

Why Is A WAAC?

By Flora Faulk

These are some of the questions that I have been pondering over. After a visit with the Wacs at Fort Lewis, Washington, a few days ago who are stationed there on military duty, having an interview with them, seeing them at their daily tasks, and inspecting their quarters, these and other questions are very clear to me now. The life of a wac and the parts they are playing to help win the war is well worth while to know.

Capt. Irma J. Wertz, commanding officer of Company F. Wac Engr. Training Sec., is a very charming and interesting person to talk with. She can relate some exciting experiences she has had during her three years of service. While there she gave us this short but interesting part of her life:

"These Wacs have the deepest interest in their work, so much so that they do not go in for social activities at all. Since they have been stationed at Fort Lewis, Wash., they have had several invitations to parties and dances, including Seattle, Wash. and the U. S. O. in Portland and these along with others they have constantly declined. When asked why, they say they are too busy with their army work to take time out for social functions. Their work is much more important than parties and dances. Then, too, they would be tired and unfit to perform their duties the next day. Therefore they give up their social life for the much needed work to be done in army life to help win the war.

They do go in for sports and their most favorite game seems to be basketball. Some time ago they played in a basketball game in Seattle, Wash. and believe it or not, but they came back winners. Most of these girls are married and husbands are in the service and overseas, so they are very anxious for the war to end so their husbands along with the rest of the boys can return home. That makes them very ambitious about their work.

It is also interesting to know that most of these girls have had from one to three years of college training and the rest have completed high school. This includes Pfc. Emily Harris of 4305 St. Louis Ave., St. Louis, Mo., who has completed three and a half years pre-medical training at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Mo. She is now a medical Wac in the hematology laboratory at Madigan General Hospital, Fort Lewis, Wash. "As a civilian," states Pfc. Harris, "I had the training but not the experience. Now I am getting the experience and intend to complete my necessary half year in college after the war."

T/Sgt. Marguerite Wallace of Monmouth, Ill., a professional dietician before joining the Wacs, is appropriately enough Mess Sergeant with Company F. She holds the B. S. degree in domestic science from Bradley Polytechnic Institute at Peoria, Ill. With professional dietician's



Adequate home nursing care, combined with a program of education in caring for the sick is one of the services provided for wives of servicemen by staff nurses of the Portland Visiting Nurse Association, a Community Chest agency. More than 2000 service wives, like the one shown here, have been visited by the Association's registered nurses to date this year. Visiting Nurse Week is being observed September 2-8 by proclamation of Mayor Earl Riley.

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authority, she declares: "Ingenuity in preparing a meal is the army mess sergeant's greatest asset. In the two years and eight months I have been in the army, I find women are just as particular about the things they eat as their civilian sisters."

Acting as First Sergeant of the company is S/Sgt. Frances R. DeCoursey, a graduate nurse. She was formerly on duty at Harlem Hospital in New York.

One of the most popular girls in the company is the mail orderly Cpl. Georgia Cheatam of Indianapolis, Ind. She majored in physical education in Indiana University before enlisting and established a reputation as a freelance commercial artist, having studied at the John Herron Artists' Studios at Indianapolis. Samples of her work adorn the company orderly rooms.

Many have learned new skills since entering the service and some are utilizing knowledge acquired in civilian life thereby adding invaluable experience to their future recommendations.

The group also includes truck drivers, typists, warehouse clerks, and hematologists.

The Wacs daily routine is similar to that of a soldier in training. They start the day at 6 A. M. and work straight through until 5 P. M. Then they dress in their uniforms and are ready for retreat at 6 P. M.

Three Years in the Army that was the proud boast of the Commanding Officer of Company

F, WAC Engr. Tng. Sec. last week.

Among the first to volunteer for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps Capt. Irma J. Wertz was selected as one of the first 36 Negro women to be commissioned in the Corps. Arriving at the first WAC Training Center, Fort Des Moines, Iowa, 20 July 1942, along with approximately 500 other patriotically inspired women. On this date three years ago these women in the words of the Wac director "gave up silks and satins and put on khaki in answer to their country's need."

The Captain comes from Chicago, mid-west bivouac of many progressive Negro citizens. You can add her name to that long list of midwestern progressives, who have contributed in no small way by their achievements to race progress.

Born in Brunswick, Georgia, the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. R. N. Jackson, Capt. Weertz has had the advantages of culture and education. Her father was a Captain during the last war and army life is, therefore, not completely new to her. She has attended Fisk University graduate and undergraduate schools at Nashville, Tenn., The Atlanta School of Social Work, The Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, Chicago's Bryant and Stratton Business College and has to her credit research in the field of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. During the summer of 1939 Capt. Wertz studied low-cost housing in Scotland and England. She was vacationing in Paris when Poland was invaded and can never forget the experience of being one of two American civilians aboard the last train from Paris prior to official declaration of war.

Prior to joining the Army Capt. Wertz has been employed as a social worker in her hometown, Brunswick, Georgia and later in Chicago in the specialized field of child placement. Upon her return to the States in 1939 she resumed her duties at Children's and Minors' Service, Chicago, but soon gave this up in favor of volunteer defense work. It was not surprising then that she should be among the first volunteers for the Corps.

Enthusiastic on the subject of the value and the necessity of Negro women aiding in all defense efforts the Captain feels that opportunities offered enlistees in the Corps provide them with many necessary essentials required to fight the battles of life. Discipline, education, sacrifice and cooperation fit these women in more ways than one for their future in the American scheme of affairs.

"Furthermore," she added, "if we of the Negro race hope for a place in the world picture of the

democracies when the total peace is established, we must by our untiring efforts sacrifice and toil, do all that we can to help win the peace, so that we shall have the right to demand and enjoy those privileges granted to all liberty loving peoples. I joined because I felt it my duty as a citizen and have never regretted it. Full credit goes to my fine staff and members of my company who have always wholeheartedly supported me and this idea. My experience in the Corps has been as Special Service Officer, First Wac Training Center, one of the first staff members with the Director in Washington, D. C. and the first Wac officer assigned with a company to report for duty on an army post.

Two weeks later in 1942 Fort Huachuca, Ariconia turned out 10,000 strong to welcome the first WAC companies in the field under the command WAC officers. It has been my privilege to serve with the same unit until we were separated in November 1944. During our stay at Huachuca these valiant women prepared and shipped to their destinies the two Negro divisions now serving their country on foreign soil. This within itself is worth any sacrifice which we have made. These same women have brought to Fort Lewis a new life and interest, their value to the post speaks best for itself in the many stripes they flourish so proudly. True, we have sacrificed for this effort but shouldn't we all?"

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