

NEW GUINEA

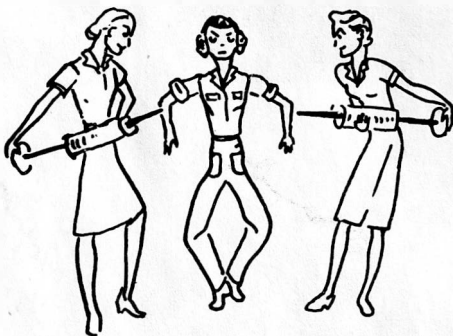


TRAINING

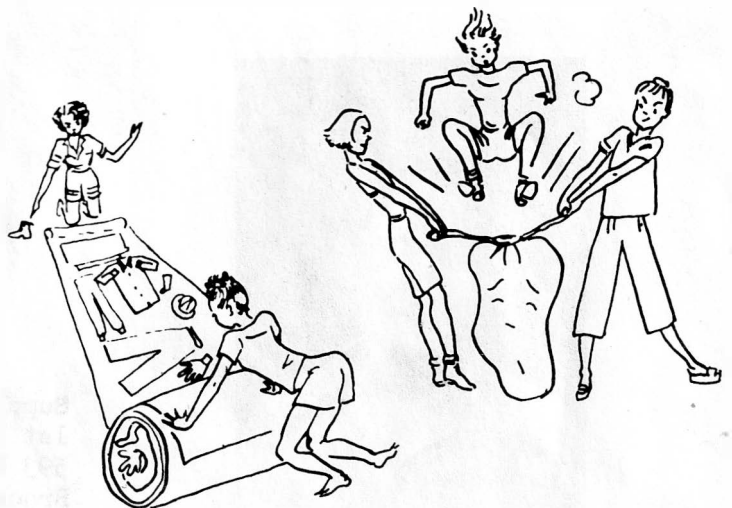
Many of us waited months for the eventful day when orders would be cut directing us to report to Fort Oglethorpe for overseas training. It was the ardent desire of about ninety percent of the women in the WAC to get closer to the real fighting. During the train journey to Georgia most of us spent the time wondering what our training would be like. Would we be able to take it? Would we be considered overage if the shipment did not require our particular skill? The next four weeks answered all our questions. They were jam-packed and every moment was a busy one. We learned to don a gas mask in seconds and reviewed much of our basic training. We learned to pack a duffel bag and utilize every inch of space. After being issued necessary equipment, taking shots, climbing the cargo net and marching in the early hours of the morning, we had at last made it and were on our way.



ALTERED TO FIT



SHOT



We traced our course on maps as we sped across country to Camp Stoneman, San Francisco, California, in a crack troop train. An overnight stop, a few more last minute details and the orderly march to the dock where a ferry boat conveyed us to the huge transport awaiting us in the harbor. Once aboard the ship we listened to the steady tramp of

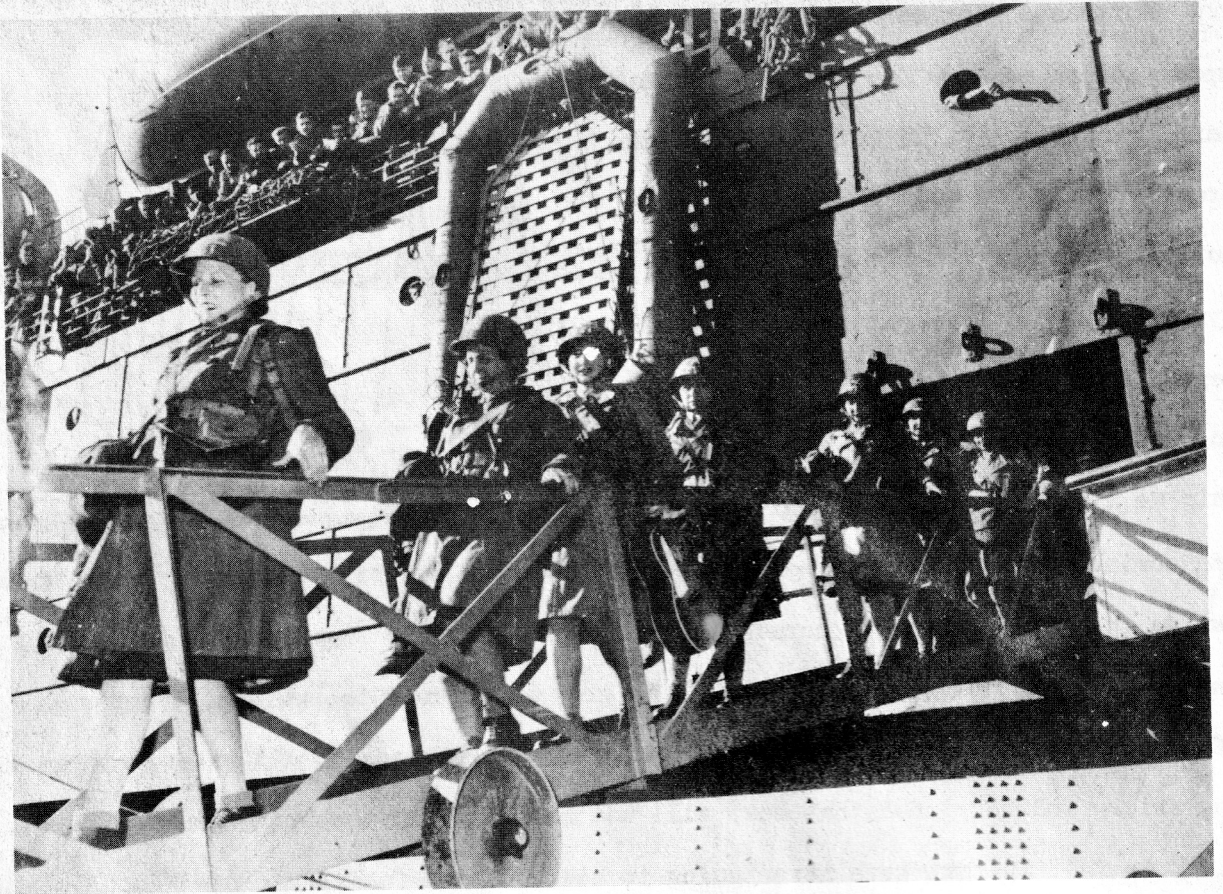
BOAT DECK
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men coming aboard. It seemed as if there was no end to the troops. Nine or twelve to a cabin which in normal times accommodated two passengers did not put us in the luxury of Army travelers. We grew accustomed to bruises, the result of our scramble to get dressed in the morning. We bathed in salt water, emerging sticky and convinced that soap will not make suds in the briny fluid. Seasick, we felt that we were never going to see home and family again. We pulled guard duty at regular watches, both day and night. The shadowy menace of subs was real and ever present. Aircraft warning guards (male) kept sharp watch for enemy aircraft. Day and night the transport's engines churned and for more than three weeks the ship plowed through the blue Pacific. Various groups of WAC's, who were to join FEAF, travelled on different transports. Most of us made the trip on a Matson liner, either the Monterey or her sister ship, the Lurline. We were older and wiser in the ways of travel by the time we reached port and without reluctance bade the big liner goodbye.



GOING AWAY HAT



FEAF WAC Detachment was assembled at Archer Field in Brisbane, Australia, July 16, 1944. It was in Brisbane that we met "the Digger", as Australians are affectionately known, and the gallant Anzacs sporting their soft felt hats with turned-up brims. We worked with the Australian WAC's for a brief period and were initiated into the mysteries of the afternoon pause for tea. Our Australian sisters were never idle; during any lull in the office work you would find them knitting. It was desperately cold in Brisbane at this time. We wore everything that was issued to us and many of us eyed our duffel bags wistfully wishing they had been furlined so that we could don them too. We spent our off-duty hours watching the antics of the native koala bear and the kangaroo. We were frequent visitors at the many restaurants. Later in our travels we were to long for the good fresh milk, the delicious fruit, and the steaks which we had enjoyed "down under." Plans were completed and equipment secured for life in New Guinea. Part of the equipment was a plane full of chickens and various farm implements which we hoped to use in our new station.

Our flight from Australia to Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, was uneventful for the most part and we arrived at Sentani Air Strip stiff from the long plane ride. We were hustled into trucks for the grueling ride up old Cyclops side. We sped over roads but newly engineered. The soft shoulders looked as though they could not possibly sustain the weight of the trucks that delivered us to the jungle spot we were to call home. Enroute to camp, we were warmed by welcoming shouts from our old friends, the Aussies, and the "hubba hubba" of our own American boys. We were fascinated by our first glimpse of the New Guinea natures.

Our camp was located in a jungle setting that would have done credit to the color and drama of a Hollywood jungle epic but our herringbone twill slacks were less vulnerable to mosquito attacks than photogenic sarongs. The deep green foliage, the inevitable bamboo trees, the foreign and vari-colored birds, the chattering of the little creatures found in the steaming jungle were in strange contrast to Main Street back home.

The first stage of our overseas roughing it had begun. There were no modern conveniences. We were to learn a new jargon, new office procedures. We learned to make furniture from discarded boxes, to set up tents, to use rough field tables instead of polished desks. We were rapidly becoming foreign currency experts. The Australian pounds and shillings, and the big copper pennies and half pennies were exchanged for the guilders of the Dutch East Indies. We put to practical application the lessons and regulations regarding health. Some of the MUSTS were: tucking in mosquito nets, taking the daily important dose of atabrine, scrubbing our clothes with GI soap to ward off the dangerous and infectious jungle rot. Bathing in the tempting waters of beautiful Lake Sentani was forbidden, but the temptation was too great for some of our WAC's and they nursed fungus infection in their ears for weeks.

The GI's, the Navy, the Seabees were more than willing to supply the deficiencies of our housekeeping equipment. We were the first American girls that most of them had seen in many months. They desired our company so much that they resorted to bribery. A pair of khaki pants was milady's tribute instead of a corsage. Evenings were spent at one of the many clubs, beautifully constructed by the men in their spare time, or on steak fries. Men of all organizations were so eager to entertain us that in the interest of health we were required to spend one dateless evening. To assuage our restlessness on the evening of our confinement, there was a moving picture in our huge palm bedecked Recreation Hall.

Dating regulations were strictly observed. An armed escort was required. The name of the soldier and his organization and the club or area being visited were carefully noted in a roster. No male could enter the WAC camp area unless he was an invited guest and his name was on the list kept at the gate by the MP's. The GI's who spent more time in the interior of the jungle than we were permitted to do, regaled us with stories and showed us pictures of the many strange tribes. The natives were friendly but once in a while a WAC would become unnerved at the sight of a native peering curiously over our burlap fence. Nerves, the female nemesis, were steady in the majority of the group but we were awakened on one or more occasions by the screams of some terrified WAC in the throes of a nightmare. Most of us were abashed to find that the Japs and headhunters who terrorized our nights were figments of our imagination.

We were to learn the thrill and pain of rumors, "We leave the 5th", "No, we leave the 20th". "Where?" "I heard Leyte". "No, it will be Manila". Ad infinitum.