

## Dough for the Woes of Africa Cash Asked for Broken Hearts

**S**OMEWHERE IN NORTH AFRICA — In a certain building in a North African city, members of the U. S. Army Claims Commission, waist-deep in worry, hold open house to complaints practically 24 hours a day.

The officer-in-charge sits at a large flat-topped desk. He doesn't say much. Mostly he broods or wistfully scans the horizon. Occasionally he rouses to pass out huge, fat wads of francs — a gesture which levels the rough spots the American Army has left in its wake quicker than any oration by a goodwill ambassador.

This is the place where civilians come with claims against G.I.s for anything from a broken bicycle to a broken heart. Some are small civilians who argue violently and bristle menacingly. Some are big civilians who remain very quiet and merely roll the muscles of their arms.

Just recently a small civilian bristled in. One day, he lamented, he had a fine sty of pigs. The next day he didn't. Strangely enough, that was the day an infantry unit set up camp nearby. Suspicious as all hell, the owner casually wandered into their messhall only to stare fascinated while lovely, fat chops — from his pigs — slid gently down G.I. gullets. So, he wanted money for his pigs, lots and lots of money.

The claims officer listened, investigated, and discovered that, although the citizen had told the absolute truth, he also happened to be an enemy alien and therefore must seek payment through civilian authorities. But when the infantry unit heard about that, they passed the hat and turned over enough money for their erstwhile host to open a barbecue.

Sometimes a claim case takes a strange twist. Like the case of the stolen wine. Several soldiers with parched throats broke into a wine cellar and blithely made off with a couple of cases of vintage grape. The owner complained to the mayor. The mayor complained to General Eisenhower. The General's office put a rush call through to Col. Mastin G. White, chief claims officer.

"For God's sake, find those soldiers," the General's aide barked at the colonel. "Those wine bottles they stole are full of sulphuric acid!" Everybody forgot about the claim in the frantic haste to locate the unsuspecting soldiers.

Several times the Commission has issued warnings and suggestions to doughboys as a result of its investigations. One of its latest reads: " Please don't throw lighted cigarettes from your convoy truck." They back this up with the tale of a motor cycle dispatch rider who, ordered to advance from the rear to the head of a convoy, became involved with two Arabs salvaging cigarette butts in the middle of the road where soldiers had thrown them from their truck.

Smallest claim paid by the commission was the 27 francs demanded by a French girl for damage to her bicycle by an Army truck. More expensive was the claim involving two soldiers who borrowed the mayor's car for a joy ride. The mayor probably would have overlooked the matter if the ride hadn't ended in the bottom of a ravine. The claims commission paid off the mayor. Now the soldiers are paying off the claims commission with a fat slice of their monthly salaries.