

leave from Albania, whom we sometimes met surrounded by their fellow-countrymen in the village streets, there was an atmosphere of peace. There was no threat of death, but in the bursting buds, the birds, and all the myriad joyous signs of spring was a promise of life.

Quite suddenly everything changed. One evening in April—I had just celebrated my twenty-first birthday—a silent, grave little group round a wireless in a camouflaged dug-out tent, we heard the news of Germany's attack on Greece and Yugoslavia. The time had come. Soon we would be in action. And shortly the frontier guns began to sound the prelude to battle, their thunder coming to us like the roll of distant drums, jarring the earth.

Events moved with lightening speed. Came the news of murderous Nazi barbarity in Belgrade. Our busy town began to empty of civilians, and then one evening came the order that we, too, were to move back to the main line of defence. Next morning found us in our new position, erecting tents at 1 a.m. in pitch blackness and drizzling rain, shivering with the cold.

Daylight revealed a valley surrounded by high snow-topped hills in the shadow of Mount Olympus. A dreary drizzle of steady rain fell from low threatening clouds. It was not at first a pleasing outlook, but in this spot we settled down for a while and found many compensations. In spite of one or two floodings we were soon comfortably housed in tents and ready for action.

We were something like 4,000 ft. up, and at times the cold was bitter, while morning and evening all-enveloping clouds of mist came rolling down from the heights above the snow-line. At first there was a good deal of rain, and we were at times struggling through mud. In fact, it was necessary to build a road, and the "navvy nurses," as we had come to regard ourselves, set to work with great vigour. Over half a mile of passable roadway was completed in short order.

At the beginning of Easter it began to snow, and one morning we awoke to find the whole earth buried under about 4 in. of whiteness. The cold was such that the men hit upon the idea of making

braziers from empty benzine-tins, and placing these inside their tents. Results were excellent, though the tents soon became filled with smoke. We began to do some of our own cooking, and some evenings could sit round the cheery brazier gossiping, making toast, or frying eggs and chips bought from the peasants.

Easter Sunday was a notable day, for we attended a special service held by our Padre while we stood amid the snow, grouped round the stones of what had once been a type of corral in which goats were milked. It was Easter, and from near at hand came the thunder of our guns hammering the advancing enemy. Easter, and the hills rolled back the echoes from a hail of fire. That night we had our first experience of the front line, our first stretcher parties going forward.

Other units had been in action for some days, we learned, and on all sides there were encouraging reports of their splendid work. We felt that, whatever might happen, we too would do our job well. And from official reports it seems we did. However, that's not for me to discuss, but I may be permitted to tell of one or two of the incidents which befell us.

The turn of the party in which I had a place did not come till later, and the intervening time will be long remembered. One day, a beautifully fine one, at a time when the guns were silent, I was resting outside our tent. There was a flat grassy patch below a tree-covered slope. Bees were droning lazily among the many wild flowers, while the tinkling music of a mountain stream in a rocky bed sounded a pleasant symphony. On the slopes of the opposite hill a bearded ancient was ploughing. Everywhere was peace.

Awakening was rude. A distant hum grew swiftly to a droning scream, a sound like the vicious voices of countless angry bees multiplied until it filled the air with menace. An air armada—there must have been over a hundred planes—was passing above and beyond us. They were mere black shapes to us, but soon after they had vanished behind the hills came the crash of bombs. When the first wounded began to arrive they brought with them many a story of high courage and work well done. Jerry was getting hell, they