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(Editor's note: Drew Pearson, during the holidays, is making a good-will tour of our North African bases.)

DREW PEARSON

ON

THE WASHINGTON MERRY-GO-ROUND

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DREW PEARSON SAYS: GI'S ABILITY TO ADJUST SELF TO SURROUNDINGS IS MIRACLE OF ROCKET AGE; IT'S CHRISTMAS--AND U.S. SERVICEMEN-SANTA CLAUSES GLADDEN HEARTS OF MOROCCAN CHILDREN; GI'S MUST MAINTAIN WAR ALERT EVEN DURING "PEACE ON EARTH" SEASON.

Nouasseur, Morocco.--The American soldier's ability to adjust himself to his surroundings continues to be the most modern miracle of an age which may send rockets to the moon. Here in Africa, three to five thousand miles from Washington or Wichita, Shreveport or San Bernardino, you'll see Christmas decorations and Christmas preparations just as beautiful and just as homelike as any in the above cities.

It makes no difference that the American GI is thousands of miles from home or that he's surrounded by a Moslem population that does not pay homage to Christ's nativity. It's Christmas--and, no matter where he is, he's celebrating it.

So, down the main street of Wheelus Air Base in Tripoli you'll see each barrack competing for the best Christmas decoration as avidly and sometimes more effectively than any community back home. Over the recreation center at Nouasseur Air Base you will see reindeer leaping toward the African horizon, and over the vehicle maintenance shop you will see a silhouette of a wrecker's truck rescuing Santa Claus. The truck has picked up Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and is towing Santa's sleigh with other reindeer inside-- a mute reminder that Nouasseur's vehicle maintenance corps can rescue anything.

Col. Bob Hangstrom of Hoboken, N.J., and Walt Hyzer of Philadelphia are a long way from home but they even make the wheels of the wrecker truck revolve and the electric-light road under Santa's sleigh twinkles here in Africa as effectively as any electrical extravaganza illuminating Times Square.

--AZORES GET ARCTIC TOUCH--

To me Christmas doesn't seem quite as real here in Africa as it did in Greenland last year at this time. There's no snow, no ice, no 30-below temperature or other touches of winter usually associated with Christmas. To be sure, Harmon Air Force Base in Newfoundland gave an Arctic touch to the Azores by sending 800

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Christmas trees and Lieut. Eugene Schayer of Chicago somehow managed to pack all 800 into one plane. Actually, however, it was in palm-studded desert country quite similar to this in Africa that Christ was born, so Christmas here should come much nearer to reproducing the physical surroundings of that day when Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem nearly 2,000 years ago.

Donkeys similar to Joseph's are still one of the most important carriers in Africa, and not far from here is a camel mart where another respected beast of burden is traded like old cars at home.

In contrast, great Globemasters come swooping down on the modern runways which American ingenuity has placed in the desert, carrying everything from jeeps to airplane engines. In contrast, also, jet bombers and fighters roar out at dawn for target practice not far from the area where the Wise Men hailed the birth of Jesus with the hope that peace on earth had come to men.

The American soldier who is maintaining and operating these weapons of war in contradiction to the hope that Christ cherished for mankind would prefer not to be doing what he is doing. He would rather be home. However, as noted above, he has an amazing ability to adjust himself to any surroundings and this Christmas he will be able to participate in community pageants, church services, and entertainment as whole-hearted as any back home. He will partake of a turkey dinner as good as any at home. Further, if he lives off base, he will have to pay only 70 cents for that dinner. If he lives on the base, he gets it free.

--GI'S DISCIPLES OF FRIENDSHIP--

And, because the American soldier, whether he reads the Bible or not, has an inherent sense of what Christmas is all about, he has gone out of his way in these distant lands to help the people of these lands.

For some weeks the air patrol at Nouasseur has been putting the "touch" on everyone from the base commander down to finance Christmas celebrations at Moroccan orphanages. For months they have been busy collecting old toys, repainting and repairing them for children in the near-by Moroccan towns. Other air units are doing the same.

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I watched one Christmas party given at the Nouasseur Air Force hospital for 60 French and Moroccan orphans by the hospital corps. A burly sergeant led a little French girl to the chow line and heaped her plate with Christmas goodies. Three orphans all tried to hang on to the hand of the chief surgeon as he led them into the mess hall. A Negro airman led a six-year-old Moroccan boy who looked longingly at the toy-laden Christmas tree, his eyes bulging. Another boy slipped away from an awkward sergeant who was trying to act the role of mother, then scampered back for a closer look at the tree.

The hospital mess hall was crowded with children too excited to eat and, with their Air Force escorts too busy to notice, they didn't eat. Finally the pretense of eating was over and the children stood by to receive the presents which the hospital personnel had purchased for each and every one of them. They stood bashful and timid in the presence of such unaccustomed riches and their eyes sparkled as they unwrapped those riches.

Then they went home to dream of another Christmas with kindly Americans acting as Santa Claus.

(END MERRY-GO-ROUND RELEASE TUESDAY, DEC. 24, 1957) 12/20/57