

DENVER WAAC CAPTAIN WRITES HOME OF HER VOYAGE TO AFRICA

Louise Anderson, Who Made Record of Roosevelt-Churchill Talks, Was on Ship Torpedoed Off Coast of Algeria.

When the story of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill's epoch-making meeting in Casablanca can be told, Capt. Louise Anderson of Denver and the Waacs, the only woman present, should be able to write it most interestingly. Her writing ability was disclosed when she told about her trip across the Atlantic in a letter to her former co-workers in the Denver regional office of the United States bureau of reclamation.

Captain Anderson, however, does not mention the most dramatic incident of her voyage, as revealed later by a press dispatch from north Africa—the torpedoing of her ship about seventy miles off the coast.

Capt. Alene Drezmel of White Bear Lake, Minn., another of the five Waacs who made the hazardous trip to Africa, first told the story of the torpedoing, according to the Associated Press.

Captain Anderson's letter was written from somewhere in Africa, while she sat in her office, where the "French doors open out to a balcony overlooking a very lovely garden full of palm trees and flowers, part of the city, and a very broad expanse of very blue water," in what she refers to as at one time "one of the finest hotels in the city, but now quite full of Allied force H. Q."

"It was Armistice day, 1942, when things began to happen," the letter reads, "not that they didn't before then.

"I received orders to catch a plane for Washington at 6:30 a. m., the next day, along with four other girls.

"What a wild scramble it was clearing the post in such short notice!

"Well, we sat in Washington for over a week—still not knowing exactly what or where or when . . . The climax, tho, was that we were a military secret for two days after we arrived in London—they took us up back alleys and in back doors, made us have our meals in our rooms. Our trip over was wonderful, of course, with very convenient layovers in interesting places.

"We were in London eleven days. You can imagine our surprise when we discovered we still hadn't reached our final destination.

"We had lunch at the famous Claridges and at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese House (the room where Sam Johnson used to hold his sessions had been hit by a bomb). We lived right around the corner from Berkeley square—but I guess it wasn't the season for nightingales, 'cause we never heard any.

"There is no exaggeration about the blackout in London. It petrified us at first, but we soon learned how to find our way home from work, with the help of our 'torches.' The experience of riding in one of those funny little taxis in the blackout, tho, is something to write home about. Talk about wild! You think every moment is your last."

WORST WAS CROSSING IN WOMEN'S.

Captain Anderson's letter states that the "north Atlantic is definitely no place to be in December—and we, of course, experienced the worst crossing they had had in twenty-seven years, according to the ship's crew."

"It was really a picnic for those of us who were healthy—but not-

ing but misery for those who weren't," she added.

"We were delightfully surprised at our fine accommodations on the ship. Outside of being crowded—one of us had to sleep on the floor—it was almost as nice as a pleasure cruise. We had trouble breaking our cabin steward of waking us at 7:30 a. m. every day for tea. The afternoon tea, tho, we thoroughly enjoyed. The very nice lounge had to be closed because the furniture wasn't nailed down and when the ship started rolling, people and furniture were spilled in every direction."

"Mealtime was the biggest problem. Maybe you think it isn't an art to hang onto the table with one hand and eat and keep your dishes in place with the other. The final result was six broken legs and innumerable patches over cuts and bruises."

WAAC TELLS OF TORPEDOING.

"Along with four other Waacs and thirty American and British nurses," Captain Drezmal's story begins, "I was aboard a ship torpedoed about seventy miles off the coast.

"I shouldn't want to go thru it again, but it's nice to have seen how splendidly people can conduct themselves under such circumstances. It made you proud of Americans and British. Their gallantry was inspiring.

"Our ship was carrying mainly English troops, with English and American officers and nurses and Waacs. Before the torpedo smashed thru the stern of the boat that night, we had been 'torpedo conscious.' There had been a lot of submarine reports the day before and we had done a lot of zig-zagging.

"Some of the girls already were packed. I had stayed up quite late making preparations. My clothes were there ready to be jumped into as if I were a fireman.

TORPEDO HIT AS WAACS SLEPT.

"The torpedo struck with a splintering crash when all were asleep. Three of us awoke at once and realized what had happened. One slept thru it. The other heard the crash, but didn't think we had been hit, and wanted to go back to sleep.

"However, we all eventually fell into our clothes as best we could and got to our boat station with our tin hats, bags and purses. Three Waacs found places in a lifeboat, but Louise Anderson and I could not find a vacant seat, and for a time it looked as if we and an English nurse were the only three women left on board.

"Later, tho, we learned that two English nurses had been down below taking care of their patients.

"Louise and I and some American officers kept circulating about the deck. The officers said it was a good thing to have women still aboard, for it perked up the morale of the men.

WOMEN WERE TAKEN TO BRIDGE.

"After a couple of hours the ship's officers heard that we three women were aboard and took us up from the deck to the bridge. We were served tea and whisky and biscuits. It must have been a strange scene—the ship going down while we were cracking jokes and making silly remarks. I think I've never laughed so much in my life. It was like a tea party.

"For a while we thought the ship would go down in about an hour, then word got around that the officers thought it might be possible to keep it afloat. Finally a destroyer towed us and the others in the lifeboats.

"We still were far from comfortable about it all, as the vessel limped along at five knots, making a fine target. We felt a lot better when we picked up an escort of destroyers at dawn.

"Early in the afternoon we were taken off the ship and, shortly after, it started burning. On the destroyer British officers shared cigarets and chocolate drinks with the American girls who had been picked up from their lifeboats.

"The girls had had hard going. They had helped pull men out of the water, had nursed the injured and had bailed out the lifeboats with their tin hats. They showed great spirit.

"We arrived at Oran late in the afternoon. We were put up for the night. Officers arranged every possible convenience for us.

"Looking back upon the adventures, I would say that perhaps most of us had moments of individual fright, but there never was a sign of panic.

"It was hard to realize we had actually been torpedoed. In fact, I hardly can believe that only a short time ago I was serving at tea parties, wearing soft gowns and walking outdoors and hearing only peaceful sounds of nature.

"Now shoe polish or a bar of soap are more important than a corsage, a box of candy, or a dance record. We can't get face cream, so we are using men's brushless shaving cream instead. We have learned to do without a lot of things."