Correspondence

OBSERVATIONS OF MEDICAL SERVICE ABROAD

To the Editor:—I have recently visited many European military hospitals, including first aid stations, clearing hospitals, and third line or base hospitals. In many places I have found American surgeons actively engaged and doing splendid service. In several large well-equipped hospitals the service is light and many beds are empty. In such cases the surgical staff is for protracted periods more or less inactive.

It is to be feared that at first men who had come from large hospitals in America, having enjoyed an active daily service normally, were surprised, not to say disappointed, to find time hanging heavily on their hands. This feeling was soon corrected and surgeons are now interesting themselves in the solution of problems of various types which are constantly developing.

Briefly the military surgeon of today must be forewarned that war is not waged for the purpose of filling hospitals, and he must be fully reconciled to wait patiently under his assignment. After an advance resulting in a large casualty list, he will lead a strenuous life for a more or less protracted period. Empty beds with idle ambulances in large number are not a regrettable feature of military life.

It should be further clearly understood that men who have specialized and who are highly trained will find their services acceptable at many points. But the average man, however capable, must win his spurs under new conditions before he can hope to become conspicuous in a foreign environment.

THOMAS W. HUNTINGTON, M.D.,
Hotel Excelsior, Rome, Italy.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—Dr. Huntington (of San Francisco) is a member of the American Red Cross Commission to Italy. This committee consists of Mr. George F. Baker, Jr., chairman; Mr. John R. Morron, Dr. Victor G. Heiser, Dr. Thomas W. Huntington and Mr. Nicholas F. Brady.]

DRAFTING PREMEDICAL STUDENTS

To the Editor:—The question of the exemption of freshman medical students is one on which there has been much discussion, and perhaps the readers of THE JOURNAL would be interested to know the attitude of one who has been drafted, and called into service.

THE JOURNAL has been for some time my constant companion in my hours of leisure and in these times, at least, my consolation that I might find at the last moment some hopes of continuing my medical work next year.

The last number, that of September 15, contained a very encouraging letter from the dean of the University of Virginia, department of medicine, which prompted this letter. He has stated my case, as well as that of many more in the same predicament.

We were told when the war first broke out between the United States and Germany that medical students would not be subject to call in case of draft and that "premedics" might be considered as medical students. When the draft became a reality, and the exemption lists included no clause for us we were still told that it was only diplomacy that kept the government from declaring a class exemption of medical students. Some of us rather doubted this and spoke of entering officers' training camps; then the dean of the school of medicine came out with a letter from a high official from Washington stating for a fact that we were free. Now many of us had already had military training in various lines and could have easily earned our commissions but were told that we could better serve our country by staying in school and then giving her a trained instead of an untrained service. Some of the boys disregarded this and went to the camps; they are now going about with silver bars on their shoulders; proud that they were counted as worthy to be officers in the great National Army, while we who thought we were best

serving our country by staying in school are going about with our hands on our hearts wondering what will be done with us next. In fact some of us have ceased wondering as we are called in the first draft. It is not as though we were trying to avoid the draft or hiding under the banner of our college, afraid to go. I venture to say that if the plain truth had been told us in the first place there would not have been one of us who would not have been in some branch of the service before the day of registration.

An objection raised is that the medical schools would be crowded with slackers and draft dodgers of every description. This immediately loses its significance when we realize that every medical school requires some premedic work and that premedic work no one would take who did not intend to pursue the further study of medicine. The fact that we entered last September in the premedical department of the university proves that we had then determined to study medicine, and hence according to all justice should be considered medical students, and exempt from draft under that clause.

It is not as though the government had no redress for those who tried to evade her orders by entering medical schools at this time; the questions of standards of scholarship and attendance could be brought to bear on all medical students in the freshman year at this time. The government could very easily require a certain minimum grade and a minimum standard of attendance, all those falling below either of which to be at once liable for call and military service. This could be very easily accomplished by utilizing the professors of military surgery that the government assigns to the various medical schools. So there is absolutely no excuse for such a drastic, not to say unjust and outrageous, procedure on the part of our government.

Furthermore, the demand for doctors at the end of the next four years is going to be just as great if not greater than it will be at the end of the next year and two following. This has been amply proved by authentic statistics available to all those who care to take the time to peruse the recent editions of the daily papers or, for the profession, the last three or four editions of THE JOURNAL. Under these circumstances it seems not only unjust but absolutely prohibitive and criminal that the government at this time should undertake to jeopardize the future healthful well-being of this country as well as those across the sea by exposing these young men to the dangers and possible casualties, not to speak of the many fatalities, of this war.

This does not exhibit on our part any lack of patriotism or love of country, but rather shows that we have the great welfare of the country at heart for the future, and should this war last—which God forbid—beyond the next four years, the need of physicians would be an obstacle that would be absolutely insurmountable. At any rate, the next two years would fit us to be of infinitely more value as assistants in the Medical Corps than we are now as riflemen. Any one can learn to shoot a gun in an hour but it takes much longer for one to acquire skill in manipulating a scalpel.

PHILLIP J. BEYHAN, Chicago.

"RED CROSS" BASE HOSPITALS

To the Editor:—My attention was directed to a contribution by Dr. Joseph B. DeLee (THE JOURNAL, Aug. 24, 1917, p. 665), advocating the construction of military hospitals in France in the shape of a cross with roofs to be painted in red color. In view of the deliberate bombing of an American base hospital by German flyers and the resulting killing and maiming of innocent "noncombatants," the doctor's plan would produce the very opposite effect he aims at. The best plan is to make all sanitary formations and institutions as invisible as neutral tints can render them. In addition it would be wise to disperse the buildings of large institutions over a fairly wide area and to place them under the shelter of natural foliage, or artificial for that matter, schemes employed to hide artillery batteries from aerial reconnaissance. In view of the fact that antiaircraft guns are effective only when the machines fly at moderate height we may even have to go farther and construct hospitals under bomb proofs.