

# CHICAGO

By Pfc. DALE KRAMER



**C**HICAGO, ILL.—Report to a quarter-million GIs from Chicago: it is still Chicago, only more so.

Carl Sandburg described it as "stormy, husky, brawling." Double that. Nerves are taut with war tension. Hard work adds to the strain and increases the tempo. People walk faster in the streets. Stampedes for surface cars, elevated trains and the new subway are more chaotic than ever. In the hurrying crowds (half a million new residents have moved in to man the war plants) are old men returned to work harness, young boys in war jobs while awaiting call to the armed forces, wives and mothers and sweethearts hurrying to the factories.

The city relaxes with a bang. Everyone, not least the GI who hits the town on leave, wants his entertainment quick and rugged. At night a sustained roar rises from the cafes and nightclubs of Randolph Street, Wilson Avenue, Rush Street, upper Broadway, Sixty-third Street, Madison above Twelfth, Calumet City. Old residents say that 20 walk on Randolph Street's White Way where one walked before. The acre-



## CHICAGO

big dance halls—the Aragon on the North Side, the Trianon on the South Side, the O. Henry out on Archer Road—are crammed.

In one way, though, the town is more like the old days than when most of its GIs left. The lights are on again—or most of them. But the powerful beacon that used to sweep the skies from the Palmolive Building remains dark; they haven't turned the floodlights on the white-slabbed Wrigley Building and at night the Buckingham Fountain is only a dismal ghost of its former self.

Physically, Chicago's major development has been the mushroom growth of its 270 war plants. The city hopes its great new airplane factories will help to make it the aviation center of the nation after the war. But the chief civic event was the opening of the six-mile length of subway between Roosevelt Road and Fullerton Avenue last fall. It is a handsome subway—worthy, what there is of it, to be matched in bull session against the gloomy stretches underneath New York. The trains get up a creditable speed, considering the relatively short distance between stations. The white-tiled walls with blue trimmings glisten brilliantly under the lights. Station platforms, two levels below ground (stores will cut in at the first level), are connected with the street by escalators.

The tracks run under State Street from Roosevelt Road to Division, west on Division, then diagonally northwest to connect with the El at Fullerton. Stations are at Congress, Jackson, Monroe-Madison, Randolph-Lake, Grand, Chicago and Clark. Sometimes pedestrians escape bad weather by going underground and walking on the continuous six-block platform that stretches under State from Jackson to Lake. It costs them a dime, though, just the same as subway fare.

Though most of the population welcomed the subway—after decades of talk it had become a sort of folk myth—not everyone was happy. In fact, some North Side residents were soon definitely and audibly unhappy. The reason was the difficulty they had getting to the west side of the Loop. Instead of taking them around the Loop as before, their trains whipped them under State and they had to walk a couple of extra blocks or more, which upset their schedules. Finally they figured out a more or less satisfactory solution by taking the local train from Fullerton or the express from Ravenswood that stays above ground in the rush periods.

**T**HE Loop is jammed with GIs. Chicago being a great transportation center and close to large Army and Navy training stations, it doubtless will continue to be for quite a while. Yet curiously enough it is the departure of certain familiar accouterments of the military that has made Chicagoans realize how deeply we are in the war. They had grown accustomed to the sight of aviation cadets doing push-ups in Grant Park, the narrow strips of shore between the lake and Michigan Avenue. Fancy-stepping marines with flashing bayonets had drilled there, too. Now the bridge over the avenue by which the cadets crossed to the park from the Stevens Hotel has been torn down, and the Stevens, along with the Congress, has been handed back to the



## CHICAGO

civilians. Chicago knows that the airmen and the marines are scattered to a thousand bases over the world. It is a reminder that the war long ago passed the practice stage.

Even more poignant reminders are present. On street corners in hundreds of neighborhoods there have been posted small plaques, each bearing a gold star and the name of a lad from that block who has fallen in this war. After the white-lettered name—printed without rank—are the letters "Sq." Hereafter the corner will be known as "Joe Smith Square," or whatever the name may be. A ceremony attended by neighbors, friends and relatives is held at the placing of each plaque.

Five thousand block flagpoles have been erected by block committees of the Office of Civilian Defense. Listed in some manner near each are the names of all GIs from the block. Some of the installations are elaborate and have bulletin boards that are kept up to date with personal news from camps and war theaters.

While its own men are away, Chicago is vociferously determined to make a reputation for itself as the nation's—enthusiasts say the world's—most hospitable city to GIs who visit it. There is no gauge for measuring such things, but Chicago certainly has an argument. City transportation is free except in rush hours. To supplement the usual recreational facilities, various groups have combined to sponsor several servicemen's centers under the slogan "Everything Free." No. 1 occupies 14 floors of the building at 176 West Washington Street; No. 2 is in the huge old Auditorium Hotel on Michigan Avenue; No. 3 is at 60 East Forty-ninth Street; No. 4, at Fullerton Avenue on the lake front, with a 1,500-foot beach, is called the Country Club.

Servicemen's centers reflect the city in which they are located, and Chicago's are on the lusty side. Free burlesque tickets are available along with Annie Oakleys to more sedate plays. The morning chosen for serving tomato juice is Sunday, when it is likely to do the most good. The 6,000 girls who come to dance at the centers are exhorted to brace themselves against the temptation of being taken home by GIs, but there is no rule against it, and names and addresses may be given.

This does not mean that GIs, a notoriously innocent class, are without protection. Far from it. The girls are investigated. It was not possible to learn the exact technique, but when I asked a stern-faced senior hostess at a dance what she was looking for, she replied without removing her gimlet eyes from the dancers: "Short dresses." They keep a record of that sort of thing. "Sometimes they don't wear panties," the hostess added. "That's a black mark indeed."



JULY 14, 1944

p. 8