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A Letter From Africa

(Editor's Note.—This letter was received from Professor W. R. Dumble with the following lead.)

ALTHOUGH, during the past eighteen months, I have received many interesting letters from former students written in all parts of the world, one letter that I had in the mail shortly after Labor Day, I believe, should be of interest to the readers of *The Engineer*. It came from First Lieutenant Allan A. Wiggins, Jr., and without his permission I wish to pass it on to you.

Lt. Wiggins is in charge of Co. B, 850th Signal Service Battalion. He is an alumnus not only of the University but also of the Tower Club. His home is New Lexington, Ohio.

The letter, dated August 28, 1943 follows:

"At many times since I came overseas, I have felt the urge to write to you and to ask how it goes with the old Alma Mater. I already have a source of information in the form of Lt. Tom Streb, our mutual acquaintance.

"I have been overseas now for a period of roughly eight months, serving in the Middle East. Where I am now, I am naturally not permitted to say, but I can tell you that I have traveled extensively and have covered a greater part of Libya and Egypt. Further operations will give me the opportunity of seeing the Bavarian Alps, I hope. Things are not as bad for us here as the newspapers would have you believe, or it might be that we have become accustomed to living in 130° temperature without fresh meat, milk, fresh vegetables, ice cream and that host of little things that make America so dear to us. We will be a hard bunch to hold when we once more come West, to where the land is bright.'

"After landing in the Middle East, this company which I now command, made a grueling trip over the Egyptian and Libyan deserts by motor convoy. The men suffered, naturally, but the excitement of going up 'into the Blue' compensated for all those things. I am not going to try describing our activities as perilous, for we are a service outfit and our biggest danger was from strafings, bombings, and parachutists. Of the three, we were only visited by some half-hearted bombing attacks. Our biggest hazard then was from the shrapnel put up by the ack-ack barrage. I have three or four holes in my tent to testify to that. I had some difficulty in explaining to the men the necessity for digging air raid shelters. This was before we had a raid. After the first attack, I could hardly stop them from digging. One boy had a hole dug right next to his bunk, so he could fall out of bed into the safety of the shelter. We were not extremely strict while operating, for I was more interested in doing the

work assigned to us correctly than in having a man salute in the prescribed manner. We did our work well, and we were complimented on it. In that I take great pride.

"I suffered a broken leg while in Libya. It seems that a motorcycle and I do not share the same opinions about skidding around corners. I was laid up for six weeks with what seemed about sixty pounds of plaster added to my figure. When the cast was removed, I virtually had to fight my way from the loving clutches of the Medical Department. I finally managed to free myself; and lucky was I, for we moved again shortly after that.

"The second long trip we took over the desert was not so pleasant. The glamor and excitement of traveling were gone, it was much hotter, the food was poor, and we had lost a man in a very tragic manner. However, we managed to get here in fair shape, and everyone is feeling better now.

"The post we are now stationed at is, in many respects, superior to the camps in The States. The biggest factors, in my opinion, are the excellent sanitary conditions and the magnificent hospital. The Medical Department has done one of the outstanding jobs of the Army here in the Middle East. I especially admire those men, officers and nurses, who go forward to set up field hospitals under the most trying conditions. It begins to look as if they can save anything that still breathes if the blood plasma holds out.

"You can tell the people back home that they can be well proud of the American 7th Army. It started out by taking an awful licking at Kasserine Pass, but it learned enough there definitely to outclass the British 8th Army in Sicily. I wish I could tell you of some of the particularly vicious type of fighting that went on on that island. Suffice to say that the American 7th will have very little trouble if they are set loose in Italy.

"While in Libya, I ran up against an Italian family who had a brood of the prettiest and healthiest children I have seen. I jokingly asked the mother if she would allow me to take her son with me when I went home to America. I was totally unprepared for her consent. She was so pitifully eager that at least one of her loved ones could be separated from her so he would be educated in a free country. Quite a touching and inspiring commentary on the attitude these people hold toward America. Our country means sterling quality to them in every phase of educa-

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tion, science, literature, and everyday living. Let us be fair, however, and say that their real admiration for us is our freedom.

"I also had the privilege of seeing King George VI while in Tripoli. You may have seen some pictures of his visit in the news reels. He was very gracious, but he was received poorly. The aristocratic system in England is going to take an awful fall after the war. All men I have spoken to in the 8th Army agree that the privileges accorded now only to the high and well born are going to be distributed more democratically, or else! They see officers in the American Army, who, if they had lived in England would have had no opportunity to attend the sort of school from which the British officers are picked. Unintentionally, we have struck a blow for a more fair system of higher education in England.

"I could go on like this forever, but c'est a guerre, and I must close this rather aimless epistle. Be sure to write and tell me how you are, and how the old stamping grounds looks from the windows of Derby Hall."