

“December 3, 1997

“Dear Mr. Carter,

“As promised, the following are replies to your questions about the 110th Station Hospital as I remember it and some general comments as I view what I experienced more than 50 years ago. I’ll take it from the top, following the order of your letter to me. ...

“The various descriptions [in your manuscript] of Norval’s general character and outgoing attitudes were confirmed by everything I got to know about him. We were both on a General Courts Martial to which we had been assigned in the spring of 1943. It was held in Liverpool and we had an opportunity to hear and see Tchaikovsky’s Ballet, Swan Lake, while we were there.

“Aboard the Queen Mary on our trip to England in early December, 1942, we had a stormy crossing. The ship was loaded with thousands of troops and only life boats for a small percentage of us. Our job as medical officers was to inspect all the enlisted men for VD, and we were assigned to gun stations on the upper decks so that when an alert was sounded we would go up to our stations while everyone else went below.

“The ship rolled so much that water came in one of the port holes and down the hall toward our cabin. A young dental officer came running, saying that we should be prepared to abandon ship. Norval, aroused from his sleep, calmed the situation by saying, “Close the door.”

“Much of what you ask about the earlier part of our war experience in England can be understood in terms of the letters S.O.S. That is for Services of Supply. And that is what we physicians and the 110th Station Hospital were. At least that is what we were for the first 18 months of our time in England. We were being stockpiled until needed and much was up to the ingenuity of the C.O. to keep us busy until the real job became paramount.

“As a result we did a lot of things to avoid boredom and stay out of trouble. On the way I am sure that Norval heard stories from others who had been in combat, in Italy, in North Africa, and yearned to get involved in the real action instead of the humdrum things we did in Honiton, up in Warrington, in Fremington (North Devon) until we got our real hospital in Netley, just outside Southampton and started preparing to receive casualties when the invasion would be carried out. Various small cadres would go out and take over an installation that the British had built for the Americans. We learned how to draw supplies for them, to equip them, so that a larger outfit could move in and be ready to receive patients. Yes, it is true about Colonel Brown’s Folly. I signed for beds galore that were presumably for venereal disease patients, patients we never had. Oh, we had a few of our troops with gonorrhoea but not the numbers envisioned when the hospitals were being designed.

“I went to some meetings in London, others went to others, depending on interests and projected needs. After our experience at the Courts Martial in Liverpool, Norval returned

to the hospital just outside Warrington, and I went to another hospital near Bristol for a week to learn about blood transfusions.

“After turning this installation over to another American hospital unit (our job being done there) we returned to North Devon, to Fremington which was just outside Barnstaple. It was here that we had a few patients from troops training nearby and that is when Norval met some doctors from the 29th Division, 115th Infantry, who were from the University of Virginia Medical School and the idea of getting into a unit that was going to see action must have developed. He worked on this and finally arranged a mutual transfer with another doctor of equal rank. Norval went with the 29th and one of their doctors came to us.

“While we were in the hospital just outside Warrington. Col. MacBrayer [Commanding Officer of the 110th when it was formed at Camp Pickett, Virginia in the summer of 1942] got into an intemperate spat with another, junior officer, and punched him. The lieutenant didn’t hit back, just preferred charges. MacBrayer was emotionally disturbed; I call it male menopause. The incident was investigated with true military thoroughness (therefore the deposition you referred to in your letter) and eventually MacBrayer was relieved of command and Col. Theodore Golden was put in charge.

“The area around North Devon was apparently sufficiently like beaches with names like Omaha, Juno and others of D-Day history, that the 29th Division could practice their invasion tactics, practice that sometimes caused casualties and we got a few of them. Other divisions practiced in other areas. This is how Norval met some of the Docs from the 29th Division. Usually, most of us were perfectly happy to be in a safe unit like the 110th. No one was shooting at us and bombing by the Germans was remote and infrequent. I, for one, was not going looking for trouble. The war was a temporary affair, noble, heroic, unique, but after all, temporary, and when it was over, I intended to go home and practice my medical specialty. Norval wanted more, and unfortunately he found action but with disastrous consequences.

“In December, 1943 I was sent with an administrative officer and several enlisted men to Royal Victorian Hospital at Netley, just outside of Southampton. This was an old, huge, British hospital being turned over to the Americans. Part of it, but a separate building, was “D” Block, the British Venereal Disease facility. It was selected because of the fact that for several months we co-existed with the British in this “D” Block and while they took care of their patients we listed them as patients in the American facility. The British eventually moved out and we converted this facility to a complete hospital, operating rooms and all. We got more staff, more doctors, nurses, and enlisted personnel so we could run this place as a full hospital. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy took over the main buildings. The Allies were gearing up for the invasion and we were ready for casualties. Between D-Day and December of 1944 we took care of about 50,000 casualties. By then the Allies were well situated on the continent, and by then Norval had been shot. The 110th eventually was moved to the continent. And I was transferred to the 162nd General Hospital as their Urologist and so remained in England until the end of 1945 before I was returned home, and was discharged.

“In summary, the general picture of the character of Norval Carter is well described in all the material in your manuscript. In a way, it is those characteristics which perhaps provided the seed that made serving in an inconspicuous little unit like the 110th so galling, so unromantic, so dull. We of the 110th were for 18 months a Supply, a sort of housekeeping unit, learning the army, learning how to organize a hospital operation, and finally, how to triage mass casualties--after they had been given emergency treatment by somebody else, then move them along as soon as possible. We did our job and got a citation for it. But for action? No way!

“For me what we did was enough and even when I could have gone to the continent, I didn't. I was assigned, after the peace in Europe, to a new hospital that was to go direct to the Pacific theater. Happily for me, and the others, the A-bomb ended the war in the Pacific so our unit didn't go anywhere and I remained in England, at a hospital, the last American Hospital in England, located in Winchester. During this time I was party to similar units to those we operated in the first 18 months in England and had the interesting duty of closing them and returning them to the British.

“These are my memories and some of my thoughts about what I did during that part of my war experience with the 110th. I'm sure others have different memories and I also saw no point in merely reminiscing. I hope I have conveyed what I believe was the mission of the 110th and how dull it was until we got to doing it. And yet, when I get together with the few remaining medical school classmates it turns out that our war experiences become a significant point of communality, whether it was from someone who was with a combat unit, from a ship or from a hospital of any size. I wasn't looking for adventure and I'm afraid that Norval was.

“All the best, and I hope you find something in my letter which helps answer some of your questions.

“Sincerely,

“Norman L. Cannon, M.D.”