, battered and bruised and then shot through the head and left to freeze where they fell. And that was how we and the villagers found them. One man had escaped and hid up till the German departure. He told the eye-witness tale; one S.S. officer had shot the lot in cold blood one after the other. It must have taken a good half-hour.

ISN'T it incredible? I never believed those atrocity tales, I dismissed them as mere propaganda, but there it was in real life for us all to see, and it made us realise just why and against what we were fighting. Every shattered home I visited had one or more close relatives killed. Many of my patients had lost everything and everybody they loved, and they were stunned, they only wished to die. Others had fevers from starvation, many were the old folk with swollen ulcerated legs, they had not been to bed for three weeks, and their hearts were no longer up to maintaining full circulation in their dependent limbs. Everything had been stolen, the simplest household remedy was missing; it was no earthly good prescribing anything which I couldn't supply myself. Then, of course, there were serious illnesses as well, pneumonia, rheumatic fever, and others. One little girl was covered with septic sores, her little fingers were all stuck together with pus, and she wept with pain on the slightest touch. I prescribed the treatment, but it was too difficult for her mother, and one of my great tough parachutist orderlies took her in hand and I left him to it. When I returned she was sitting on his knee, he had won her with chocolate and they were giggling with fun as he bathed each finger, and dressed each one with a gentleness only found in the strongest men. After a few days, and it took a good hour each day, every sore was healed and dry.



From Arnhem to England: This is the Royal Signals pigeon William of Orange interviewed by the BBC after his record flight with a message from Arnhem Bridgehead to England in two hours twenty-five minutes. With others in the Royal Signals flight he has made parachute descents over enemy-occupied country to fly messages back to England

By Hilary St. George Saunders, author of "The Battle of Britain."

THERE is a story of the evacuation of Crete which still remains to be told. It does not fit into the main picture of the organised embarkation, for the men concerned were few in number and they organised their own escape. Their story is a small but memorable incident in the history of the Royal Marines.

The Royal Marine battalion that had formed part of the rearguard fought to the last, knowing how slender were their chances of rescue. They are said to have "conducted themselves in a manner worthy of the highest traditions of the Corps." Now the traditions of the Corps include episodes like the taking of Belle Isle, Gallipoli, Beaumont Hamel, and Zeebrugge. There is no longer any room on their colours for their battle honours, so they wear a globe instead and the word "Gibraltar." Lord St. Vincent, probably the strictest disciplinarian the Navy has ever known, and not given to flummery, once said of them that in the country's hour of real danger they would be found its sheet anchor. Before dismissing their achievements with a phrase whose radiance is a little dulled with usage, it is well to remember these things.

EVENTUALLY reaching the beach at Sfakia too late for the last lift, the battalion was disbanded by Major R. Garrett, Royal Marines, on 31st May, by order of the Senior Army Officer ashore.

Major Garrett, having carried out his instructions, then made it known that he would never allow himself to be taken prisoner, that he intended to find a boat and make his way to Africa. Having made his purpose plain to his famished and exhausted men, he set off in search of a boat, and in the bay found the landing craft abandoned by Lieutenant McDowell, R.N.V.R. Swimming off to her he found a wire foul of the port screw and the engines incapacitated. She had, however, some provisions on board and appeared to be seaworthy.

Major Garrett then went in search of an engineer. In the ruins of the bombed village he found one J. Lester, a lance-corporal of the 2/7 Australian Battalion, who had been a mechanic in civil life and was still game for anything. On their way off to the lighter they were joined by another Australian, Lieutenant K. R. Walker, and between them they got life into the engine, and finally warped the lighter inshore. Major Garrett then called for volunteers to join him on this desperate venture. It was the last rally of the Royal Marines in Crete. To his stout-hearted "Who goes home?" five officers and 134 other ranks responded. They included Royal Marines, Australians, New Zealanders and men from the Commandos landed by the Abdiel on 24th and 26th May. They collected all the petrol, water containers, and rations they could lay their hands on, and at 9 a.m. on June 1 they cast off; there was a light mist drifting in from seaward and under cover of this they