



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

An Alexandrian in France at the end of the Great War

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Image: Embarkation Order for Anna Lewis Jones at the end of her tour in 1919. Alexandria Library, Special Collections.

An Alexandrian who had a unique experience was Anne Lewis Jones, who was sent to Toul, near the front lines at the time of the Armistice, as a nurse for the American Red Cross. In her “Remembrances of the War,” written after her return to Alexandria, Jones relates the experience of caring for newly released prisoners of war, many of whom had been either malnourished, mistreated or had injuries treated unsanitarily.

In letters to her mother and her aunts, Jones described traveling in France right after the end of the war. She went to Verdun, which caused her to write about the devastation on the French environment caused by the war. The hill, which Verdun was built on, had once been forested, but the war had destroyed the trees, and instead of trees, shell holes and holes pock-marked the hill.

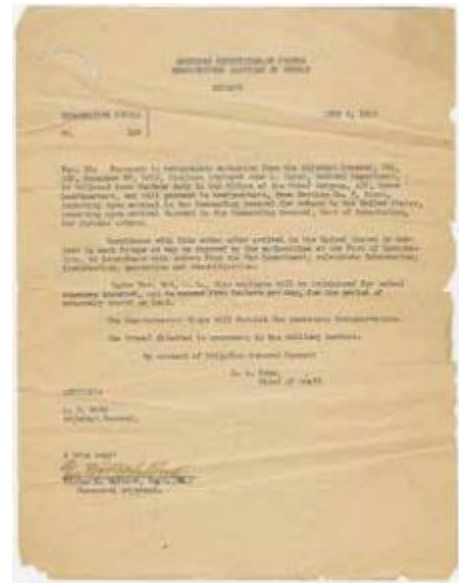
Another letter discussed the lack of women and children in the towns that she visited.

Jones also related lighter experiences from her travels.

One of her letters described her visit to Metz, which had been a German city since the Franco-Prussian War in the 1870s. In

other letters, she comments, “We at home have no idea what war ... is.” Jones had a special fondness for her one Christmas in France, in 1918. She remembered:

“US Army Base Hospital 45 in Toul and Colonel Stuart McGuire, in command, determined that we were to ‘pull off’ a real Christmas, and we did. We had about 85 wards, averaging 24 or 25 patients to a ward. ... The buildings were huge stone French military casernes, were in peace times live about 40,000 troops to garrison Lorraine. ... During the war and up to about the middle of December we had acted entirely as evacuating hospitals, rarely keeping our patients more than a few days. It was a problem at first for the nurses to arouse in the patients the spirit of Xmas. To shake off their lethargy, to get them interested in making the decorations for their ward. To make them understand that the Colonel was giving a prize for the prettiest ward and that they themselves must make the ornaments, trim their own tree, have it different, in fact have it the prettiest. We sent to Nancy and to Paris and got together plenty of tinsel, colored paper, paste, scissors (surgical to be sure, but they cut) and soon the spirit of the American boys caught them and the whole hospital buzzed with excitement. The boys able to be up would crowd around the bed of a less fortunate one, drawing, designing, planning with mathematical precision just what color and scheme of decoration was to be used, all of which was a deep secret.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

"Then there were the socks, soft hand-knit woolen sox, knit by the legion of Red Cross workers, wives, and mothers and sisters at home. Each boy got a pair and we filled them, fruit and candy and cigarettes, raisins, nuts, postcards to send home, letter paper and a toy, and generally a mouth-organ to help the noise along. ... The cripples in the surgical wards got together and with their miniature horns, drums, etc, and some homemade instruments formed a band and hobbled around from ward to ward, they looked so young and happy, even if they were crippled, in pretty clean pink and blue pajamas.

"We wound up that night with Christmas dinner which would have graced any private home in America, there was turkey and cranberries, dessert, and all sorts of delectable and a dance with a 50-piece orchestra and we danced and sang in honor of good Old Uncle Sam. And the Colonel has never yet decided who go that prize."

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.