

Eldon Dewhirst

Describes Scenes in England *Dec. 17, 1942*

Tells of Life in an English Community in Which He is Stationed and Gives Values of the Money

Private First Class William Eldon Dewhirst writes his wife at Newton from England, where he is stationed with an Infantry division, telling of the customs of the people and what he has seen. The letter follows:

"You know the English money standard is different from our own. We turned in our American money and received English in exchange. An English pound is worth four dollars and three and one-half cents. Ten shillings are worth about approximately two dollars. Both of the above mentioned are paper money.

"Two shillings or a florin is worth approximately forty cents. Each is about the size of our half dollar but a little thicker. One shilling is equal to about twenty cents and is about the size of our quarter. You have a shilling at home I took for a quarter once, if you remember. Six pence is about the size of our dime and has the same value. Two pence is about the size of a nickel and the newer ones are hexagonal or six sided. It has the same value as our nickle. The pennies are about the size of a half dollar but they are made of copper. Half pennies are also made of copper and are about the size of our quarter.

Combinations of Coins

"A crown and half crown are not coins but rather a combination of other coins. The value of the crown is about a dollar, and a half crown is about fifty cents. They also have quarter pennies but as yet I've never seen one. I think I understand their money fairly well, but I can't read their price marks in stores. I'll soon learn it.

"The English motor and pedestrian laws are different from our own. They drive on the left hand side of the road and pass, or 'overtake' as they say, another car on the right. A pedestrian has every right to walk in the middle of the street or road if he so desires, and if you hit him you are responsible. Any livestock may wander or be driven on the road and you are held responsible if you hit them. Don't get the idea that stock have a free range, because they don't. English fences as a rule keep stock in the pasture very well.

Life in a Blackout

"Five of us drivers went to town Friday night. You should have been with us. It really was an interesting experience. Some of the curbs were six or eight inches high, some were only an inch or so high, and some places there isn't any curb. Of course, the town was blacked out. I almost fell once in stepping off a curb and one of the fellows did fall in stepping on a curb.

"It's rather hard to see anyone walking down the street, and you collide with someone every once in a while. They are good natured about it, and if you run into them they excuse themselves and laugh about it.

"Some of the streets, roads and sidewalks are very narrow and, sometimes, they curve in the most unexpected places. You seldom find a street that is straight. We enjoyed our visit to town and I hope to see it in daylight hours soon. It's about a ten minute walk from here to the main part of town.

Semi-Private Rooms

"Our barracks has semi-private rooms. There are two of us in this room, but some rooms have as many as four. We have double deck beds and each bed has a straw mattress and four blankets. It's rather a hard bed but I guess it agrees with me. I am seldom sore or stiff when I wake in the morning. The barracks are heated by a hot water pipe that runs along the back of the barracks about six inches off the floor. It's rather a novel heating system but works very well. The same pipe carries water to the wash basins and the showers.

"It's interesting to walk through the country and notice the livestock, farms and farm layout. The farmers have a dual purpose type of cattle. They are a type that makes pretty good beef and also gives quite a bit of milk. The pastures are very good. The grass is green and about shoetop high.

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"The horses are a draft type and are they fat! Most of them have docked tails, the bone of the tail being about six inches long. They seem to be of any breed as long as they are the draft type of horse. I've seen a few ponies, too. They aren't as tall as our horses but they are blockier. They look like a miniature draft horse.

Saw Some Sheep

"I've seen three or four good sized flocks of sheep. One flock had white faces and another had black faces. Some had full length tails and some were docked. The latter had about a half length tail. Some looked as though they had been dipped, because their wool was a reddish color.

"Most of the farm equipment is made for one horse. Some farmers have two-wheeled, rubber tired wagons pulled by one horse. The wagon looked to be hand made from the rear axle and wheels of an old car frame. Most of the horses are shod and you can hear them trot down the road but you don't hear the wagon rattle.

"The fences are usually stone walls or hedge. It's a different type of hedge than we have back home, but it makes a good fence. The hedge fences are usually growing on top of a foot high mound or wall of dirt. The stone fences are about eight to twelve inches thick and between two and six feet high. I haven't seen a barbed or woven wire fence except around a part of our camp area.

"All the buildings are made of stone or brick. The easiest way to tell a barn from a house is to look for chimneys or windows. The barns have small wooden doors to take the place of windows. The windows of the houses always look as though they had just been washed.

Glass Cloth Windows

"The windows of our barracks are imitation glass cloth that looks much like the glass cloth used in brooder houses back home. You can see through them good enough to distinguish colors, but you can't see a person's features if he is on the other side.

"We looked for a restaurant when we were in town the other night. They are called 'chip shops' over here. There are one or two cafes here. About the only thing you can buy is French fried potatoes, fish and sausage. The French fries sure are good. We each had three pence (a nickle's) worth of them. Their soft drinks have a peculiar taste but the English like it and I'll soon learn to like it. The English drink quite a bit of beer, and they are all crazy for American cigarettes.

"Most of the things we consider 'essentials' are rationed at the canteen. I don't mind it though. The allowance isn't a lot but it's enough. It seems strange to carry a ration card.

"The roads around here are good but they are rather narrow. Most roads have a crushed rock base with a black top. Some of them are quite slick when they are wet."