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Marjorie Alexander Joins the Army  
Adventures of a World War II WAC  
Part 1

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Laurel Roberta Dean

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For Marjorie and her Army buddy, Marilyn

Marjorie was late for her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party. It was unfolding at her son-in-law's swanky country club and all of the guests had arrived. Her tardiness was unusual as she was a stickler for punctuality. Her eldest daughter, the one married to the country club guy, started looking at her Rolex with concern and disbelief. It read half past noon.

"Where could she possibly be? She's a half- hour late, " she whispered to the middle daughter, showing tension in her voice but showing the assembled guests a smiling and welcoming demeanor. The eldest daughter was known for her fertile imagination especially when it came to disaster anticipation. The middle daughter didn't want to be concerned. She didn't like to worry, she didn't like to think of bad outcomes and she didn't like parties and large gatherings of any sort. She really didn't want the party at the swanky country club at all. She had made some initial plans to reserve a Mexican restaurant in their mom's home town, a few miles east, that she thought would be just fine and much easier to navigate for the silver-haired set and herself but, as things usually go, the elder daughter had different plans that became quickly adopted. Marjorie's youngest, also a girl, was from out of town and really didn't care where the party was as long as it was affordable and besides, she was well into her second Mimosa at the open bar and wasn't really aware of the time. The only son, who was senior to the eldest daughter, was also late but that was of no concern since he could

be counted on to be late. So, in that respect, he really wasn't late.

"They probably got lost," the middle daughter pointed out. "It's really confusing finding this place." Maybe Mexican food wouldn't have been as fancy and La Tapatia certainly didn't have the view of verdant rolling hills bordering velvety pristine greens but at least her mom and driver and driver's husband wouldn't be wandering through twisted mansion-dotted country roads looking for understated signs to an overstated country club, was what the middle daughter was thinking. She had an issue with this country club because women weren't allowed on the greens except on special days and jeans weren't allowed in the dining room on any days. Not that she wanted to play golf here or wear jeans to dine but it was one of those principle things. She sighed and glanced at her watch too, a Swiss Army model, not wanting to be concerned. Finally there came a phone call to the eldest daughter, who was still fumbling with her new iphone, from the driver of the errant SUV holding the "birthday girl". They were, indeed, lost and the maitre d' was quickly dispatched to talk them in.

Marjorie was a little frazzled when she arrived at her party, entouraged by Sandy and Noel, the driver and driver's husband, but quickly settled in to her role of being the center of attention and playing hostess to guests that represented three generations. There was actually a fourth generation, Oliver, recently born to Marjorie's grandson, Alexander. He was, disputedly, born in the year of the Tiger, depending upon whom you talked to, his mother Niki or his grandmother,

the Chinese grandmother who was, herself, a Tiger. Marjorie hadn't yet met the Tiger or possibly the Rabbit, depending, and an appearance of The Tiger/Rabbit at her birthday party would have certainly eclipsed some of Marjorie's spotlight, so it was decided that the Tiger would stay home in Berkeley and meet his great grandmother on another less auspicious day. Marjorie looked radiant as she worked the room, her hair silvery-white with unusual blond highlights, not yet pulled asunder by old age, and sporting a new and stylish black and white St. John's suit, which she splurged on one month prior to her party. She had always wanted a St. John's but was too thrifty to buy one prior to this momentous occasion. Nancy Reagan regularly wore St. John's suits, red ones, and although Marjorie didn't particularly admire Nancy Reagan, she did admire her suits. So casting aside her values built on the bulwark of World War II and the Great Depression, she dropped some serious cash at Nordstrom's to ring in her 90<sup>th</sup> year. She was a charming hostess and greeted all of her friends with warm embraces and a convivial glow, old friends that bridged over 50 years and newer friends like the gals who had coffee with her every Wednesday afternoon at Major Market and Jim, her 67-year old buddy from the cardiac rehab gym that she attends three days a week following a "heart incident" she had a few years back. Her beloved gardener, Salvador, was there looking a little uncomfortable but sporting a beautifully tricked out western shirt open at the neck complementing three different gauges of gold chains and flared black dress pants



with a large blingy silver buckled belt. The middle daughter was assigned to him. "Make sure Salvador feels comfortable at the party," were the marching orders from the eldest daughter to the middle daughter. She rarely questioned her older sister.

Providing the music for the event was the Sandy DeVito trio, minus its usual osteoporotic drummer who was busy on this Super Bowl Sunday. So the trio was this day a duo consisting of Sandy DeVito himself, a local guitar maestro and his sometimes but not regular bass player and singer, Ron Black. Word on the Escondido streets was that Ron Black, a tall and dashing white-haired gent, "entertained" local widows. Marjorie seemed interested in that bit of gossip when she first heard it, since she had reached widow status a few years prior, but had lost interest recently as she enjoyed her ascendancy into CEO status over her financial affairs. An elderly gigolo with a velvety voice wasn't enticement enough. Sandy and Ron's collective age was 165 and if you added the absent osteoporotic drummer, Don, the trio would hit well over the 245 years mark. They performed every Sunday at La Tapatia and were the one contribution to the party that the middle daughter/sister insisted on. Marjorie frequents the restaurant on Sunday evenings in order to hear the trio, being particularly taken with the musical dexterity of Sandy DeVito. She and the middle daughter, who spends every Sunday night at her widowed mother's house, normally arrive at the restaurant around 5:30 p.m. and, upon spotting them, Sandy immediately falls

into his version of "Margie," a 1921 song popularized by crooner Eddie Cantor. That always brings a beam to Marjorie's face. Upon entering the restaurant and hearing the music Marjorie walks with a samba or swing rhythmic sway to her step headed for her usual cocktail table, not only carrying a spotlight of sorts with her in this procession but enjoying the moment of pure musical abandon. The middle daughter, never relishing the spotlight. hovers slightly behind her mother, ready to steady her through any unexpected obstacles that might prove challenging to a soon-to-be nonagenarian. Although Marjorie might sometimes list to one side or the other, she is fairly steady on her feet, walks with a healthy gait and erect body. Nonetheless, the middle daughter has hopes of starting Marjorie on Tai Chi lessons to improve her balance, as soon as an appropriate instructor can be found.

Marjorie and her eldest daughter had constructed a seating chart for the six round tables seating eight partygoers each that were scattered in the country club's elegant dining area. It was an important task as there were delicate connections that needed to be attended to. The grandchildren in attendance, of which there were four, two boys and two girls, were seated together at the "Young People's Table". There were three World War II veteran pilots attending the party, none of whom knew one another but this shared experience determined their seats at the World War II table. Counting Marjorie, there were four World War II veterans sitting at one table. She joined the war effort at age 22

and became a member of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, later known as the WAC. Inducted in Philadelphia in '43 alongside 150 other women, Marjorie and her fellow warriors became known as the Liberty Belles as they shoved off of Philly's train depot headed for basic training in Florida. Marjorie didn't talk about her experience in the service when she borrowed the microphone from Sandy and thanked her friends and family for attending her party. She did acknowledge the three pilots and honored her army buddy, Marilyn who lived too far away to attend and lamented the loss of her pilot, Robert, the blimp pilot and her husband of 62 years, who had passed away four years earlier just after his 92nd. birthday. Following Marjorie's gracious acknowledgments of her friends and family in attendance, the microphone was passed over to the eldest daughter whose cueing was slightly off as at that very moment the Sandy DeVito duo now trio again, since Marjorie's granddaughter's guitar playing boyfriend Justin sat in, struck up the Bart Howard hit tune of 1954 "Fly Me to the Moon." The eldest daughter recovered gracefully from this awkward moment and following the conclusion of the song and copious clapping for Sandy DeVito, Ron Black and Justin Scott Lucas, she again borrowed the microphone and said a few gracious words of thanks to all attendees. To avoid an awkward moment of silence the middle daughter jumped in and added a few more remarks about her remarkable mother. That concluded the emceeing from the progeny since the youngest daughter was known for breaking down in a sustained crying binge when sharing

sentimental thoughts and couldn't possibly work the microphone and the eldest son remained mum, stating at the conclusion of the party that he would rather be hospitalized than speak in front of such a crowd. Marjorie basked in the glow of praise and her signature high cheekbones were flushed as she visited each of the six tables laughing, hugging, and sharing a moment with each attendee. As the clock crept ever closer to the kickoff to the Super Bowl and an anticipated influx of revelry by testosterone driven, beer drinking, club swinging members, the maitre d' motioned it was time for the closing event, the cake.

The eldest daughter ordered Marjorie's favorite cake, a chocolate mousse, from the Champagne Bakery of Del Mar and decided it would be practical to have one candle represent every decade. Thus, Marjorie had to contend with blowing out nine candles when the time came. She did so successfully, all the while accompanied by Sandy DeVito on lead guitar and a group of 48 of her closest friends and family on vocals performing the venerated "Happy Birthday To You".

### Marjorie Alexander Joins the Army

Marjorie Alexander caught a ride with her father William to the Upper Darby El stop every weekday morning. He would proudly drop off his middle daughter, the one with the great legs and the fierce tennis strokes, at the curb

then continue at the helm of his fancy Buick model 41 convertible, watching her, through his rearview mirror, turn heads as she grew smaller and he got closer to his Buick dealership, a pride-of-owner establishment in this small suburb of Philadelphia. Marjorie would purchase a round-trip ticket on the EI to Philadelphia, a quick 15-minute, twenty tops jaunt and would walk another 15 minutes to her secretarial job at the Philadelphia Electric Company, a job she had since she graduated from Upper Darby High School three years previous. She was lucky to have the job and got her foot in the door because her Aunt Jo, her mom's best friend, was married to a big wig in the company. She loved her Aunt Jo and Uncle Bern, not blood relatives but relations all the same, so she had to be extra diligent. While the work was monotonous and simply a placeholder until she came up with a different career plan, still, she enjoyed being in the city and liked the company of the other girls she worked with. It was almost all girls working now as the guys were being shipped out by the truckloads to basic training and then overseas. Everyone was joining the war movement. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, a day she keenly remembers. The family was just about to sit down for Sunday afternoon dinner when the radio show her dad always listened to and was listening to on that day was pre-empted: "We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin," stated a monotone voice. "The Japanese have attacked Pear Harbor, Hawaii by air."

The family supper was spoiled that ominous afternoon as the Alexanders all crowded around the radio and listened to history change its course. Now, a year later in the waning days of January 1943, everything had changed. The country was geared up for war. This particular workday started out much the same for Marjorie: the Buick ride but with the top up due to the January chill; the El commute, crowded with the usual Italian construction workers, talking with thick accents and smelling of chianti and garlic, a slight affront to Marjorie's teetotaling sensibilities; the walk to work with her nylons chilled to her gams and her heavy camel wool coat buttoned to the top; the hello to Millie, the receptionist, as she swept through the wide lobby of the PEC; a wave to her best friend Marian and the other girls working the switchboard; and finally her own tiny cubicle where she faced the Dictaphone and sheaves of electric bills she had to reconcile. It was a normal Tuesday and she was looking forward to having lunch with her friend Marian Brill. They met at the company cafeteria at noon and slid their trays along the slick metallic runners, too engrossed in conversation to care about casseroles.

"Marjie, I've been giving it a lot of thought and I think we should join the Army," Marian whispered as they slid past the salads. "They are recruiting here in Philadelphia, just up the street, for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and I think it's just what we've been looking for, a way out of working here, just like we've talked about," she continued. Marjorie and Marian had spent many a lunch hour

dreaming about what college they would attend, what band they would sing with, what man they would fantasize about. Clark Gable for Marian, while Marjorie's taste drifted toward Rod Taylor, although there was no denying that Clark Gable was handsome too. What Marian was proposing was never part of the dream.

"Why the Army?" questioned Marjorie as she eyed a Cobb Salad in passing. "I think Navy blues are much prettier than khaki, don't you? What's wrong with joining the Navy," she said with a smile that displayed her slightly bucked teeth, now capped by red lipstick.

"Marjie, I'm serious. The Army makes more sense, you can become an officer without any college," Marian said as she grabbed an iced tea at the drinks station. "The Army will give us a better future, more opportunity," she said firmly. "They've already recruited 35,000 girls and are looking around for more. Marjie, let's do it," Marian pleaded. They looked around for a private table in the lunchroom now hosting a sea of bobbed hair and lively conversation. Marian continued her prodding as they placed their trays at a table for two. Marjorie's surrender came quickly.

"OK," Marjorie assented. "Khaki it is." It was as simple as that. Suddenly the day became more than ordinary. The girls agreed to meet after work and go to the Philadelphia Army Recruitment Office to fill out the paperwork. Marjorie felt almost dizzy as she waited for Marian in the lobby of the building and had to sit on one of the wooden benches facing the elevator. With every ring of the

elevator door she would look up at the employees rushing out to get home, would wave at a few, but no Marian yet. Marjorie glanced at her wristwatch, the Hamilton that her parents gave her for high school graduation, which read 5:15 and clucked impatiently, afraid that she might lose her nerve if Marian didn't get down soon. "Ding", out poured another carload of Electric Co. employees into the large tiled lobby, everyone buttoning up their overcoats to brave the chill beyond the revolving doors. And there was Marian waving to Marjorie, rolling her eyes and exaggerating a glance to her watch. Seemed like the telephone girls were always the last to leave. Marian claimed the supervisor was an ogre, always looking over her shoulder and ready to pounce on the slightest mistake. No wonder Marian was so motivated to join the Army. The friends started down Cole Street, past Horn and Hardart's, which was packed with the after work crowd getting a bite to eat. Marjorie loved eating there because each food item was neatly presented in its own little glass case. Put in two bits and open up the case for a piece of pie. "Marian, let's stop in and get a piece of boysenberry pie when we're done, as a reward for joining," Marjorie suggested. Arm-in-arm they walked the four blocks to the recruitment depot getting more nervous by the minute. You couldn't miss the building because it was plastered with recruitment posters for the WAACs. Marjorie felt excited but nervous as she held onto Marian's arm while waiting in the recruitment line, filled with other young women with about the same profiles, give or take a few inches or pounds here or there.



Marian knew the specifics of just who the WAAC's were looking for and she and Marjie fit the bill. Recruits had to be between 21 and 45 at the time of induction, have no dependents, be at least five feet tall and weigh at least 100 pounds. Marjorie was not quite 22 years, her birthday was just a couple of weeks away and Marian had just hit the ripe old age of 22 back in November. They were exactly what the WAAC's were looking for.

"Marian, we're really doing this," Marjorie reminded her friend and herself. "Are we sure about this?" she asked with a slight waver to her voice as they neared the front of the line. "This way miss," a gruff Sergeant grunted for Marjorie to move to a table to the right and have a seat. A woman who looked to be in her 40's sat before her wearing the standard Khaki uniform that Marjorie had seen on recruitment ads in the newspaper: A-line skirt, blouse with epaulets and that funny hat that Marjorie thought looked silly and extremely unstylish. Clothes were important to Marjorie, who kept up her figure and usually fished out of her money-lean purse the coins needed for the weekly edition of Woman's Day Magazine in order to keep up with the latest fashions. The Army clothes for women were less than desirable but it certainly wasn't a deal breaker since this was about the war and helping the country and all that, she reminded herself. But those clothes... The thought of her brunette bob flattened down by that odious hat made her start to giggle. The woman before her smiled, welcomed her to the Army, complimented her on the step she was about to take and pushed a

pile of papers before her to read and sign; all the vital statistics were required and a number of signatures and that was that. With pen in hand she scrawled out "Marjorie W. Alexander" on three different sheets of paper, the W. stood for Whittiker, named after her Nana's maiden name. Marjorie spotted Marian at the other end of the lobby, also seated and signing. She already missed her. The woman soldier abruptly dismissed Marjorie telling her that a follow-up required physical must be passed before her induction was complete. The girls met outside the building, hugging and giggling. "Well, we've really done it now Marian," said Marjorie. Funny thing, she thought this life changing moment took less time than freshening up her lipstick.

Marjorie returned home that evening exhilarated from the blustery mile walk from the train stop and the fact that her life was about to change. Drastically. Her high cheekbones were flushed from the biting wind she left at the doorstep and her spirits ebullient following the big adventure at the recruiting office and, of course, the big juicy piece of boysenberry pie she treated herself to following such a momentous occasion. Gosh, was she ever going to miss having boysenberry pie. She didn't want to tell her parents of her new commitment until she passed her physical but if they had seen her throw open the front door and fly up the stairs, they would have known something was up. The Alexander family homestead, a five-bedroom, one bathroom, two-story rambling affair bordered by a small meadow and stream, once housed five Alexander girls in descending age

order: Francis, Annabelle, Josephine, then Marjorie, followed by the baby, Jeanne. Squeezed in between Marjorie and Jeanne was the sole heir to the Alexander name, Bill Jr. But, the big house was quiet now as the three eldest had left home, two of them eloping, which wasn't looked upon kindly by the Alexander elders.

Within a week Marjorie and Marian were scheduled for their physicals at the Army Recruitment Office. Marjorie passed hers and was immediately given orders to ship out on February 7, just two weeks away and one day after her birthday. Marian flunked the physical, discovering she had contracted tuberculosis and would be spending the next year confined to her bedroom. She was rejected from the Army and Marjorie, the shy and demure brunette with the slightly bucked teeth, who had counted on her bosom buddy, the one who had concocted the idea of this big adventure and escape from the confines of the electric company, was now going it alone. She was terrified.

"Marian, I can't believe this is happening," she said as the recruits spoke on the phone and Marjorie lamented the loss of Marian's companionship.

"Gosh, can't you get some rest and meet me in Florida real soon?" Marjorie pleaded. The conversation ended with both girls crying and Marjorie sitting down to the family dinner table in a state of complete bewilderment. She was a little nervous to tell her parents, Helen and William, her big news about joining the WAAC even though she felt confident they would approve, in their understated

way. "What's wrong Marjie?" her sister Jeanne asked, noticing Marjie's flushed demeanor as she sat down at the long mahogany dining table for supper. Marjorie took a big gulp and just blurted out, "I joined the Army at least Marian and I did, she actually came up with the idea and now she can't go because she has tuberculosis and I am going all alone down to Florida and I'm really nervous and wish she was going with me." There, she blurted it all out, squeezing a few tears along with the announcement as Helen, William, Jeanne and Bill sat mesmerized with forks in hand, poised above roasted chicken and green beans. Her father broke the silence first upon learning that yet another daughter would be leaving the house.

"Honey, we're proud of you for doing this," William said. He was surprised she wasn't going to Des Moines, Iowa because he read that's where they were sending the auxiliaries. Helen and William were just happy that Marjorie wasn't announcing an engagement, since she had the same boyfriend, young Farley, since high school. They were afraid she would follow the paths of her older sisters, who had chased after boyfriends and now were all married. Helen's own dreams of being a professional woman had been dashed at age 17 when she married William and started having babies; lots of them. Her constant mantra of education and making something out of oneself must have made an impression on at least William. In fact, William had promised Marjorie a car if she stuck it out single by her 23rd. birthday. Helen Alexander was actually pleased to unload

another daughter and have a more manageable home life after attending to so many children and, in particular, so many girls. The hair, the clothes, the boys, the drama, the years of managing so many lives.

All of the Alexander kids knew that Helen never really wanted children. She as much as said so. She was more interested in reading and writing, joining the Soroptomist Club and always wanted to be a journalist or a librarian. Helen had been keenly educated at a finishing school and was well versed in the literary arts and able to read and write in French. Proper grammar and proper everything from her children was expected. Her skills were not naturally bent on motherhood, one of the reasons why she encouraged her girls to stay away from marriage, but she took her mothering job seriously. Marjorie felt love and even a sort of tenderness from Helen, who was fiercely dutiful, but never received enough, especially when it had to be shared by so many. As a girl she would always run to Helen and wrap her arms around her, squeezing tightly but the light response and stiff pat on the head was never enough. Farley Ralston, the longstanding boyfriend and all-around wonderful dancer, tennis player and dreamboat who looked somewhat like Rod Taylor and worried the dickens out of Helen, could be counted on for a good deal of attention and healthy doses of necking, but he had shipped out six months ago and while Marjorie tried to write him regularly she noticed her letters to him as well as her memory of him were on the wane. The Army certainly wouldn't be the purveyor of tenderness and love,

so Marjorie would have to wait on that score. Saying goodbye to her baby sister Jeanne, now 15, was hard on Marjorie. She looked out for Jeanne and would set aside some of her earnings, the \$55 per month wages from the electric company, to buy special things for her, since the stoic Helen and authoritarian William only believed in hand-me-downs. Jean received from her big sister fancy underwear, tennis togs, and other niceties that weren't part of the normal operating procedures in the Alexander household. Nor was listening to Benny Goodman and all the swinging and jitterbugging that Marjorie spent endless hours practicing at home and partnering with Farley at the local dances. She had a great sense of rhythm and love for classical and swing music, probably in no small part due to the piano she had played since she was six years old. Helen insisted that all of her girls take up piano lessons but one by one they dropped out, unable to face the drudgery of practice, leaving only Marjorie at the old upright, ripping out song after song she memorized.

In addition to her piano prowess, Marjorie took to the tennis court with great vigor, having been taught the game by Farley. With Farley now out of the picture Ellwood Lewis and his older brother Bert would pick her up in their sweet blue roadster every weekend and off they would go to the boys' tennis club. Marjorie was a fierce competitor and the Lewis brothers, especially Ellwood were quite smitten with her. When she told Ellwood of her army plans he looked ready to cry. Poor Ellwood, he wanted to join the Army but was rejected because of

poor eyesight. Margie wondered how he could even find the tennis ball given the thickness of his glasses.

Boys and the Alexander girls was a challenging proposition with William at the door threshold as the meeter and greeter or more appropriately the master of arms. Most of the young men who came around the big white clapboard house didn't pass William's scrutinizing and were soundly dismissed. It was no wonder that the Alexander household was declining; the girls were suffocating and one-by-one escaped, usually into the arms of someone. For Marjorie it wasn't a sense of suffocation as much as a certain restlessness for adventure and change. While the Philadelphia Electric Company job was fun for a short time, she had her sights set on college and a real career but William wasn't about to loosen up enough change for that. Her paltry attempt at a career discussion following high school was abruptly dismissed with an, "I'm not paying for you girls to go to college when all you'll do is get married and have babies." She always thought it was queer that her daddy didn't want her getting married young, hence, the car bribe, all the while seeing it as inevitable. "But Daddy," she argued, "college will help me find a career and give me more options than just getting married, isn't that what you want?" She never got the answer she wanted or even a logical explanation, so instead of going off to college she headed for secretarial training and landed the job at the electric company. But, that was all in the past because February 7 was looming and she was bound for Daytona Beach, Florida,

a designated WAAC training camp.

Marjorie was given a choice between Ft. Des Moines, Iowa and Daytona Beach for her basic training, neither of which she had visited. Fact was she hadn't ventured away from the family turf at all save for the yearly family summer vacation to Aunt Jo's beach house on the New Jersey shore. She loved the beach and had enough of the cold, the terrifying electrical storms and gray and bleak Phillyscape for the time being and if she was going to be marching around and learning the army life she would rather be amongst swaying palm trees and wide, white beaches and warm, balmy breezes and picked Daytona Beach without blinking her bright blue eyes.

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The first WAAC training camp in the country, the one Marjorie rejected, was established at Fort Des Moines in Iowa in June of 1942 and was quickly filled to capacity. The Army wasn't really prepared for the overwhelming response to the newly established Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, the brainchild of Edith Nourse Rogers, the first Congresswoman from Massachusetts. In May of 1941 Congresswoman Rogers introduced a bill to establish a women's army corps, separate from the Army Nurse Corps. Up to that time the only females serving in the armed forces were the army nurses, a branch of the service since its establishment in 1901. Rogers wanted to open up the Army for other women with varied skills, "For the purpose of making available to the national defense



the knowledge, skill and special training of the women of the nation," she said before Congress. These "auxiliaries" would receive food, uniforms, living quarters, pay and medical care and would help alleviate the growing dearth of servicemen topside. The image of the WAAC recruit had to be pristine, giving the American public a vision of a "lady" who could appeal to small town and middle class American girls, from which the recruitment was to take place, mixed with the "can-do" strength of the woman ready to fill in and help do a man's job. It took the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese to get Congress activated enough to pass the bill and on May 14, 1942, a year after the initial bill was introduced, Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed it into law and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was born. The first recruits, 440 strong, were selected for officer training school from an application pool of over 35,000, and these future officers were shipped off to six-weeks of basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa on July 20, 1942. They were joined by the first class of enlisted women, known as auxiliaries, who faced four-weeks of basic training. These initial training sessions were run by male Army officers but were handed over to the new, green WAAC officers once they graduated. As recruitment ranks swelled all summer long a second training center was quickly cobbled together in the fall of '42 at Daytona Beach, Florida. By the time Marjorie had signed her name on the dotted line, bound for Daytona Beach, there were 35,000 WAACs.

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The night before her departure, which was also her 22nd. birthday, William made his middle daughter his specialty and her favorite, pot roast, usually reserved for the post- Episcopalian church Sunday family dinners, but he made an exception and featured it on a Friday. Although William was the type of man who expected dinner on the table upon his arrival home from work and the kids cleaned up and ready for bed, oddly he was accomplished in the culinary and sewing arts, skills taught to him by his mother, Myrtle Alexander. Marjorie had seen her daddy darn socks, sew on buttons and put up hems in addition to padding around the kitchen making pot roast and baking bread. She guessed it was because his mother, reportedly a 6'2" giant, wheelchair bound due to rheumatoid arthritis, couldn't easily do household tasks, so she taught her little boy to fill in. And she taught him well because his pot roast was sure yummy, she thought. Marjorie's other grandma, Helen's mother, was referred to as Nana by the kids. She lived part-time in the Alexander household ever since Marjorie was a little girl, but come the winter months, like a migrating bird, she would flee to warmer climates and wait out the too-harsh Pennsylvania cold season. Marjorie loved her Nana, the one person who would shower her with warmth and affection and keep the household always smelling of baked bread.

Around the dinner table the five Alexanders talked about the war effort, the WAACs and what Daytona Beach might be like. "I'm joining in just six months from now, when I turn 18," declared Marjie's brother Bill.

“Oh Bill, that would be just swell if we were both in Florida,” Marjie said. “Why, you could come and escort me to the dances on base,” she said.

“What dances on base?” William interrupted her reverie. “This is the Army and we are at war. This isn’t about jitterbugging,” he growled. William didn’t want to pop his recruit’s bubble but he had been reading lately in the Philadelphia Inquirer, which landed on the doorstep every morning, about trouble stirring within the Army with some of the soldiers resenting the WAACs and casting aspersions on their reputations. In fact, the recruitment of WAAC’s had slowed down because of this PR problem. Marjorie was oblivious to this slightly sordid side of the war effort and he wasn’t about to tell her. She was too excited and comforted at the thought of her brother being close by even though it was probably just fantasy.

The picture of her sister and brother in the Army together elicited another round of cries and sniffles from Jeanne, just 15, who not only felt left out of the war effort but was lamenting the fact that soon she would be the sole Alexander kid left at home. “Why can’t I join the Army and go with Marjie,” Jeanne wailed. “Oh, Lord, “, said William, “can we just get through the pot roast without any more tears?” Marjorie put her arm around her sister and dabbed her white linen napkin under her eyes, picking up some stray tears. “Jeanne darling, you’re too young to join the Army, you have to stay in school and look after mama and daddy and Bill,” Marjie said soothingly, adding her own tears to the mix. Just at this moment,

the dining room lights were dimmed and out of the kitchen marched Helen holding a beautiful chocolate birthday cake with 22 candles ablaze. Tears were traded for verse and the Alexanders sang "Happy Birthday" to Marjorie. Ellwood Smith stopped by during the birthday celebration to deliver a small pink carrying case as a birthday and going away present to Marjorie. "Oh Ellwood, that is so sweet, won't you stay and have some cake?" Marjie asked. But, feeling the sting of William's glare, Ellwood quickly took his leave with what looked like tears in his eyes. Marjorie walked him to the door and out onto the broad porch, mindful of William's prying eyes. "I'll write to you all about Army life," Marjie declared. "Will you write me back," she asked as she leaned towards him and placed a chaste kiss on his blushing cheek, leaving behind a whisper of her latest lipstick, Surrender, while reminding him that she would be home on leave and ready to play tennis by summertime. "I'll write to you Marjie," declared Ellwood as he backed down the stairs, his eyes lighting up behind the thick horn rimmed spectacles. She waved to him from the porch as he high-tailed it out of the Alexander compound in the little roadster she spent so much time traveling to tennis matches in. She wondered if basic training might include tennis, or even jitterbugging. Probably her daddy was right, the war was serious business with no time for such frivolities.

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In early 1943, the very time Marjorie and Marian made their trip to the

Army Recruitment Office, the number of women joining the WAAC dropped drastically due to a sudden backlash of public opinion against the employment of women in the armed forces, the very thing William was reading about. By this time the WAAC had been assisting in the war effort for eight months and while generally received well by their fellow soldiers, especially the officers and top brass, within the enlisted men's ranks there was a fear that these women represented a change and their place in the community and family would be forever altered. The boys serving at home also feared that a rash of women coming into the service would free them up to go overseas and into combat; they were right, that was the point. When the Office of Censorship ran a sample tabulation early in 1943 it found that 84 per cent of soldiers' letters mentioned the WAAC in an unfavorable light. This was curious since few had even seen a WAAC member, but tales of gossip and slander were running rampant in order to discredit the WAAC and get these women back where they belonged, in their homes and communities. Enlisted soldiers, tilting an ear to the grapevine, questioned the moral values of any woman attracted to military service, defying all logic of the intent of the WAAC and passed these beliefs on to their families, sisters, friends and sweethearts. The soldiers who actually saw the auxiliaries on the job and worked with them, mainly on Army Air bases, changed their minds. But, by then the impact was felt and the recruitment had slowed considerably.

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Marjie packed her new pink valise with her favorite dress, a bright blue with polka dots and a hem that flirted about the knee, mindful that blue made her eyes stand out and the hem length made her legs stand out. She also included a few cosmetics, her tired and worn blue striped bathing suit and a picture of the family and Farley. She was told to bring very little since her clothing, the unfortunate khaki, would be provided and there was little room for much else. With a snap of the valise, she was ready for her trip to Pennsylvania Station-30th Street where she would be meeting the 150 other recruits from Philadelphia, now known as the "Liberty Belles", headed for basic training in Daytona Beach.

Departure time from Philadelphia was 3:25 p.m. on the East Coast Champion Pullman, which meant an overnight train ride and most likely a fitful sleep. In the dark of Saturday morning, February 7, 1943 following a restless final night's sleep in her own bed, she snuck into Jeanne's room across the hall, which used to be occupied by the two eldest Alexander girls, Frances and Josephine, but was quickly claimed by the baby upon their respective elopements.

"Jeanne, you up?" she whispered at the lump under the white knobby bedspread. "Am now," she stirred, popping her head up and grabbing the hand of her older sister. They spent the next couple of hours cuddled up on Jeanne's twin bed having a final pajama party while paging through Marjorie's favorite magazine, Vogue. Marjorie reassured Jeanne she would continue sending her

money to purchase some of the stylish clothes they were paging through. “Look at that yummy jacket with those shoulder pads,” she showed her little sister. “I’m going to make some pretty good dough in the Army and I’ll send you enough for one of those dreamy jackets,” she promised. Marjorie was especially happy that the dresses were climbing closer to the knees, which meant she could show off more of her legs, considered her best feature by the fellas she knew, although they would have to be minus silk stockings. Those were a thing of the past, practically the first thing gone from the stores once the war started, due to the annoying rationing going on. William told her that all the silk produced had to go toward making parachutes and other items needed for the war effort. She let out a long sigh, “Well, if I can’t wear any of these cute things at least you can,” she told her baby sis. “Besides, it says right here in the magazine that we are helping the war effort by buying clothes,” she said. Marjorie read an excerpt out of Vogue Magazine, which seemed to her sort of a justification to be fashion-minded during the war.

*“Many a woman with the best intention in the world thinks that she is doing her bit, making a noble sacrifice, by refusing to buy any new clothes during the duration. But so complex is our economic life that this very act of self-denial may work injury to the delicately adjusted gears which must continue to mesh if that great machine is to continue to function, if that great machine is to swing into the mightiest armaments production efforts of all time. Arms and munitions, boats*

*and planes are made by workers, who are paid in the money that comes from defense bonds and taxes. A sizable part of these taxes comes from the clothing industry - the second largest industry in our country. The makers of fashionable shoes and hats, gloves and bags, of dresses and coats and suits - all these makers are operating with full government approval. Whatever is on sale in a shop is there to be bought with the Government's full permission. Refusal to buy only helps to dislocate the public economy."*

"You'd better show this to mom and dad next time you need something to wear," Marjorie laughed. "Tell them you want to do your part since you're too young to serve." She flipped the page and landed right on a recruitment ad for the WAAC, which included a woman in full WAAC uniform in front of an American flag backdrop with the caption "This Is My War Too". She had seen this before in poster form at the recruitment office. "Is that what you'll look like Marjie," asked Jeanne. She and Jeanne laughed at the picture of the WAAC recruit wearing the funny hat. "Yes, I suppose in another couple of days that's what I'll look like," she told Jeanne.

"Marjie," came a call from downstairs, breaking up the fashion magazine runway reverie. "Time to get ready to go," came the cue from Helen.

The Buick 41 with Helen and William in the front seat and Marjorie in the back, waving like mad to Jeanne and Bill left behind on the porch, eased out of sight of the rambling house and headed for the Philadelphia Train Station.



Marjorie watched her neighborhood slip by: the stark elms lining her driveway, the river where she and Bill would look for frogs in the summer, the grassy meadow, now yellowed with winter and tipped with frost, the El station where she would wait before work, the Buick slid past her most ordinary life, William driving at the proper “Victory Speed”, which was 35 miles per hour, as set by the U.S. government.

#####

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of '41, almost overnight the U.S. economy shifted into a full war production mode. Consumer goods and needs were secondary to the needs of the military, which meant sacrifices would have to be made. These consumer sacrifices came in the form of nationwide rationing. War ration books and tokens were issued to each American family, which dictated how much of any particular item any one person could buy. Initially only food items were rationed, but once the Japanese had seized plantations in the Dutch East Indies, which produced 90% of America's raw rubber, the President had to add rubber to the rationing list. In addition he included in one of his “fireside chats” a plea to all citizens to help with the rubber shortage by contributing scrap rubber to be recycled: old tires, rubber raincoats, garden hoses, rubber shoes, bathing caps were among the items that were turned in. This was also the reason for the lowered speed limit, since slower driving conserved rubber tires. Gradually, as America got more invested in the

war effort more items were added to the rationing list: silk, tires, cars, bicycles, gasoline, fuel oil, stoves, sugar, coffee, processed foods, meats, canned fish, cheese, canned milk, fats, and typewriters. In February 1943, the very month that Marjorie left for basic training, shoes were added to the rationing list. That was a real blow to her for there wasn't much she liked better than slamming out a fast swing in a pair of chic heels.

#####

It was a madhouse at the Philadelphia station where Marjie was dropped off at the curb with nothing but her pink valise, a sandwich Helen had fixed her of leftover pot roast and a quick embrace and wave. Then they were gone.

"I'll write to you every week, I promise," she told her parents as the Buick pulled away from the curb. The Alexanders weren't ones to unload too many tears or give away too much sentiment. So, off went the Buick, Marjie watching it turn the corner, her mother's head never turning to look back at her recruit. She stood there alone but together with 150 other recruits and boarded the train witnessing before her as many varieties of goodbyes as there were girls saying

them.

Marjorie and the others were shoed into a section of Pullman cars for the overnight trip to Florida. She claimed a window seat and watched the frenetic activity that takes place just before a train leaves the station, especially one containing 150 female recruits leaving behind a small battalion of waving and tear struck family members. Marjorie was exhausted both mentally and physically from all that led up to this moment and after some introductory chatting with her Pullman mates she devoured the pot roast sandwich, glanced at her Vogue, wishing she was still paging through it with Jeanne on her cozy bed, and glanced out at the scenery flashing by as the train headed for its first stop down the coast, Baltimore. She would be asleep in the top bunk as the train snaked its way along the Atlantic Coast and would miss the brief stops in Washington D.C., and Richmond, Va. Waking up at daybreak just as the train was scooting over the border of Georgia into Florida. She was struck by two things as she opened the curtains of her bunk and glanced outside, sunshine and palm trees. Despite yet another night of restless sleep filled with rocking train cars and untimely train whistles the sight of being greeted by a sunny day in the middle of February was an unexpected lift. Daytona Beach was just a couple more whistle stops south. Little did she know that Florida was experiencing a severe cold snap, for Florida, and the beacon of welcoming sun was a red herring.

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The WAAC training center at Daytona Beach was the second WAAC training center established, rather quickly, to handle the overflow from the initial center in Iowa. Established in the fall of 1942 and staffed with newly trained WAAC officers shipped down from Iowa, it was followed by the establishment of training centers at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia and Fort Devens, Massachusetts. From the initial 1,000 WAAC's who joined in June 1942 as officers, the ranks had swelled to 35,000 by the fall of '42 and growing. By the end of WWII there would be 150,000 women who would serve in the Army, many of them assigned to Air Force bases.

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The East Coast Champion rocked the rails along the contours of the Atlantic coastline making a special stop at Daytona Beach, mid-day, when the shoreline looked its most glorious. Marjorie and her fellow "auxiliaries" alighted a little bleary-eyed from a restless night on a rollicking ride, ready for the next leg of their journey. As Marjorie stepped down onto terra firma clutching onto her pink valise she noticed a number of buses lined up waiting for the raucous group of recruits. And raucous they were. Marjorie hadn't strayed much from the reach of the Alexander household environs and was shocked to hear profanity come out of the mouths of perfectly normal looking girls. She noticed a number of girls sported liberal amounts of make-up, as well. This made her feel a little uneasy.

She wondered if the girls were a little more “worldly” than she. Not that she was a prude, but whom would she pal around with? She missed Marian and was starting to feel flutters of regret dart in and out of her psyche.

“Ladies, Welcome to Daytona Beach”, came a pleasant sounding voice over a bullhorn. Marjorie saw a number of Khaki attired women step out of the buses. “Please line up and proceed into the buses. We’re heading to what’s going to be home for the next four weeks.” The commanding officer didn’t look all that commanding to Marjorie. She pegged her for around 28 and looked fairly normal despite the fact that she was sporting the hat. One of the girls told her the hat had a name, Hobby Hat, named after the Director of the WAAC, Oliveta Culp Hobby.

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In anticipation of FDR’s spring signing of HR6293 to establish the WAAC, the War Department had to hustle and find a director, housing for training and a myriad of decisions had to be made regarding recruitment strategy and just general R&R’s. Enter, Oliveta Culp Hobby, who was appointed the Director of the not yet existent WAAC in February ’42. This 37-year old firebrand, mother of two, married to former Texas Governor William P. Hobby, had an impressive resume including stints as a radio and newspaper executive in Texas, publisher, lawyer, writer and, most recently, the Chief of the Bureau of Public Relations Women’s

Interests Section for the War Department. Mrs. Hobby had to get the caissons rolling quickly, anticipating a summer launch date of a new army brand, The WAAC. She was a tough broad with a firm hand and managed to carve out a dignified place for her women in a still wary “men’s” Army. Hobby was involved in every decision that affected the WAAC including the selection of head attire. The choice of WAAC headgear, like every decision, had to be made on the run, from scratch with heavy-handed opinions from the Army’s Quartermaster General. She wanted her recruits and officers to wear the same hat and wanted them to be distinguishable from other branches of the service and other volunteer groups. The visor cap was designed cooperatively by the Knox Division of the Hat Corporation of America and the Stetson Company and quickly became known as the Hobby Hat, determined by Mrs. Hobby to meet the criteria of shielding the eyes, not blowing off in parades and looking both distinctive and military.

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Marjorie didn’t have much time to wonder about what her temporary quarters would look like because the bus ride was just a few short miles down the road, following the contours of a coastline bordered by the ever-present palm trees. She hadn’t really seen palms before except in postcards and an occasional movie. Just a couple of months before she and Marian saw “The Palm Beach

Story”, starring Claudette Colbert and Joel McCrea and the wonderful Rudy Vallee. She thought he was the cat’s meow. She had that movie in mind when she picked Daytona Beach for her basic training. It was so romantic and fun and dreamy. Although she thought palm trees had no real practical use as a tree, especially those tall ones she was watching from the bus window. She couldn’t believe it when her bus turned into a long drive back dropped by a large gleaming ritzy looking white hotel comprising three buildings, attached by a somewhat grand archway and all three sporting red roofs. Was it possible this was their training camp? At the entrance to the drive was a tall flagpole topped by the Stars and Stripes and another flag she didn’t recognize, maybe the Florida state flag. The buses traveled down the long drive bordered on either side by extensive lawns and stopped right at the hotel entrance, arched with a sign reading “Welcome to the Princess Issena” The girls were all whistling and carrying on about the Issena. “Get a load of this joint,” she said to herself under her breath. The girl sitting across from her, the one with the red, curly hair, nodded in agreement. “This is what I call hotsy totsy,” she said. The best part of all was what the Princess Issena faced. Just across the street, spitting distance, was how her dad would describe it, was the beach at Daytona Beach. A big, beautiful, wide, white beach, preening in the famous Florida sunshine, playing host to the lapping waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Why, it was almost picture postcard perfect. Marjorie was certain her decision to head Army south was a

good one.

Marjorie and the other recruits were quickly assigned hotel rooms, which had been refitted into bunk rooms, three to a room, and told to meet in the hotel service quarters to pick up their sets of uniforms, which from that moment on, would be both the order and fashion of the day. With a quick appraisal of her slim size 6 figure, Marjorie was issued the following WAAC clothing in the closest sizes available, which weren't all that close:

Winter ensemble - One wool, olive-drab skirt, jacket and cap (Hobby Hat); olive drab wool coat, two olive-drab shirts and olive-drab raincoat with attached hood

Summer ensemble - Two cotton, khaki skirts, jacket and cap (Hobby Hat) two, fitted, long-sleeved khaki shirts with khaki necktie.

Accessories included: russet oxfords with a one-and-a-half inch heel, russet leather handbag with a shoulder strap, tennis shoes, galoshes, khaki-colored nylon-tricot underwear (bra, panties, girdle, slip); cotton and flannel pajamas; cotton and rayon stockings in "suntan" shade; cotton lisle anklets in a khaki shade; and a green seersucker belted dress for exercise, otherwise known as a "middie".



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All of these khaki and olive-drab items, came about after much high-level discussion between the Army Quartermaster General, Director Hobby and a number of fashion designers. The Army had to scramble and quickly put together clothing ensembles in fairly massive quantities that would be practical, appear lady-like yet make the women look like they were part of the Army. Sketches from well-known designers were considered: Mangone, Maria Krum, Russell Patterson, Helen Cookman, Mary Sampson, were among the fashion elite who pieced together the various components of the WAAC wardrobe. The jacket was a design team group effort, incorporating individual design features from a number of the designers into one group product. Other design features, such as belts, nearly started a war between the aesthetically minded designers and the practical, no-nonsense, not used to women and their sensibilities-minded Army officials. Director Hobby was able to quell the heated clothing arguments and a final and complete ensemble was off to the cutting room in the spring of 1942 and ready for the first flurry of recruits by that summer.

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That heavy and complete, though oversized, ensemble was now hanging from Marjorie's left shoulder and she was teetering under the barracks bag's weight. By the time she threw the bag onto her bunkroom floor she was ready to

crumble from exhaustion, both physical and mental. She hadn't a moment to herself, just to catch her breath before another task was ordered down the WAAC pipeline. As she folded the clothing carefully and placed olive-drab and khaki into her chest of drawers, she thought back to just yesterday morning and paging through her magazine drooling over the spring fashions coming up. Khaki wasn't the color featured in Vogue, but that was what she had to slip into quickly and report back to the "classroom" at 1500 sharp. They even tell time differently in the Army, she thought.

"How in the world do you tie a necktie?" came a plea from one of her roommates, Beverly, a tall and statuesque blonde who looked better suited to the posh Princess Iskena premises as a sunbather in one of those new dreamy two pieces rather than trudging around the resort in WAAC khaki. Marjorie was wondering the same thing. She had seen William spin his hands around and flip one end of silk around another and feed a longer end, or was it the shorter end, into some sort of a constructed loop, but never had she dreamed of doing it herself. Some sort of horn sounded and all of the recruits scrambled, ties awry, shoes untied, jackets unbuttoned as they hightailed it down to their first official meeting as WAACs. Marjorie's darn khaki shirt was a size 36, three sizes too big, so she had to cuff the sleeves three inches, jamming the excess into her jacket sleeves as she ran down the long wooden-floored corridor, doors banging all the way, to the sweeping staircase, now filled with nervous recruits in various stages

of dress adjusting, and her first meeting as an “official” WAAC.

The indoctrination started immediately in what must have been meant as the hotel’s ballroom, probably once swinging with vacationing couples hitting the dance floor, now converted to a WAAC assembly room. Marjorie pictured some of her favorite bands: Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Harry James Orchestra, or even better, Duke Ellington swinging with that nifty tune, “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore” and she and Farley trying out some of the latest Lindy Hop moves. Instead, here she sat, out of breath, with 150 green auxiliaries flushed with excitement and disheveled in appearance. That was the last time things would be so aflutter. From this point forward it would be rules and regulations and spit polish and the Army way, including the proper way to tie a necktie. Each recruit was handed a Handbook for the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, the opening page of which read, “Why are you here?” The very question that Marjorie was continually asking herself. “Why am I here wearing a man’s tie and a shirt three sizes too big with no privacy, no friend and no time,” she thought. A podium was set up on the small stage and standing at it was the same officer she had seen at the buses. The buzz in the room stopped immediately when the officer shouted out, “Attention,” in a long and drawn out way. It worked. They were all giving her their full attention. “Ladies,” she called, “My name is Captain LaBorde and I am your commanding officer during this phase of your training. Over the next four weeks you will learn the Army way. Why are you here, why are we here?” she

asked. She grabbed the manual they all received and starting reading from the front of the book. Marjorie thought she looked a little nervous and flushed. She heard that all of the officers here were newly trained from Ft. Des Moines and brought here to train Marjorie's fellow 150's. She decided that becoming an officer might be the ticket, just like she and Marian had talked about. Captain Alexander....

“The purpose of the Corps is to make available the knowledge, skill and special training of the women of our Nation for the war effort. You are part of that Corps now. We know you can do a good job but the Army has to teach you a few things first. While you're here, you'll learn how to salute, how to march, how to handle a gas mask, how to make a bed the Army way and how to look like a soldier.” Marjorie took a long hard gulp when she heard the words “gas mask”. She wondered where in the world the gas would come from and why would she be around this gas. Marching and saluting she expected along with ship shape everything. But poisonous gas? “Beverly, did you hear that?” repeated Marjorie, whispering to her new roommate sitting to her left. “Thinking about gas masks gives me the heebie jeebies.” Beverly just smiled and nodded. Marjorie knew that Beverly wouldn't be long for the service. She could tell she was plotting her escape.

The captain outlined the rigorous daily training regimen and introduced the other officers and drill instructors, outlining the next four weeks of training to the

new recruits. Maybe Daytona was all about the beach, the ocean and palm trees, but the rigorous training schedule would leave little time for frolicking on the beach. Nope, the Army had different plans for these recruits and Marjorie was beginning to glean how challenging the Army was going to be while she tried to downplay the gas mask part. Six hours a day would be devoted to courses in: military sanitation and first aid, military customs and courtesy, map reading, defense against chemical attack, hence the gas mask instruction; defense against air attack, interior guard, company administration, supply, mess management and military hygiene. She could also do without lectures on sanitation and hygiene, as she was very familiar with toilet cleaning, kitchen scrubbing and floor mopping from home. With the Alexander herd running rampant through the household, Marjorie, alongside all of her sisters, her brother always managed to wriggle free, had her share of nasty and odious chores ladled out by Helen each week. But, the thought of cleaning up after 150 women gave her a deep chill down her neck and a burning unease in her stomach. Mess management was something else she wanted to steer clear of. She knew the word “mess” was somehow attached to the kitchen and that was another red flag being hoisted. Marjorie sensed that many of the “subjects” covered in the daily classroom lectures were readying the recruits for the work they would do while in the Army. There were already rumors about where they would be stationed, a place called Hendricks Field, an Army Air B17 training center in Sebring, Florida.

In addition to the six hours of classroom time, they could look forward to one hour daily of physical fitness and another hour of marching.

Captain LeBorde, impeccably dressed in a stunning amount of khaki droned on about other items of orientation. It was a showstopper when she announced that reveille, the daily bugle call to rise and shine, would take place at 5:30 a.m. A palpable breathlessness hushed over the seated rows of recruits. Marjorie thought if ever there was an appropriate time to curse, which ladies never did, this might have been the time. “Darn that Marian,” she thought. “OK, so she has TB, but at least she’s in her own bed resting without a bugle blowing in her ears at a time when you should be dreaming about some dreamboat and not this darn old war.” Marjorie was used to rising early to catch the El and scoot on into work by 9 a.m. but rising at 5:30 was, as her daddy said, a different ballgame. Plus, weekends were just like any other day. There were no weekends. With only four weeks to learn the in’s and out’s of being a WAAC, training was all day, every day. After dinner the girls were expected to study the Army Handbook for one hour, followed by evening sessions devoted to the washing and pressing of uniforms and the shining of shoes. A collective sigh filled the room. Beverly looked bored and inattentive while Marjorie felt... shell-shocked might be the word to describe it. Her only hope was that these khaki commanders were trying to scare the girls initially and would quickly relax the reigns.

“I know this is a lot to take in,” said the Commander just before dismissing the recruits to their first Army dinner, “but starting tomorrow things will start to make more sense. Before I dismiss you ladies to dinner, does anyone of you know how to play the piano, “ the question rang throughout the ballroom and all eyes landed on Marjorie as she stood up and announced proudly, “Yes, ma’am I play the piano.”

“Great, there’s a need for a Chaplain’s Assistant to play the organ. What’s your name private?”

“I’m Marjorie Alexander, ma’am, but I don’t know how to play the organ,” she said somewhat dejectedly.

“You’ll learn,” the Commander said crisply. That was the end of the conversation.

During dinner there was much speculative chatter on what jobs would be assigned everyone following the basic training. Everyone agreed that Marjorie was one lucky girl to be Chaplain’s Assistant, given some of the other jobs that would all-too-soon be assigned to this large sisterhood of the khaki.

“I’d like to be in the motor pool,” announced Violet, Marjorie’s other roommate who barely made the height standard of five feet. Marjorie wondered how she’d be able to see over the steering wheel, she was so tiny. Marjorie was used to tiny women in her family, in fact she always thought of her sisters as the “Little Women” like in Louisa May Alcott’s novel. Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy were

Louisa May Alcott's Little Women but Marjorie's sisters Frances, Annabel and Josephine were truly "little" women, all less than five feet tall and would tip the scales at less than 90 pounds apiece. At least Jeanne was a little taller and starting to fill out some. Always feeling somewhat horsey in the Alexander girl line-up probably accounts for why Marjorie loved vigorous exercise and despised the thought of deposits of fat creeping up on her body. She could at least look forward to the part of the day that included the exercise. Maybe even the marching wouldn't be so bad. The first taste of Army food and the ambience of an Army mess were uninspiring but acceptable. Marjorie was used to cafeteria style from the electric company lunchroom, so the concept of a line and a tray with separate compartments for each food group was very familiar. Even sitting with 150 other girls seemed somewhat familiar from the lunchroom. But there she had a best friend and here she didn't. That shiver of aloneness was creeping up into her psyche and she was determined to shake it off. She could barely get through dinner without nodding off. Good that lights were out at 9:30 p.m. It had been the longest day of Marjorie's life and she was ready to turn in.

The 5:30 a.m. wake up call came in the form of a bugle call outside, which while noticeable was not an alarming intrusion, but the loud knock on the door and a resonating, "Rise and shine, you've got a half hour ladies until fall-in." rolled her out of bed quickly, on this her first full day of being a WAAC. Beverly complained at lights out the night before about pretty much everything: the trip on



the train, the uniform, the food, the bed, you name it and she was ready with a moan and groan. Violet, her other roommate seemed just the opposite, after just a mere few hours in a uniform too big for her slight frame she declared herself an army WAAC for life. Marjorie wasn't keen on the early morning rise but was willing to put on a good face on this, their first fully WAAC day. She hoped Beverly wasn't going to keep up this constant barrage of complaining and eye rolling. Stoicism was part of Marjorie's DNA and sucking it up and putting on a good face was what was expected of Alexanders. After all, they were taught by the master, mother Helen. "Beverly, you better get up fast and put on the exercise clothes, those seersucker numbers," Marjorie warned as Beverly continued to lollygag on her cot. "And don't forget the bloomers or your uniform won't be complete and you'll get in trouble," were her parting words as she tore out of the room eager to get started and be right on time. Helen insisted her girls be on time and Marjorie was a stickler.

Marching and calisthenics started at 6 a.m. and Marjorie was looking forward to the exercise despite the ungodly hour. The recruits were as green as their seersucker dresses but they were quickly taught how to line up and how a lady was expected to march, Army style. Marjorie liked the sound of the shoes crunching, nearly in unison, over the gravel drive as she and her 150 fellow privates, 10 girls wide and 15 rows deep marched for a full hour up and down the long, sweeping hotel drive clear out to the flagpole and back again. Their drill

instructors, one on each side of the formation, that's what Marjorie discovered the orderly line was called, barked out the marching orders in four/four time, "Hup, two, three, four". Only those privates who had no sense of rhythm found the beat hard to follow. Once the semblance of unison was achieved the tall Drill Instructor (D.I.) with the short arms and squinty eyes, named Sargent O'Donnell started singing to the 4/4 beat and had the rest of the crew join in. By their third or fourth rotation around the flagpole the Army song was synchronized with the marching and gave Marjorie a slight chill of pride.

"You're in the Army now, you're not behind a plow, you'll never get rich a diggin' a ditch, you're in the Army now." This was the first marching song Marjorie learned, which cut a powerful sound with 150 recruits strong singing through a usually quiet 6:00 a.m. Daytona dawn. Other songs would trickle into the marching repertoire. Her favorite went like this:

Over hill, over dale, As we hit the dusty trail,

And those caissons go rolling along.

In and out, hear them shout,

"Counter march and right about"

And the caissons go rolling along.

Then it's Hi! Hi! Hee! In the Field Artillery

Shout out your numbers loud and strong,

Wher'er you go, you will always know,

That those caissons go rolling along.”

She wondered what caissons were but she loved the tune and the formation and the unison. This was what would be Marjorie’s favorite time of the day during her basic training stint. Unlike her roommate, Beverly, she felt right at home with a strong ration of exercise, what with all of the tennis she had played with her hometown beaux. She was also the goalie of the Upper Darby High School field hockey team in her senior year and developed a competitive bent out of sheer self-protection. As she had explained to her friend Marian, back home, “You wouldn’t be so ladylike if you had a bunch of girls coming at you with sticks raised.” Marjorie also loved music and in addition to keeping up her mother’s dream of having a piano-playing daughter she secretly held the dream of being a big band singer. Weekends at home had been devoted to the Alexander family radio, a big Philco that was installed in the front parlor and was William’s pride and joy. WFIL 550 Philadelphia is what she would quickly turn the dial to when her parents were done listening to President Roosevelt’s weekly Fireside Chats on Sundays. A couple of clicks on the dial and she would enter the sanctified air of big band swing music a la Tommy Dorsey. She loved Jo Stafford and the Pied Pipers and was a devoted fan of Dinah Shore and her new radio show, “Call To Music.” She and Jeanne would spend what seemed like hours prancing around the porch pretending they were Pied Pipers, holding a wooden spoon for a microphone and belting out the latest tunes. Not that singing to “The Caissons

Go Rolling Along” was something Jo Stafford would lilt about but still, it was singing and Marjorie could exercise her fairly competent set of soprano pipes. The marching was followed by calisthenics: push-ups, jumping jacks, burpees, in-place running. The recruits spread out over the extensive lawn in front of the Princess Issena, double arms distance apart and followed the orders barked out by the DI. She imagined herself training for Wimbledon like Alice Marble or Helen Wills Moody, the top American players. Of course, Wimbledon was dark since 1939 when Alice Marble beat Kaye Stammers Bullitt from Great Britain, 6-2, 6-0. Straight sets, not bad she thought. She and Farley had listened to that match on the Philco, but now the Germans were strafing the city of London and its outskirts, including Wimbledon and may have destroyed center court. This made her think of Farley who was over in the European Theatre somewhere. “Gosh I wish this darn war were over,” she thought even though she was just getting her Army legs and finishing her last set of jumping jacks.

Marjorie quickly fell into this new a.m. routine of bugle sounding, punctuated by Beverly bellyaching, a quick jump into seersucker, marching and calisthenics. This was always followed by breakfast a la formation. Each transition to a new chapter of the day was traveled to in formation thus practicing marching and unified movement. The “mess”, formerly known as the Princess Issena dining room, was noisy and filled with green seer-suckered twenty somethings, like a sea of grasshoppers, all yakking about Army life and cheeks

flush from formation. Marjorie thought the breakfasts were the best meal of the day always featuring eggs, bacon, oatmeal, grits, orange juice, toast and loads of fresh-roasted coffee. As many cups as a girl could consume. It was always chilly outside during the dawn exercises, being in the thick of the Florida winter, nothing like the Pennsylvania cold but it still could raise a shiver, and the cool down march to the mess was rewarded by the blissful scent of percolating java, which would hit her olfactory like a ton of bricks, as her mama always said. She was always reminded of that radio hit by The Ink Spots a couple of years back; Java Jive. The lyrics went something like this:

I love coffee, I love tea  
I love the java jive and it loves me  
Coffee and tea and the java and me  
A cup, a cup, a cup, a cup, a cup.

She loved the Ink Spots, a group of four who could harmonize like nobody's business. Their latest hit was, "Don't Get Around Much Anymore." She had heard about USO tours where entertainers would travel around to various bases entertaining the soldiers. Wouldn't it be swell if the Ink Spots came to her base sometime? Maybe she could even accompany them on the organ that she didn't yet know how to play.

"Marjie, what are you dreaming about now?" Beverly asked as she squeezed in between her and that girl with the red curly hair. Before she could

share her Ink Spot fantasy Beverly shared her own, "I'll tell you what I'm thinking; how fast can I bounce out of this joint and get back home? I've had it to here with marching and saluting." All the girls at the table just shook their heads at Beverly, just like a 45 stuck on a note. Marjorie didn't really even mind Beverly's antics anymore, she just became another part of her daily routine, like the bugle call.

Marjorie, being away from home for the very first time, really started enjoying the new found independence from her parents and felt proud of being a WAAC but was awfully blue about being without a real buddy. That's the one thing that made her less than exuberant about WAAC life. Sure, she liked a lot of the girls just fine, but she hadn't really clicked with anyone that she felt she could share things with like she could with the M.I.A. Marian. "Gosh, if Marian were here things would be just about peachy", she thought. There were days, following the finish of classes, where she would wander down to the beach and just sit there, alone or walk down the usually deserted shoreline toward town, looking out at the Atlantic horizon and feeling sad but not feeling the right to even be sad. She thought of all those boys overseas fighting, some coming back broken or worse and she knew she had to perk herself up. One evening, following mess, she headed down to the beach feeling a little out of sorts and thinking a barefoot walk dodging the wash of the tide might be just the thing to brighten her spirits. As she finished freeing her feet from the Army shoes and dug her toes into the white Daytona sand, she noticed a convoy of what she

imagined to be battleships, slipping just inside the horizon and heading east toward what was now referred to as the European Theatre. Thinking of Farley over there somewhere, beyond the Daytona sunset made the war seem much more real than being at the Princess Iskena. High time she wrote Farley another letter. So much had happened since she last saw him. She started composing a letter in her head as she followed the shoreline toward town.

*...Dear Farley, or maybe I shouldn't put "dear" or he might think I'm thinking he is my dear, which I don't really want him to think. Hmm, maybe I should just put a plain and simple, "Farley." How can I even think this way? I'm such a mean person. What if Farley is lying in some ditch in France or Germany still all stuck on me, still carrying the torch and I'm fretting over calling him "dear" in a letter I haven't even written? I wish Jo were around to talk to. She's really good with problems like this, not like it's a huge problem since Farley's not even here but I feel sorta disloyal to him. Yeah, if Jo were here to talk to I'd feel better, like the time I asked her if I was pregnant because I got stuck sitting on Farley's lap when a bunch of us went to the movies in Dee's car. Boy, did she get a laugh out of that. But how was I supposed to know how sex worked, mom never said anything except about never sitting on a boy's lap. How could she do that? I would never say something like that to my daughter, if I ever have a daughter. I sure do miss Jo, more than Farley. I can't believe she's married now and living out in California. I know what I'll do; I'll save some of my pay every month and*

*buy her a swell wedding present, something that she wouldn't get for herself. I should really write her a letter too. So that's two letters, actually three because I have to write Mother. Oh, horsefeathers, I'd better get back. Gosh, the water's getting kinda chilly...*

She had walked just to the edge of town when she turned around and headed back for the Issena, her thoughts chattering away in her head made her forget about the time and the fact that the sunset was in its last throes. Maybe she could go into town tonight with some of the gals, just to put a spring in her step, although most of the forays into town usually ended up with lots of drinking and carrying on, plus the 2.5 mile taxi ride to town was 25 cents, which seemed like highway robbery to her. The good thing about town was there was a movie house and she got to see "My Friend Flicka", a real humdinger and "This Land Is Mine", starring George Sanders. She wasn't too fond of that movie because the star played a drunk and she thought there was too much drinking going on all around her. She figured three quarters of the recruits she was with smoked and at least half or more were regular drinkers. Beverly thought she was a bit of a prude. "Margie, loosen your tie a little," she would always say with that big, lazy smile she was quick to give. Marjorie didn't mind Beverly's chiding and knew she was no prude, she just had high standards and hanging out and drinking with "wolves" in Daytona, whether they were flyboys or not, wasn't her cup of tea. Plus the townsfolk didn't seem all that keen on the WAACs, from what she had noticed.



All of the girls were talking about rumors swirling about the WAACs and how many were getting pregnant from “servicing” the enlisted men. One night at dinner the commander officer had to address some of these unfounded rumors. “Ladies, there is some nasty gossip coming straight out of Washington about the WAACs and I want you to know that Colonel Hobby is addressing these unfounded rumors and has assured me she will put an end to them.” Commander LaBorde didn’t have to say what the rumors were, all the girls knew and Marjorie sensed that the townspeople in Daytona knew, as well. She just hoped that Colonel Hobby got busy dispelling them so she didn’t have to face anymore furtive sidelong glances from the greasy-haired ticket seller at the Bijou or that nasty woman at the soda parlor, acting all grumpy and bothered every time Marjorie ordered a root beer float. “Gosh, all we’re doing is serving our country, just like the boys are. Who’s pitching a fit about that?” Marjorie piped in following the Commander’s announcement. She thought maybe the move to the Army Air Force Base, Hendricks Field would make things better since all 150 of them would be working at real Army jobs and not just marching around a flagpole and drinking with the boys in town. At least she would be playing the organ rather than learning about mess management or military hygiene.

The weeks of basic training at the Princess became very routine, starting with Beverly’s groaning and eye rolling at daybreak and finishing with complete exhaustion by the time lights out rolled along. Marjorie was something of a night

owl back at home and would always stay up late with her nose in either a book or a fashion magazine. But during basic training she was ready to turn in by 9:30 p.m. and sometimes could barely gather up the steam to brush her teeth and comb out her hair. It seemed like no sooner had she closed her eyes than that darn bugle would sound and the daily commands would run in singsong fashion in her brain: Attention, at ease, at rest, present arms, order arms, left face, right face, mark time, forward march, halt. She wondered who in the world came up with these Army terms. But, they were important to learn, along with all of the saluting and especially Army protocol. Any mistakes and you might get a “gig”. Kind of a funny word itself, Marjorie thought. The only “gig” she had heard of was Gig Young, a dreamy actor whose new movie starring Bette Davis called “Old Acquaintance” was just coming out at the Mastbaum Theatre in Philadelphia just when she was shipping out. She had only been to the Mastbaum once just last September with Farley to see two of her favorite actresses, Ginger Rogers and Rita Hayworth, in “Tales of Manhattan.” It was a swell movie but more memorable than the movie was the theatre. She and Farley walked through the grand foyer, loaded with tapestries and fountains with marble floors and statues, thinking that Versailles must look just like this. Now she had missed that latest movie at the Mastbaum and unfortunately had picked up a different sort of “gig” for the most itsy bitsy violation. Nobody wanted a “gig”, which was a black mark on your record. Too many of those could sink a girl’s chances on getting a

promotion.

Marjorie's only gig at basic training came during room inspection, which was done randomly but frequently. She found out the hard way that the officers took room inspection very seriously. Marjorie's big mistake was having a couple of hangers in her closet turned the wrong way. She and Violet and Beverly stood at attention as an entourage of commanding officers; the Company Commander, the executive officer, supply officer, platoon officer and 1<sup>st</sup>. sergeant looked around the room for the slightest item askew. She couldn't believe they actually bounced a coin off the bed to determine if the sheets were tight enough. Marjorie excelled at orderliness, which was expected at home, what with so many girls sharing so many quarters. It was really a matter of staying on top of one's assets and fiercely guarding them from sibling snitching. "Private Alexander, your hangers are out of order," came the supply officer's voice as she rummaged around Marjorie's closet. On the inside of the closet door she had taped a picture of Farley and a family photograph she had brought from home. The portrait of the Alexanders was always front and center when she was dressing in the morning and gave her a sense of comfort. The five girls were in their Sunday best, sitting at the feet of William, who rested in his worn brown leather chair that belonged to him and his paper. Helen sat on one arm of the chair and Bill on the other. Although the pictures weren't exactly protocol, it was commonly practiced and overlooked by curious and condemning eyes. Beverly was a complete disaster

during inspection, which reflected her overall attitude about the Army in general. Marjorie almost admired her plucky spirit and defiant attitude since she had never even breathed a note of challenge to any authority figures, most of all her parents. Everyone knew that Beverly didn't give a hoot about the Army and only joined to meet and marry a fly-boy, of which there would be plenty at their next stop. Beverly's bed covers were sloppy, a stray tennis shoe was under her bed and her necktie was slightly askew. The supply officer, Sargent Trimble would write down the violations in a small notepad, referred to as the "gig book" and she was usually busy jotting things down when all eyes were on Beverly. Violet fared much better because she was determined to be a "lifer" and always wanted to impress the officers. Marjorie thought her a bit of a teacher's pet type.

She wasn't sorry about leaving Daytona Beach and the Princess Issena since basic training was getting a little stale and she felt ready and prepared to handle regular Army life. Of course, this meant moving to a base with men, real men in addition to the entourage of the 150 newly trained fellow recruits. The barracks bags were packed, the buses boarded and following a month at the seashore the recruits now headed to Hendricks Field for their real Army job. That meant heading southwest to Sebring, Florida.

The 140-mile bus ride from Daytona Beach to Sebring was on a gloomy March day that made it easier to leave the seashore behind. The long-necked palm trees quickly disappeared as the army green vehicles lumbered along

Highway 17 doing the prescribed 35 miles per hour. “Gosh, at this rate we won’t be there for hours,” Marjorie said to Beverly, who was busy filing her nails with an emery board, rather carefully between the intermittent bumps. In fact the bus ride did take four hours, making just one stop in some hick town with the funniest name, Kissimmee. Everyone got a good laugh over that in addition to a sprinkling of dirty jokes that circulated snickers and sneers through the bus. Marjorie had a window seat and every now and then would stick her head out of the bus window and breathe in the sweet smell of citrus. The straight flat terrain took the recruits through mile after mile of the famous Florida orange groves. Marjorie wondered if spring would come early this year. For some reason on February 2<sup>nd</sup> Punxsutawney Phil, the beloved groundhog and the pride of all Pennsylvanians, didn’t show up and Groundhog Day was cancelled. She wasn’t paying much attention to the event this year, due to the fact she was in the throes of getting ready to shove off for the Army, but it did cause quite a stir up in Gobbler’s Knob, where the Prognosticator of prognosticators lived. So she wasn’t sure if it would be an early spring this year, but it sure smelled like spring. She hoped the miles and miles of oranges meant that Hendricks Field would supply an endless source of orange juice, which Marjorie loved but rarely received since it was considered a luxury in the Alexander household and only offered sparingly. “I could drink a gallon of orange juice without batting an eyelash,” Marjorie announced to her fellow privates. Everybody on the bus starting laughing when

Beverly added something about mixing up a gallon of screwdrivers. Marjorie, not being a drinker didn't know what a screwdriver was but didn't want to look like a prude and didn't bother asking Beverly.

Marjorie spotted a sign that announced "Welcome to Sebring, Florida, "The City on the Circle," and announced it to the girls, knowing they were getting close to their destination. Rumbling through the city center, which wasn't really much to look at other than another tiny but tidy town, the bus came to an odd circular thoroughfare from which radiated a number of streets, which Marjorie figured was the "circle" in this town's moniker. A park with large canopied trees filled the center of this circular roundabout. Everyone going through Sebring had to pass through this circle and be exposed to all that downtown had to offer. Marjorie quickly assessed the storefronts and took note of the women's wear store. She sure would give her eyeteeth to slip her feet into a pair of heels. Of course, shoes were on the rationing list too. She sighed, looking down at the plain and sensible brown oxfords that were spit polished to a gleam. The bus was buzzing with anticipation as the girls straightened their ties and laced up their shoes, nervous but excited to arrive at a real Army Air base, just a few miles past the circle.

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Hendricks Field was the vision of Sebring's city fathers who saw that an Army Air Field would bring vitality to their City on the Circle. The announcement

that the vision would become a reality ran in the Sebring American Newspaper on Thursday, June 12, 1941 and was headlined with, "Sebring New U.S. Defense Unit". The article opened, "With a blast of the Sebring fire whistle early this morning, residents of Sebring sent up a cheer that sounded like an early victory against Adolph Hitler. The blast, however, was a response to a flock of telegrams sent to Sebring by Congressman J. Hardin Peterson." The article went on to describe the plans for this new airfield. Built on 9,200 acres of woodland that the City of Sebring leased to the government for \$1 per year, construction of the base started in July of 1941. While the infrastructure and out buildings were being constructed the first soldiers, who arrived on September 5, 1941 initially occupied tents on the shore of Lake Jackson, just at the edge of town, until their barracks were completed in December. By the time Marjorie and the girls arrived the base had become a self-supporting city complete with paved streets, water and sewage systems, frame buildings, a hangar, control tower, two-story barracks and four concrete runways, and a recreation center, a PX, hospital and post office. And, of course, a chapel. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the base became fully operational and by January 1943, just as Marjorie was signing her civilian life away, at least temporarily, it became a B-17 training school. By the time the Liberty Belles arrived in the spring of '43 there were 120 B-17's assigned to the field and over 2,000 Army Air soldiers.

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The buses pulled into Hendricks Field in mid-afternoon. Marjorie was impressed with the size of the place. As the bus rolled past the gate with an OK by the sentry on duty the first thing she noticed were all of the two-storied buildings looking new and painted a drab olive, as drab as the clothes in her barracks bag. There were two very tall structures that stood out, one looking like a water tower, standing on wooden scaffolding topped with what looked like a large stainless steel bucket, and the other looked like an airport control tower, which Marjorie figured was an important place to keep straight all the comings and goings of the planes. Marjorie thought it was a little odd that she'd never traveled on a plane before and here she was now, completely surrounded by planes and boys who were learning to fly them. A few jeeps, filled with flyboys, passed the bus with the men's necks doing a quick 180 to take in the buses now all dotted with Hobby Hats hanging out the windows. The whistles were low but present. This was the first time this base would play host to a bevy of women and one of the few bases that had actually requested the helping hand of the WAACs.

The girls were excitedly assessing the "looks" of the boys in the jeep when the staff sergeant interrupted their revelry. "Ladies, listen up, we're coming up to your barracks, so get yourselves and your stuff together," she said as the bus rounded a corner and pulled up in front of a two-story building, identified with a numbered signpost #42. Right next to number 42 was another large square building that was identified as "Community Room". The recruits, looking slightly



freshened up, due to quick fluffs and puffs from the steadfast compacts that no girl was ever parted from, exited the bus under the weight of their heavy barracks bags and went straightaway into the meeting room. They all knew that this was the hour when they would find out what the heck they would be doing here at Hendricks Field. That is, everyone except Marjorie who was already nervous at the prospect of having to transfer her piano skills to an organ. She did enjoy hearing the organ played at the Church of St. John, lower Merion, where the Alexanders attended Sunday service and Marjorie learned unabashedly to belt out tunes like “The Old Rugged Cross” along with the rest of the congregation, accompanied by Mrs. Dross on the church organ. Playing the organ herself with all of its pedals and stoppers was another matter entirely. The Meeting Room was large enough to hold the Liberty Belles, with plenty of room to spare and high enough ceilings to bounce around the cacophonous sound of nervous laughter, giggling, and chit-chat of 150 exited and anxious privates. At the front of the large room were a few chairs set up next to a podium for the commanding officers who promptly marched in to the call of “Tention” sounded off by Lt. Irene LaBorde, a keepsake from the Princess Issena. The WAACs immediately jumped up out of their chairs and stood at attention ramrod straight as a tall dark-haired officer stepped up to the podium. “At ease men, sorry I mean women, ladies,” stumbled the Commanding Officer of the base who introduced himself as Colonel Carl B. McDaniel. Marjorie wasn’t alone in getting a kick out of his

introductory remarks. As she looked around her most of the women were smiling as they sat back down in their chairs intent to give the Colonel a good impression. Clearly the Colonel wasn't used to having to address a large group of women. Marjorie didn't know what all the ribbons and medals and stripes meant but the Colonel sure was sporting a rainbow assortment. Marjorie had heard all of the ribbons referred to as "Fruit Salad", which she thought an odd name but his uniform certainly had a lot of fruit in the salad. Colonel McDaniel was a flyer himself and introduced the WAACs to Hendricks Field focusing on the planes he called the Flying Fortresses, otherwise known as B-17's.

"It is with a great sense of pride that I welcome you to Hendricks Field, home of the 80<sup>th</sup>. Bomber Squadron, the B17 Flying Fortress and the first Combat Crew Training School, " he said his chest puffing and the fruit salad billowing. "Our job here is to train entire crews: pilots, copilots, navigators, bombardiers, aerial engineers, radio operators and gunners for the hard work in the days ahead. You are all part of this team and your work here is essential to our overall mission. I welcome you to Hendricks Field and I thank you for your service to your country. Captain LeBorde here will fill you in on your jobs and the daily schedule here at Hendricks Field as well as barracks assignments."

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The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress that the Colonel was busting his buttons over was a four-engine heavy bomber aircraft developed in the mid-1930's by the

Boeing Co. for the United States Army Air Corps. While its design went through a number of different iterations during its development phase it was ready for use and first employed in WWII in 1941 by the Eighth Air fleet and the RAF flying out of England. With a range of 1,300 miles and a payload of 6000 pounds, the Fort could fly over German soil from its English bases and do considerable damage to the German industrial and military targets. Sporting eleven machine guns in flexible positions or turrets, this heavily armed fighting machine lived up to its name, "The Flying Fortress. The crew required to operate the Fort included: Pilot, Co-Pilot, Navigator, Bombardier, Flight Engineer (top turret gunner), Radio Operator, two Waist Gunners, Tail Gunner and Ball Turret Gunner. All received their training at Hendricks Field.

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Before the Colonel left he put in a pitch for the Hendricks Hi-Life monthly newspaper, leaving a large stack of the March issue to help acquaint the women with the base goings-on. He then high-tailed it out and Captain LeBorde and her staff of two sergeants had the task of delivering the news of job assignments, barracks assignments, daily schedule and the list of do's and don'ts on base, especially now that the genders were on a collision course. Reveille was still at the ungodly hour of 5:30 a.m. which no longer brought on eye-rolling since the recruits were now accustomed to rising in the dark, followed by the familiar marching and formation work, breakfast, and off to work. What was on

everyone's minds was the question of jobs. The girls were called up in alphabetical order to receive barracks assignment, job assignment, and a list of the camp rules. Marjorie was among the first few called, given her last name, and received her barracks and bed assignment along with the name of her supervisor and where to report first thing Monday. The Chapel. She went to grab her barracks bag, snagged a Hi-Life newspaper that the Colonel was crowing about and waited at the back of the room to compare notes with her comrades. Beverly was in a different barracks building, so they would no longer be roomies. She was relieved to be assigned as a secretary to one of the commanding officers. "I was sweating getting assigned to the kitchen," Beverly said. "That would have been the last straw. I think I can handle taking dictation for some good looking flyboy."

"Why Beverly, that's about the most positive thing I've heard you say. Maybe you'll be a WAAC after all," said Marjorie, somewhat relieved that she would have a change in roommate scenery. The very next building was her barracks, #43. There were two buildings assigned to the women, which were adjacent to one another. Each barracks had two stories and held around 36 beds on each floor. Marjorie went up the stairs of #43 and found a long narrow room with beds lined up like dominoes. There were no closets or other Princess Issena accoutrements. This was a bunkhouse, plain and simple, but without the bunk beds. Two lines of 18 beds faced each other with a long wooden walkway in

between. The beds were steel framed with an olive army blanket covering the top and tucked under the foot of the beds were what was referred to as footlockers, which would entertain the clothing and personal items in lieu of a closet. The girls had been taught how to fold their clothes, just so, in order to keep the uniforms crisp and unwrinkled with lines in just the right places.

“Ruth, did you happen to see a bathroom?” Marjorie inquired of her friend who was lugging her barrack’s bag to the very end of the bunkroom. “It’s downstairs on the first floor Marjie, she answered. “Wait till you get a gander of it. There’s no privacy at all,” she said. Marjorie was used to one bathroom in the Alexander household and with four sisters and a brother, privacy was a privilege. But, with 38 girls on her floor and another 38 on the first floor, that was 76 girls sharing bathroom quarters. Marjorie shuddered at the thought. Down the long wooden floor at the end of the room was a separate room, almost an alcove, that contained two beds. She noticed that Ruth disappeared into that room, followed by Ellen Harden. She wondered how they lucked out with near private accommodations. At least the giant bunkroom had great natural light with large windows open to the Sebring sky, which was a Robin’s egg blue on this, their first day of “real” Army life.

The girls started moseying in and flopping on various beds, throwing down their barracks bags and groaning about the accommodations. Marjorie’s bed was dead center in the middle of the room, marked by a #14 scratched into the

bedframe. Rosie O'Malley threw her bag on one of the beds next to Marjorie and dropped down on top, caring not a hoot about the condition of her clothes. Rosie was a tall gangly drink of water, thought Marjorie. She had to be at least 5'10" and had a mass of bright red hair. Marjorie had remembered her from the Princess Issena because she had arrived late one night from some Daytona bar, drunk as a skunk and was written up. Now, here she was a bedmate. "Hi, I'm Marjorie," she introduced herself. "Hi Marjie, you don't mind if I call you Marjie, do you? She asked. Marjorie nodded an affirmative. "You're the lucky girl who plays the piano and doesn't know how to play the organ," she smiled. "Thank God I got assigned to the motor pool, probably because I'm so darn tall and can get in and out of those damn jeeps. No kitchen duty for this gal." Marjorie agreed that motor pool was much preferable to cooking duty. She told Rosie that she should organize her belongings in the footlocker and went about doing it herself. Out of the barracks bag came her collection of olive drab and khaki togs, which had to be placed in a very particular way in the locker in order to pass inspection, which were to be held frequently and randomly.

The bed on the other side of hers was still vacant and she wondered if it would stay that way. The girls had one hour to kill before dinner and Marjorie, quick to put her things in order, lay down on the bed with her copy of the Hi-Life and amidst the barracks buzz she acquainted herself with life on base. She read to Rosie some of the more funny tidbits that were included in the base

newspaper as Rosie was struggling to stuff her things in some semblance of order under her bed. Marjorie loved to read out loud, something she picked up from having a younger sister. She always read stories to Jeanne and got accustomed to sharing magazine articles or book excerpts she liked with the entire family, sometimes to their chagrin. She just couldn't help herself. And this moment was yet another opportunity to read out loud and impart base trivia to Rosie, a willing listener. "Rosie, the base actually has a "mascot" named Sgt. H.F. Bombird and his assistant, Pvt. Yardbird Yardbird. I wonder what they do. They sound like cartoon characters. Do you think they are real people?" she wondered out loud, not really expecting an answer. "Honeybee," came Rosie's response. "Of course those aren't real people. Who in their right minds would name a child Yardbird Yardbird?" She supposed Rosie was right. She sighed and read on, discovering that the base's sports teams were called the Hendricks Bombirds. She wondered if they ever competed in tennis tournaments with other bases, or if there were even any tennis courts at all on base. The Lewis brothers had entered Marjorie into a grass court tournament at their club and she relished the competition, although she didn't make it to the finals. Of course, it was her first time. She would love playing for the Bombirds.

"Rosie, listen to this," she said as she reeled off a list of movies that were playing on base for the next week; Sunday and Monday featured, "Young and Willing", starring William Holden and Susan Hayward; Wednesday and Thursday

was, "They Got Me Covered", with two of her favorites, Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour. "Let's go see this one on Friday, it's Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn. Don't you just love them?" Marjorie couldn't hide her excitement. She had seen the two together just a year ago in, "Woman of the Year", and thought they were such a perfect movie pair.

"Sweetie," answered Rosie, "come Friday it's gonna be men and booze for me." Marjorie could actually picture Rosie with a cocktail in one hand, a cigarette in the other, holding court at the NCO (non-commissioned officer's club). She had a lazy and deliberate way of talking and peppered her speech with lots of "Sweeties" along with a few choice four-letter words that Marjorie never employed. Helen thought cuss words showed bad breeding and they were banished from the Alexander girls' vocabulary. Marjorie was getting more accustomed to hearing more colorful language and didn't bristle or bat an eyelash any longer. Rosie's eyelash batting would have to be tempered by the restrictions of intra-Army socializing. The girls were given the word by Captain LaBorde, plain and clear, that enlisted WAACs were not to fraternize with officers. That meant any socializing with the boys on base had to be with enlisted ones. The girl who broke that rule would suffer more than a gig or two, there would be severe consequences, according to Captain LaBorde. Marjorie sure had no thoughts about pushing the boundaries and with over 2,000 guys on base that still left lots of possibilities for Rosie to work her magic on.



Marjorie continued sharing excerpts from the Hi-Life, entertained by its inclusion of one of her favorite comic strips, Terry and The Pirates. She'd been reading the continuing adventures of Terry and the Pirates since she was about fourteen years, just when she was going into high school at Upper Darby. She would always wait patiently on Sundays for her daddy to finish with the paper so she could rout through it and find out what kind of trouble Terry Lee and his journalist friend Pat Ryan were getting into as they ran into pirates and assorted villains off the coast of China. As Marjorie read she saw a new arrival quietly slip onto the empty bed next to hers, remove her cap and breathlessly claim the pillow for her curly auburn head. Marjorie noticed this girl from some of the bus rides but had never spoken to her. "Hi, I'm Marjorie," she said, shifting her weight toward bed #13 and an exhausted looking private. "I'm Marilyn," she replied, opening her peepers just enough to display green ones. "And I'm so tired." Just then the horn sounded for mess. Six O'clock on the dot and Marjorie was starving. She hoped the food at Hendricks was on par with the Princess. At least she knew she wouldn't have to be cooking it.

The mess was tucked away between the two women's barracks and adjacent to the community room, where the girls were free to entertain family or friends. Their little corner of the base had a clear separation from the men's quarters, which were way on the other side of the administrative and operations buildings, halfway across the compound. But, there were many shared facilities

such as the post library, hospital/dispensary, and the field exchange, which housed the main store, cafeteria, fountain and coffee shop, barbershop as well as a shared recreation area. All of these would be on her “to do” list. Especially the base Fountain, where surely a root beer float might be in the works. Marjorie offered to help Marilyn empty her barracks bag and the two worked quickly to neatly fold the clothes away in the footlocker. The three bedmates then walked the few hundred yards between their barracks and a fried chicken dinner with mashed potatoes. They all were famished.

Not only was Marjorie’s first dinner at Hendricks Field delicious, filled with southern style deep fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans and salad, topped off with her favorite, apple pie a la mode, but all the while she was laughing and joking and carrying on with a group of girls she really liked. Everyone was comparing job assignments and yucking it up about what life might be like sharing the base with 2,000 men. The jokes were flying as high as those B-17 flying fortresses that the Colonel was busting his buttons about earlier. Captain LaBorde horned in on the buzzing and made a few announcements about the next day’s schedule, a big day in that all of the recruits were starting their “real” Army jobs. She dished out the bad news that everyone would have KP duty at least once and probably more like twice a month. KP stood for “Kitchen Patrol “ and included all of the onerous duties related to bringing three squares to 150 gals on a daily basis, minus the actual cooking. Sweeping and mopping

floors, wiping tables, serving food on the chow line, emptying the grease bucket or anything else the kitchen staff needed to be done comprised KP. Anyone on KP duty had it for the entire day, which included breakfast, lunch, dinner and prepping for the next morning's breakfast, and this was on top of one's regular job. Marjorie didn't like the sound of emptying the grease bucket. She wondered where in the world you would put a giant bucket of grease. Suddenly the deep fried chicken seemed less appetizing. She whispered that to Marilyn and they both started laughing.

"If ever there was an incentive to go on a diet and stay away from greasy food, this is it," she whispered back. In addition to monthly stints on KP the Captain also informed them about sharing the duties of Charge of Quarters or CQ.

This duty was akin to being the barracks' guard dogs. At least that's what it sounded like to Marjorie. They were expected to work in pairs and would take a 24-hour shift at the entrance desk, just inside the barracks door, and monitor incoming and outgoing traffic into the barracks. Included as part of this task were some mopping and sweeping duties around the entryway and bed checks to ensure that the girls were safely tucked away by curfew and that the barracks' doors were locked. A report of the goings on then had to be completed prior to the shift being over. The CQ area did include a room with a bed to allow for some naptime taken during the night, which Captain LaBorde explained had to be

shared by spelling each other. Marjorie already worked out that if Marilyn were her CQ partner then the duty wouldn't be nearly as odious.

After delivering the bad news about KP and CQ, the Captain then announced some good news, at least to Marjorie. "Any of you interested in becoming officers may apply to OCS in June. I don't know how many spots are open yet but I wanted to tell you all that there could be some opportunity for motivated WAACs." Marjorie and Marilyn decided they were motivated WAACs and left the mess hall talking about nothing else. Well, almost nothing else. They did have to fill in the blanks of hometown, family, boyfriends, clothes, former jobs, favorite movie stars, singers, Hollywood gossip and hopes and dreams, one of which now included OCS. Their continuous chatter about everything under the Florida sun had to be squeezed in before "lights out" snuck up on them. And they did a remarkable job of filling in the blanks of their lives up to the present time, where anticipation of the start of their unknown jobs was feeding a nervous energy and pumping a good deal of adrenaline.

Marjorie found out that Marilyn had a serious boyfriend who was a pilot stationed in California, which meant she wouldn't be out on the prowl, like Rosie, and would be more available to explore their new army lives together. That made her happy, the thought of perhaps having a real army buddy. She confided in Marilyn her thoughts about Farley and why she wasn't missing him more. "Marjie, it probably means you don't care about him the way you thought you

did,” Marilyn said having heard the full confession. “So, he’s a nice, sweet fella but maybe he’s not really the one for you. Don’t worry about it,” she advised. Marjorie was thinking what a treat it was to have someone to talk to about this personal stuff. Here, she had been feeling so guilty about Farley and just talking to Marilyn made her feel so much better. “You’re right, he’s not the one for me,” Marjorie agreed. “I’ll write him and explain that we should see other people and just remain friends. Why, I feel better already,” she said. Taking immediate action to solve an impending problem was something driving Marjorie’s character. She wasn’t impetuous by nature but once she got an idea in her head, it was full steam ahead.

Marjorie’s first night at Hendricks Field sharing sleeping quarters with 36 other girls was surprisingly uneventful. One thing she had to drop quickly, like a bad penny, as her dad said, was any sense of modesty and any expectation of privacy. Those had to get packed away in her suitcase of scattered dreams, replaced by the acceptance of sharing dressing, undressing, showering, tooth brushing, make up applying, or any of the other toiletry moments with a sizeable sisterhood. She made her first venture down to the bathroom with Marilyn in tow, sporting their Army issue pajamas and robes. The bathroom was absolute bedlam with too many women holding too many toothbrushes with far too few sinks and far too much splashing. “Marilyn,” she nudged her friend, “we’ve got to have a strategy, this is crazy.” They nodded in agreement and decided to try

slightly different times for the next few nights to find a pattern of lighter use.

Marjorie thought that this place sure made the shared bathroom of the Alexander clan seem like a private luxury spa. The shower area was just a large, white-tiled square room with each tiled wall housing four showerheads. The bathroom became less and less appealing and the picture of showering with dozens of WAACs sent her scurrying back upstairs to her own little piece of turf, her bed.

With a half hour left until time to turn in, she decided to pen a letter to her mom, the first since her departure. She kept putting off the letter writing while at basic training at Daytona because she kept battling away the blues and didn't want to sound less than enthusiastic since she always prided herself on her optimism.

She had spoken to her parents briefly by phone after having arrived at Daytona Beach, just to let them know that she was doing swell, even though she was feeling a little low. She got to talk to Jeanne too, who was peppering her with so many questions that she could barely keep up. There was precious little time to make phone calls because of the heavy volume of communication due to the war effort. Marjorie remembered seeing an AT&T ad in the newspaper featuring a handsome G.I. on the phone saying, "Hey mom, it's me." She thought it was cute at the time and now she understood what it was all about. AT&T was pleading with the public to stay off the telephone lines between 7-10 p.m. every night to allow soldiers to get through and talk to their families. Marjorie preferred letter writing to phone calls because she could think more about what she wanted to

say and didn't have to feel rushed. And now, she felt like she was ready to burst with news to tell her parents. She was particularly excited to tell them about her plans to try and get to OCS (Officer Candidate School) in the fall. And then she was tickled pink to have met Marilyn and wanted to tell them all about her. As Marilyn flopped on the bed next door, another refugee from the bathroom wars, she said, "Marjie, remind me never to go down to that bathroom again." Rosie, who was intently filing her nails down nearly to the quick in preparation for possible grease monkey work, piped in, "I feel like we're a flock of blackbirds fighting at the birdbath." The three of them laughed and vowed to find less crowded times to shower and attend to their toiletry needs. Marjorie decided to put off the letter for one more day and continue chatting with her new friends. After all, this time tomorrow she will have started her Chaplain's Assistant job and will have even more news to share with Helen and William. She laid across the bed staring at the ceiling and listening to the ebbing commotion in the room as her barracks mates started winding down their conversation preparing for lights out. "Are you nervous about tomorrow"? she asked her bedmates, as her brain was flipping through various scenarios of what a job at the Chapel might look like. "What for sweetie," answered Rosie. "The way I figure it nothing could be worse than the job I left for the Army. I worked for a real stinker. Good riddance, bring on the motor pool, grease and all," she said with her low and sultry southern drawl. Marilyn's assignment was as secretary to a Captain on

base and since she had already worked as a secretary in civilian life she felt confident about the job, Her only trepidation being the Captain himself. She just hoped he was a nice guy, preferably married and not a “wolf”. The barracks’ lights went out at 10 p.m. sharp but a certain residual of giggling, whispering, sighing, sniffing and coughing went on for a few minutes until there was a certain hush that enveloped this room of 36 recruits.

Before the sun had a chance to lighten the sky Marjorie and her compatriots awakened to yet another rendition of Reveille at 5:30 sharp. This Hendricks Field bugler refrained from using the usual predictable staccato sounds of that most disagreeable rousing tune and instead added a syncopated and jazzier flair. He threw in unexpected pops followed by longer, more languorous notes. Hmm, a jazzy bugler just might mean a jazzy band on base, Marjorie thought as she opened her bleary eyes to the darkness of the still unlit barracks and cat-stretched to the blare of the bugle. It occurred to her that if Hendricks Field houses its own homegrown dance band there might be a need for a female singer. The thought of singing some Jimmy Dorsey number with microphone in hand, wearing a saucy dress, maybe with polka dots and some chic high heels, while being backed up by a big band, even a little big band, as swinging couples swayed to her crooning gave her goose bumps. She rolled over to her left side and shook Marilyn, who hadn’t yet moved a muscle. “Marilyn, do you think Hendricks has its own dance band on base?” Marilyn



groaned, not yet fully awake. “Lord, Margie, why in the world are you thinking about that at this ungodly hour.” The lights suddenly came on completing any possible unfinished dirty work by the Reveille and as the girls started routing through their respective footlockers to dig out their green striped middies for the morning marching and calisthenics, Marjorie filled Marilyn in on her singing fantasy as they braved the bathroom for a quick face splash on their way to “fall in”.

While the first morning of marching at Hendricks Field was much the same as at the Princess Issena, same staff Sergeants, same formations, same songs, the difference was the venue. No beach, no swaying palm trees, no resort hotel, rather, a large triangular shaped, stark, treeless landscape of green shingles, large towers and long cement runways that stretched clear to the distant orange trees. The girls marched from their twin barracks, past the water tower that looked to be on stilts and down one of the three runways and got their first gander at the famous B-17's that seemed to put the town of Sebring on the map. Marjorie was amazed at how large the planes were as they marched by a number of them lined up, not yet awakened for the day's training. Big sleeping Goliaths with giant spinning heads is what they looked like. Each plane looked decorated with some sort of picture on its wing but since the dawn wasn't yet at full stretch, she couldn't quite make out their marks. To think these beasts were going to carry these boys all the way to Europe to drop bombs on Germany just

seemed impossible to imagine at this moment of early morning peacefulness.

Following the a.m. calisthenics Marjorie had just three things on her mind: Coffee, a shower and impeccable grooming. These were to be her trifecta for success as she decided they were necessary components in making a good first impression on this, her first day of her Army job. She had to be awake, smell good and look good. Too nervous to eat much breakfast, Marjorie downed two cups of coffee, a glass of fresh squeezed orange juice and a dry piece of toast at the mess hall and spent no time gabbing in order to have time to put her best face forward. She didn't know anything about being a Chaplain's Assistant but she remembered her grandma always saying something about cleanliness is next to Godliness and working for a preacher in a chapel was about as close to godliness as she would ever be. So, cleanliness was the key. She showered quickly since the community shower was not an appealing place to dilly dally and was fairly empty since breakfast was still ensuing, threw her robe on and ran upstairs to the tiny parcel of bed space she now called home. There she quickly put on her khaki bra and panties and set up her small make-up mirror, part of her little pink valise that she kept tucked under her bed, on the window sill above her bed as she worked on applying a very conservative applique of face make up from her Charles of the Ritz compact.

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The public and, in particular, the press seemed overly interested in the details of the WAAC's grooming and clothing regulations, much of this due to the prevailing image of women, which Director Hobby's staff noted, had long been patterned on three stereotypes of the American woman: (1) she was a giddy featherbrain frequently engaged in powder-puff wars and with no interest beyond clothes, cosmetics, and dates; (2) she was a hen-pecking old battle-ax who loved to boss the male species; (3) she was a sainted wife and mother until she left the kitchen, whereupon she became a potentially scarlet woman. As Director Hobby faced down the press in her first conference she tried to impart to them that, "WAACs will be neither Amazons rushing to battle, nor butterflies fluttering about." This was a never-ending seesaw between the Director and the press to set the tone for which idea of a woman in the Army would prevail. Would the public receive stories of the hard work and meaningful contributions the WAACs were making or would the endless obsession by the press concerning WAAC underwear, cosmetics, dates with soldiers, sex life and misconduct rule the day? Director Hobby was prepped prior to her first press conference by a public relations consultant in anticipation of possible embarrassing and demeaning questions and how to steer things back to emphasizing the serious job of the WAACs. Flanked by General Marshall, the Chief of Staff and Major General Alexander D. Surles, the head of the Bureau of Public Relations, Director Hobby opened up questions to the press and received what was anticipated. Here is a

sample of the questions and answers:

Q How about girdles? A: If you mean, will they be issued, I can't tell you yet. If they are required, they will be supplied.

Q: Will WAACs be allowed to use make-up? A: Yes, if it is inconspicuous.

Q. What do you consider that to be? A: I hope their own good taste will decide.

Q Nail polish? A: If inconspicuous, yes.

Q. Will the women salute? A: Yes, they will salute.

Q Will they march and carry arms? A: They will learn to march well enough to parade, but they will carry no guns.

Q. Will they be put in guardhouses? A: No, no guardhouses.

Q. This is a burning question. Will officer WAACs be permitted to have dates with privates? A: Mrs. Hobby turned to one of the generals for a description of Army tradition. He explained that Army policy was that officers when not with troops, and enlisted men when off duty, might associate.

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Marjorie was always conservative in her approach to make-up, having grown up with the three older sisters who always pushed the make-up limits with Helen, receiving glancing looks if the pancake was too thick and the lipstick too bright. The thought of disappointing her mother gave Marjie the heebie jeebies, so she fell right in line and did what was expected. But, that didn't mean she didn't have moments of daring, or at least mildly so, egged on by those three little women. Her older sisters always ribbed her about being momma's girl but she really didn't care. As the girls started drifting in from the mess, Marjorie was

nearly done with putting her face on, just adding an ever-so-thin line of eyebrow pencil. “Why did you high tail it out of mess so quickly,” asked Marilyn as she found her friend standing by the window above her bed in her khaki underwear staring into a 6” diameter mirror. “I’m just so nervous I couldn’t eat,” she replied. “I need to make a really good impression so the chaplain will want me as his assistant. I really want this job,” she said, snapping the compact shut. “So, how do I look?” She pranced around while completing a couple of 360’s as Marilyn gave her the once over and an approving nod but suggesting a conservative touch of lipstick. Marjorie only had two lipsticks to choose from. She preferred the more daring Dorothy Gray Headline Red, which she bought after she discovered that was the lipstick used by Veronica Lake in the movie, “I Wanted Wings”, in which she played one hotsy totsy dame, but she opted for the more subdued and conservative pink-hued, Surrender, given she would hopefully be working in a house of worship. “Marjie, I don’t know why you’re so worried that he won’t approve of you,” Rosie piped in. “Who else around here knows how to play the organ, plus the Chaplain will be wild about you if he sees you in that sexy underwear,” she laughed. The three girls burst out laughing at the thought of Marjorie arriving at the chapel in her khaki underwear ready to play the organ. Nearly in tears picturing that image, Marjorie smoothed out the components of her uniform by placing them on the bed and running her hands across the fold marks. Since she had mastered the art of folding and didn’t mind taking the extra

time to do it right her uniform once pressed could be placed in her footlocker and look fresh as a daisy when sprung out. She pinched her cheeks to bring out a tad more color, brushed her hair 100 strokes, an old-fashioned habit that her Nana had taught her, and watched the barracks floor fill with girls stripping down and heading for the bathroom. "Marilynn, you'd better get down there and shower," she prompted her buddy, who was trying to smooth out her khaki shirt of a few unwanted wrinkles. "I think I'd better press this," she said. "Marjie, do you think I have time?"

"Look, I'll press it and you go take your shower," Marjorie offered. "I'll leave it on your bed and then I'm heading out." Marilyn looked relieved and took Marjorie up on her offer as she scrambled out of her seersucker and into her robe, heading down to the showers with a grateful, "Thanks awfully Marjie. Good luck and I'll see you at lunch." Marjorie ended up quickly pressing Marilyn and Rosie's shirts in the alcove area designated for just that task. Her barracks floor was provisioned with two ironing boards and irons to accommodate 36 women's needs. Marjorie took note that this was another case of needing to beat out the crowds and be organized and prepared.

It was nearly 9 a.m. by the time Marjorie finished the ironing and headed out from the barracks trying to track down the chapel. This was the first time she had seen Hendricks Field fully functioning and there was a good deal of bustle she passed. It seemed like a small city with streets, sidewalks, signage, large

vehicles rumbling by and enough G.I.'s to make a girl's head spin. What the base was missing were trees and just about any sign of plant life at all. She figured that if the base were run by women there would be a few rose gardens spread around and at least a potted plant here or there but with men running the show gardens were low priority. Instead there was a good deal of dust kicked up from the constant comings and goings of the B17's and the jeeps that also flew by regularly leaving behind a wake of cat calls and whistles. She was used to those and generally turned her nose up and just paid those sorts of men no mind.

She passed by the main administrative buildings where she supposed the big wigs had their offices. She heard that the married officers lived off base with their families in special quarters in nearby Sebring. That was probably where all the gardens could be found. Or maybe the only thing they could raise down in these parts was oranges and grapefruits. Marjorie was used to gardens around her house, since her Nana had what Helen referred to as a green thumb. She raised all types of flowers and insisted on having vases of freshly cut lavender and black-eyed Susans all through the warm months. The smells in the Alexander house would alternate between the pleasant, yeasty scent of baking bread and the all-enveloping scent of lavender. Marjorie's favorite flower was the long-stemmed black-eyed Susan with its big yellow bonnet framing a dark brown face. Such happy looking flowers. Right about now the meadow that bordered the northwest side of her big white house would start weaving in amongst the

grasses the native wild blue violets and wild strawberry. Many a spring day would she lay out in the meadow, breathe in its sweet and strangely ripe air, suck on a long stem of sour grass and take in the landscape of the sky with its white billowy clouds with peaks that looked like the whipped cream her Nana generously dabbed onto her strawberry pie. So very peaceful until her brother Bill would disrupt her carefree repose by throwing a lizard her way or placing a bullfrog from the nearby stream on her outstretched arm. She would scream like a banshee and chase that little devil clear down to the stream. She was so deep in her Pennsylvania spring daydream that she barely noticed the considerable rows of men's barracks she sauntered by and nearly passed up the chapel. Surely all of this dreaming about flowers and meadows and bullfrogs and Bill, despite the fact that she was being serenaded by the revving engines of B-17's on an Army Air base in the hinterlands of Florida, was a sign that she really needed to write to her folks and find out what was cooking back home. Plus, she had to attend to the Farley issue, which would require further conferring with Marilynn.

At the moment she had to clear her brain of its latest rumblings and pull herself together to meet the chaplain. She stood in front of the chapel steps and thought its appearance rather quaint, like the ones she would see scattered throughout the Pennsylvania countryside marking it like dotted swiss. It was small and white with a steep A-frame roofline topped with green shingles. Its tall steeple, the third tallest structure on the base behind the two towers, was also



green shingled and had a small cross topping its spire, like a Christmas tree topper, now a welcoming perch to a number of wayward black birds. She took her compact out of her purse, taking a last peek, in case her nose had gone shiny, just as a jeep whipped around the corner leaving in its wake a, “Lookin’ good sister.” With that note of reassurance Marjorie smoothed out her skirt, took a deep breath and walked into the Hendricks Field chapel to report to duty, she hoped.

“Hello,” she sang out, followed by a, “Private Alexander reporting to duty.” There appeared to be nobody around. Marjorie stood inside the chapel’s entrance and looked into the dark space, filled with wooden pews and an altar back dropped by a large cross. The only light filtered down from the small, high windows and gave the place an ethereal feel with crisscrossing, dusty silver shafts looking as if the Lord himself might appear at any moment. Marjorie walked further into the chapel toward the altar and the podium and found nothing but silence. She saw no sign of a chaplain or an organ. This was certainly a queer sort of introduction to her new job. She tried another yell, this time using the power of her soprano pipes, “Hello, anybody home?” The question bounced around the rafters until it found a muffled response coming from a door she hadn’t noticed, tucked away behind the podium. As she tiptoed toward the mysterious sound, the door suddenly flew open and framed the most drop-dead gorgeous hunk of male that Marjorie’s eyes had ever witnessed, outside of the

usual movie stars. He stood frozen in the doorframe, somewhat disheveled with his khaki shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows but the shoulders flaunting the stripes of a Captain and the tip of the collar sporting the chaplain's cross.

Marjorie swiftly came to attention and saluted while stating for the second time, "Private Marjorie Alexander, reporting for duty, sir." Captain gorgeous, who didn't look dissimilar to Clark Gable, gave her a quick "at ease" and introduced himself as Father Mac. "You must be my new Chaplain's Assistant," he said as he fingered his stray dark curls, brushed them out of his eyes and unrolled his sleeves. "Sorry, I'm a little disorganized, I was moving some boxes around on a shelf and lost track of time." She just stood there facing him nodding, as if she understood all about the boxes and the fuss, when really she was trying to absorb the fact that this dreamboat was a Catholic priest. Wait until Marilyn and the girls got a gander of him. Why it was almost enough to make a girl convert to Catholicism.

"Private, why don't you take a seat over there," he said pointing to a section of the pews that basked in the light shafts. "I'll be back in a jiffy, just got to turn on the lights and grab a glass of water. Can I get you something?" he asked with an ever so slight southern drawl.

"No sir, thank you sir, Father sir, " she said stumbling over his title as he disappeared just as quickly as he appeared. She wondered how in the world a man that looked like that could possibly be off limits to women. She quickly pulled

out her Charles of the Ritz compact and looked over her face, tuned up the lipstick and hoped the blush that washed over her cheeks would lose its intensity. Marjorie shook her head thinking of the waste of such a specimen. Of course, maybe God didn't think so, but she didn't see why God would appreciate a priest who looked like Clark Gable while she, on the other hand, was drooling with appreciation. Father Mac returned with his glass of water and a fresher looking face. His jet-black hair was slicked back and glistening as if he took a quick dip into the sink along with his water glass. He explained how the current organist was being sent overseas shortly and how lucky they were to have her to fill in. He went through a laundry list of duties that Marjorie was expected to attend to: scheduling the special events and ceremonies, preparing the Sunday service program, gathering information from all of the chaplains to prepare monthly calendars of their sermons, and practicing and playing the organ for all services and special events. Of course, that meant she would be kissing goodbye most of her future weekend passes but as she took note of his blue eyes smothered in dark lashes and how he looked straight into hers as he spoke, she really didn't give a dilly, as Helen would say, about a weekend pass. He had an odd way of suddenly jumping up from a seated position in order to emphasize a point. She thought that was sort of charming. And his smile, with all of those beautiful white, even teeth. Marjorie appreciated even rows of teeth because she was not blessed with them and had to slog through childhood trying to minimize the effect

her buckteeth had on her smile and overall appearance. William and Helen thought her teeth were cute and gave her character. “Marjie, you’re special, not like all the other girls,” her father said. “You should appreciate your God given attributes.” Well, Marjorie didn’t think her teeth were even a little bit cute and they dogged her all through her adolescence as the boys taunted her with Bucky Beaver jokes. All she really wanted was a beautiful smile filled with even teeth, unobstructed by her self-conscious hand.

“Private, on Sundays we are busier than nine cats on a tin roof,” Father Mac said, again jumping up and pacing around as he explained how the Sunday services worked, of which there were three: Southern Baptist, Methodist and Catholic. In addition to those a Cantor came in from Sebring to conduct Jewish services on Saturday, which didn’t require the organ, nor did the Wednesday visits of the Christian Science Practitioner. He explained how she would act as secretary to all of the Chaplains as well as run errands for all of them.

“Can you drive a jeep, private?” he asked. She shook her and explained that her father would have taught her to drive had she not joined the Army. “Well, if you can work the pedals on the organ I ‘spose you can work the pedals on a jeep,” he said throwing out a wink. Father Mac then slung back the remainder of the water and jumped off of the pew bench as he offered to show her around the chapel. All of this time she had been curious where the organ might be, almost frightened to see the beast that was hers to tame. She followed Father Mac to

the back of the chapel, away from the altar but closer to the chapel's entrance and climbed up a narrow staircase that was tucked away on one side of the entryway, which led to a balcony overlook. There, facing toward the altar and overlooking the empty pews was a Hammond model "A" organ. And it was a beauty. When she told Captain LaBorde she didn't play the organ it was mostly the truth but not the whole truth. She learned just a little about organs from her short-lived organ lessons she took when she was fourteen. Her first lesson with Mr. Bolton, who taught in the basement of a Methodist church in Upper Darby, was keen enough. He showed her the stoppers and the pedals and let her play one of her piano tunes so she could feel the difference between piano and organ. The next lesson Mr. Bolton had other things on his mind and showed her pictures of naked women and men in interestingly intertwined positions that he drew in the lesson book, asking her if she knew what the pictures meant. She shook her head and remembered feeling frozen to that Hammond keyboard and frightened by her creepy, stringy-haired teacher. She had nearly forgotten that part of her musical history until seeing the Hammond A nudged that memory. Marjorie left that organ lesson frightened and confused but too embarrassed to tell Helen, at least initially. But she dreaded going back to her next lesson in a week's time and as it loomed ever closer she finally blurted out her secret one day in the kitchen, while her mother was taking something out of the oven. "Mama, Mr. Bolton drew some dirty pictures on his music book last week and showed them to me," she

said. Helen slammed the door of the oven closed with enough force that it shook and probably made the biscuits sink, turned around to face Marjorie and said, "Mr. Bolton did what?" That ended Marjorie's organ lessons and sent Helen on a tirade that didn't stop until she marched down to the church basement to pay Mr. Bolton a visit. As angry as Helen was, Marjorie figured Mr. Bolton was in big trouble. That was the last time Marjorie had fingered a Hammond organ.

"Sir, I told Captain LaBorde that I play the piano and not the organ," she said as she ran her fingers across the mahogany console, which left a light layer of dust. "Well, private...Alexander, is that right? It can't be that much different, can it? It certainly looks like a piano."

"Yes sir, no sir," she said firing back quick answers. She didn't want to disagree with him even though she knew the similarity between the two instruments was they both had keys. That was about it. Father Mac lifted the top of the organ's seat, which housed sheet music, hymnals and what looked like the official Hammond Manual. "Try looking through this and I'm sure you'll do just fine," he said handing her the manual as they exited the balcony back down the stairs and Father Mac continued his role as tour guide. They walked down one of the two aisles as he continued outlining the types of duties she would be performing and then ducked through a door behind the altar, the very door that first framed his Clark Gable visage. This was the administrative arm of the chapel, which housed offices, a bathroom and a workroom. Each permanent

Chaplain, of which there were three, had his own small office and everyone shared the workroom, which had a work table that housed a typewriter, mimeograph machine, and a five-drawer file cabinet topped by a small Jesus statue. The walls were barren, white and the space stark with the exception of a large, green leather reading chair with big rolled armrests and a matching ottoman. William had a similar one in his tiny study back home. Marjorie was familiar with mimeos from her secretarial school training and was a whiz at typing, having won a typing speed contest while at school, so the duties didn't look daunting to her with the exception of the Hammond A.

“Well, Private, I've got to get back to those boxes, doing a little Spring cleaning,” he said. “Feel free to explore all you want, look through the file drawers and get acquainted with the hymnals. I'll see you back here at 0900 tomorrow and you can meet the rest of the chaplains then.”

“Yes, sir, tomorrow sir, thank you, sir,” she said as she saluted Father Mac's exit from the workroom. He popped back in for a second, whipped out his beautiful smile and added, “Oh, by the way, nice making your acquaintance Private Alexander,” and again retreated. And that was that. It appeared that she was the new Chaplain's Assistant who already had a crush on the Chaplain. Since it wasn't yet lunchtime Marjorie decided to cozy into the armchair and read about the Hammond A. She sunk into the leather, stretched her legs across the ottoman, making sure her skirt was properly addressing leg coverage and

opened the Hammond manual at the intro page:

“An organ that is without pipes or wind may well indeed be called a new instrument. The Hammond Organ, here pictured and described, is not merely new; it represents in itself a revolution so far-reaching as to be quite incalculable. New chapters in our social history were opened when, two or three generations ago, the telephone and the typewriter arrived on the scene. There can be no doubt whatever that the advent of this new instrument must have an equally startling significance in the world of music. Science and the laws of dynamics have been so harnessed to the inventor's will that he has created an instrument eminently suitable for the draw room yet, when occasion demands, powerful enough to fill a Cathedral with a tone of great nobility and sweetness It is remarkably adaptable for installation purposes The minimum floor space which it needs never exceeds four or five feet square. The actual "Furniture" of the instrument consists of but two pieces the console and the power cabinet, which is connected to the console by a cable and can be placed in any convenient part of a room or building. The number of cabinets may be multiplied for large buildings, as required. “

Marjorie yawned through a couple more pages of Hammond propaganda but was wide-awake when she eyed the Table of Contents. More than wide-awake, she was terrified. The words that stared up at her looked as if they might be in an engineering manual: diapason tone quality, electrical principle, harmonic



controller, harmonic controls black and white, coupler effects, super and sub octave, synchronous motor and generator. "Lord," she thought, "I'm gonna be eating humble pie if I can't figure out how to operate this thing." She read on trying to decipher the 19-page manual that swamped her with doubt. She sure didn't want Father Mac thinking she was a Dumb Dora. Her doubts were rising like floodwaters. She gave out a heavy sigh that fell on the empty room and joined up with the racket being made by Father Mac down the hall. With her Hamilton watch striking a pose at 12noon, Marjorie popped out of the leather chair sloughing off her organ trepidation for the moment recalling her favorite line from *Gone With The Wind*, recited by her favorite character, Scarlett O'Hara. "Great balls of fire...I can't think about that right now. If I do I'll go crazy. I'll think about that tomorrow," said Marjorie out loud, using her best imitation of Scarlett's southern drawl.

"Everything OK Private?" came a response from Father Mac to her Scarlett impersonation.

"Yes sir," she replied stifling a laugh. "Everything is fine. I'll be leaving now for lunch if that's OK." She imagined Father Mac as Rhett Butler acknowledging his love for Scarlet in one of her favorite scenes: "Here's a soldier of the South who loves you, Scarlett. Wants to feel your arms around him, wants to carry the memory of your kisses into battle with him. Never mind about loving me, you're a woman sending a soldier to his death with a beautiful memory."

Scarlett! Kiss me! Kiss me... once..” She loved that scene from the movie, taut with emotion and then the final embrace. She must have seen that movie at least four times.

“OK with me. See you tomorrow, 0900,” yelled Father Mac, bursting the Butler bubble.

“Yes sir, goodbye sir.” And with that Marjorie packed up the Hammond manual, grabbed her purse and lit out for the mess, excited to compare work notes with Marilyn and some of the other girls.

“Cross my heart and hope to die,” swore Marjorie. She had just finished telling an enraptured table of girls, including Marilyn and Rosie, just how good-looking Father Mac was, comparing him favorably to Clark Gable. She embellished just a smidgen, imagining that it was possible she just might have spotted a dimple somewhere on his clean-shaven cheeks.

“My Captain seemed a bit like a Casper Milquetoast,” shared Marilyn, who had spent all morning in the Administration Building taking shorthand and organizing files. “He sure spent a lot of time on the phone with this wife, at least I hope it was his wife,” she smiled and winked at Marjorie. “Yes honey this and yes honey that. Nothing like what Rhett would have said to Scarlet.” Marilyn then stood up from the table with a flourish, holding a ham sandwich in one hand and making a hand pushing motion with the other while saying in a deep, exaggerated drawl, “No, I don't think I will kiss you, although you need kissing,

badly. That's what's wrong with you. You should be kissed and often, and by someone who knows how." All of the girls knew that scene from "Gone With The Wind" and those who witnessed Marilyn's antics got a great laugh.

"Margie, I grew up Irish Catholic and have seen plenty of priests and NONE looked like Clark Gable," said Rosie, emphasizing the word none. "Heck, my parents had to drag me to church. Believe me, if there was a priest who was a real looker I would have been there in nothing flat."

"You'll have to come to a Sunday service and see for yourself," said Marjorie. "But not until I figure out how to play that darn organ. I don't want to embarrass myself." They all agreed to take a gander at the dreamboat Father Mac when Marjorie gave the word. Rosie chimed in about her first experience working in the motor pool.

"Some freckle-faced kid, couldn't have been much past 18, no older than my kid brother, showed me how to do an oil change on one of the jeeps, imagine that," she laughed. "My daddy would be impressed. Me, Rosie, a grease monkey." She stood up, sporting light blue overalls she was issued at the motor pool. The girls agreed that Rosie, with her long and lanky body could pull off the overalls with style.

"Rosie, I hate to say it but you look a little like that Rosie the Riveter character in the song, said Marjorie. I saw the sheet music back home and the picture has a girl in overalls, wearing a bandana just like you, plus the name..."

This brought another round of guffaws as the lunch hour came to a close and the girls busied their lunch trays on their way to the barracks to ready for some afternoon marching.

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Just as women like Marjorie and the Liberty Belles answered the call to serve in the military as World War II got underway, civilian women were also needed to fill the dearth of factory workers as the country ramped up its war efforts, particularly in the munitions and aircraft industries. In an attempt to lure housewives into the workforce the government started a propaganda campaign using a fictional character named Rosie The Riveter as the idealized American woman worker. Rosie was loyal, efficient, patriotic, a knockout, and boy, could she handle a rivet gun. Rosie The Riveter was first used in 1942 in a song of the same name written by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb. The song was played by big band leader Kay Kyser but became a big hit in early 1943 when recorded by the harmony singing group, The Four Vagabonds. The song portrays "Rosie" as a tireless assembly line worker, doing her part to help America in its war effort. A couple of stanzas from the lyrics illustrate her image.

"All the day long, whether rain or shine

She's a part of the assembly line

She's making history, working for victory

Rosie, brrrrrrrrrr, the riveter

Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage  
Sitting up there on the fuselage  
That little frail can do more than a male can do  
Rosie, brrrrrrrrrr, the riveter”

Marjorie and Marilyn walked the short distance back to the barracks humming the tune to Rosie the Riveter but stopped dead in their tracks when they ran smack dab into a table stationed by two nurses, just outside the door of their barracks. An open-sided canopy covered the table and a line of privates formed alongside the temporary station. The girls ahead of them in line were being asked to roll up their sleeves by the nurses.

“Oh Lord,” said Marjorie, “Not another shot, seems like they’re poking us all the time, doesn’t it.” Marilyn agreed that so far Army life included an awful lot of inoculations. “I wonder what this one is for,” she said. “I heard we have to get a typhoid shot at some point.”

“Typhoid?” said Marjorie, “Why in the world would we need typhoid shots? I don’t plan on being in the jungle any time soon,” she laughed. But, they rolled up their sleeves along with the rest and winced as the needles lanced the meaty part of their upper arms. Marjorie hoped the ache wouldn’t last as long as from the last shot.

“I also heard that we will be getting monthly pelvic exams,” said Marilyn in a whisper meant for only Marjorie, as she rolled down her sleeve and buttoned the cuff. “I overheard Captain Renshaw talking on the phone with someone from Director Hobby’s office and he said something about putting in place the monthly gynecological exams.” The girls entered their barracks distracted by the thought of being probed in their private parts.

“Pelvics every month?” asked Marjorie. “Are you sure he said monthly? I just had one back in January as part of my physical and that was bad enough, but every month, that would be dreadful. Plus it’s so embarrassing.” They decided to put that secret kernel of information aside and see if Captain LaBorde announced new medical protocols on the horizon.

“Maybe he got it wrong,” said Marjorie as she pulled her Hammond A Organ Manual out of her purse and threw herself on her bed, taking a short breather before “fall in”.

“Got what wrong?” said Rosie hearing the tail end of their conversation as she started stripping off her new overall issues, already stained with engine oil. Marjorie and Marilyn looked at each other and just burst out laughing. “Come on, what gives, let me in on the joke.” So, the three of them huddled together on Marjorie’s bed as Marilyn repeated the tidbit of gossip she heard on her first day on the job. Rosie gave a low whistle and shook her head. “I hope he’s all wet on this,” she said. “The girls are not gonna like this one little bit if it’s true.” The

three friends vowed that mum was the word and jumped up to change into their seersucker middies for the pre-dinner slog around the base. Marjorie hoped they marched toward the recreational area as she heard there was a tennis court and hadn't yet tracked it down. She and Marilyn had vowed to explore the base from top to bottom as soon as they had a moment of free time. They had also heard there was a dance every Friday night for all of the enlisted personnel. Marjorie was just itching to cut up on the dance floor although her Army issue brown oxfords might be a problem with that darned low heel. She was used to dancing in high heels, the higher the better. She slipped into her seersucker middie and laced up her white tennies for the hour ahead of marching. She would have to tackle the pesky question of how to get her hands on a pair of heels later.

“Dear Family, Would like to write each one of you a nice long letter, but I find that there are not enough hours in a day, so here is one for all of you,” Marjorie wrote as she settled in for the evening in the only space all her own, her bed. She was beat after more than an hour of marching in formation, followed by the evening mess and capped with a lecture on more base protocol given by the ever-present Captain LaBorde. There was good news and bad news that the Captain let out in dribs and drabs to offset the groans and clucks with smiles and winks. The bad news: Marjorie was assigned to her first KP and Charge of Quarters duties during the week, the monthly pelvic exam that Marilyn gleaned from the earlier conversation was now announced as a reality starting next week

and a swim skills test was to be administered later in the week. One of Marjorie's little secrets was she couldn't swim worth beans, other than using a very sloppy dog paddle that wouldn't hold any water against the canine world. The thought of dog paddling in her frenzied fashion in front of her fellow recruits, chopping through the pool waters left her anticipating her upcoming humiliation with certainty and dread. Although Marjorie and her family had spent a month every summer of her childhood at her Aunt Jo's summer cottage on the Atlantic shore and she did her fair share of wading and splashing and horsing around, she never did learn how to swim properly. The good news: A dance on Friday that she and Marilyn planned on attending, her Charge of Quarters duties were with Marilyn as her partner and upcoming summer furloughs would be announced shortly. All of this news was buzzing around in her head as she lounged on her bed determined to complete the letter to her family before her eyes fell to half-mast. She looked over at Marilyn, who was also wrestling with letter writing.

"Who are you writing to?" she asked her friend. Marilyn put down her pen with a sigh, propped her head up under a khaki-draped pajama sleeve and explained that she tried to write to her dad and her boyfriend every week but it was getting harder to find the time and energy.

"I know what you mean," said Marjorie. "I am just whipped every night, have been since Daytona." Marilyn nodded in agreement as the girls collaboratively found a reason to put down their respective pens and set aside



the WAAC issue stationary embossed with a small profile of the head of Pallas Athene, the official WAAC insignia, which Marjorie thought looked like a female Trojan warrior with a smirk on her face. Apparently she was some sort of goddess associated with a variety of impressive womanly virtues including an adeptness at handicrafts, which left Marjorie picturing this goddess darning socks, making quilts, knitting woolen scarves and serving up biscuits, like her grandma, while also recognized for, “being wise in the industries of peace and the arts of war. “ This was the profile of Pallas Athene that Marjorie was taught back in Daytona and now her mug sat embossed on her half written note, dropped to the floor by a too sleepy private ready to drown the images of a biscuit making warrior somewhat resembling her grandma with something a little dreamier, say a certain chaplain with a killer smile.

Marjorie was a light sleeper, something most likely picked up from sharing beds with sisters who employed occasional restless kicks and high-spirited moans and groans while in dreamland. She always felt as if half of her brain would rest in slumber and the other half would be like a sentry on guard duty, ready to ward off impending disasters. So, an early morning ruckus on the floor below, although somewhat faint, perked her antenna-like ear not swathed in pillow loft and she slipped out of bed and followed a moonlit path down the stairs to investigate. What greeted her was bedlam. The lights were on and the barrack’s floor was filled with girls in pajamas hitting, slapping and kicking at a

staggering airman who looked dazed and confused. "Poor sap", thought Marjorie. "He must have been drunk as a skunk." The airman found himself staggering through a gauntlet of screaming banshees, one of which was beating him with a broomstick as he was quickly escorted to the barracks door and kicked out onto the porch.

"What in the world happened," Marjorie asked the girl with the broom in hand and the pink curlers on her head, many of which were now dislodging from the recent tussle. "Oh, this chump was drunk and came in wanting to have a little whoopee with someone named Sylvia," she laughed. "There is no Sylvia and I don't think he'll make that mistake again." The girls quieted down and climbed back into their beds and Marjorie headed back up the stairs to hers, now awake more than ever. Rise and shine was just around the corner.

Reveille came quickly, offering no special sleep dispensations due to the early morning airman sweep. This morning's rendition proved to be yet a different sound from the day before with the horn player going off on a jazzy riff that reminded Marjorie of the great Satchmo himself and strayed far afield from the usual morning gargle. Today she would find out who played that dreamy horn. Maybe the chaplains would know. That reminded Marjorie, this was the day she would meet the entire preaching crew over at the chapel. She shot out of bed to take a quick shower, shaking Marilyn awake as she scooted down to the bathroom.

Marjorie felt like she could eat a horse following the usual hour- long march past the bombers and around the flagpole. She was one of the first lined up to march and was also one of the first in chow line at the mess. What she saw was a sight for sore eyes, Adam and Eve on a raft, at least that's what William called the iconic American breakfast of bacon and eggs. Her favorite. The smell of the bacon wafting from the kitchen right into the stainless steel serving pan made her stomach growl as she slid her tray along the track, making stops at the bacon, eggs and toast. If only she had KP today, she could chow down on as much bacon as she could squeeze into her slender stomach, as that was the one benefit of having KP, you could help yourselves to seconds or more. The Alexander dining table demanded good manners but without an aggressive and forceful push at just the right time the window for potential seconds would slam shut on a dime. Tomorrow she and Marilyn would be up for KP and she sure hoped it wouldn't include those awful grits for breakfast. "Of all the darn luck," she thought. Oh well, two pieces of bacon would have to do. Besides, she wanted to keep slim and she knew how those pounds could creep up on you as she saw a number of the Liberty Belles going from slim to stout. She wasn't sure how it happened since they were so darned busy and couldn't pad down to a refrigerator in the middle of the night and make a bologna sandwich. She held her tray under her nose and breathed in that reminder of Saturday morning breakfast back home as she saved a spot on either side of her for her two

bedmates who were lollygagging behind.

Marjorie reported to the chapel at exactly 0900 following a quick stint at the breakfast mess listening to the story of the wayward drunk airman who had the ever livin' daylights beaten out of him by a bevy of early a.m. pajama-clad privates.

"Marjorie was there," mentioned Claire, the one dramatizing the story of the early morning rampage and getting a rise of giggles and snorts from the girls at the long mess table. Marilyn looked shocked. "Why Marjie, whatever were you doing in that melee," she asked. "I didn't hear you get up. But, then again, I was sleeping like a top." Marjorie didn't have time to explain her relationship with sleep, as she had to scoot and get ready to face the introduction to the rest of the chaplains. Plus, the dreamy Father Mac motivated her to take even more care with her appearance, even if for a mere girlish fantasy.

This time she entered the chapel with more confidence and marched straight to the workroom to hang up her purse and ready herself to meet the men of the cloth, as William said. As she crossed the threshold she stopped cold at the sight of a chaplain sitting in the leather chair, the very one Marjorie lounged in the day before while attempting to decipher the Hammond manual. She stood at attention and saluted. A funny little man jumped out of the leather, answering her salute with his refrain and giving her an, "At ease Private." He introduced himself as Lester Horltdt, the Southern Baptist chaplain, who she just barely edged out in

height. He was short, for a fella, slightly paunchy around the middle with fiery red hair and pale skin that looked like it never saw the light of day. A Father Mac he was not but he seemed kind and displayed a lively personality as he quizzed her about herself and filled her in on some of the daily goings-on in the chapel, sprinkling his conversation with effusive hand gestures that matched his speech. Marjorie decided his antics would be effective at the pulpit and was eager to see this cadre of padres in action. Captain Horltdt, who was putting the finishing touches on the coming Sunday sermon, escorted Marjorie to his office down the short hallway and showed her where he would place his typing assignments for her, comprised primarily of his weekly sermon, the Sunday church service program and any other special occasions that required programs, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms or revivals. Her ears perked when she heard the word “revival”. She remembered William talking about a preacher who was “all fire and brimstone” holding a tent revival down near his Buick dealership. She asked if the revival was held in a tent or in the chapel. He explained that the occasional revivals would be held in a tent on base always on a Wednesday and that she was expected to attend and hand out the programs but wouldn’t have to play the organ, for obvious reasons. As he spoke he was flipping his hands all around and gesticulating as though he was already saving souls. This job was getting more interesting each office she passed. Father Mac poked his head in to inquire how she was getting along. “Have you got that big ‘ol organ figured out

yet Private?" he asked. She shook her head "no" while wondering if it was possible to have eyes bluer than Father Mac's. The two preachers then escorted her to the final office door, which housed Methodist central and its chief pontificator, Captain Conor Hastings, the youngest of the bunch and the tallest. When he rose from his desk she had to cock her head back slightly as she saluted him. In no time she discovered Captain Hastings was a key player on the Bombardiers basketball team, the mention of which covered his boyish but serious countenance with a wide grin.

Since there were three of these fellas all requiring about the same kind of work Marjorie guessed she would be typing and mimeographing plenty during the week and was starting to get a picture of life at the chapel. She asked all three if there were particular hymns she should learn for their various services or was the music selection up to her. What ensued was a visit to the workroom file drawer where all three started perusing the mini-library of hymnals. When the holy smoke settled she had two pieces from each chaplain to learn within the next couple of weeks in addition to any others she liked and wanted in her repertoire. She would be dusting off the music to, "The Old Rugged Cross." Of that she was certain. She excused herself from the workroom hubbub, grabbed the desired hymns and the trusty Hammond manual and marched up to the second floor balcony to acquaint herself with her musical partner.

Her first session with the Hammond was spent performing a long series of

scales for various keys while throwing in, via the stoppers, a number of different sounds and dynamics. She particularly liked the strings and woodwinds. It was slow going but Marjorie could always draw on vast reservoirs of patience to accomplish her goals. She had one week to master the Hammond enough to perform the selected pieces. She was determined.

Time slips by quickly when practicing an instrument. Marjorie knew that from her practicing of the piano. At home she might spend an hour or two working out a favorite popular piece from its sheet music and it might seem like only a few minutes had gone by. Of course, her family got a little tired of the endless practicing, but here at the chapel she could keep the volume down on the organ and the chaplains would never know she was playing. As she practiced she noticed a regular influx of GI's would come in and out of the offices of the three chaplains, probably for advising and consultations. Marjorie decided that being a chaplain was a little like being a counselor. Plus, there were always the confessionals that went on. Father Mac had a little area where you could duck in and do whatever people did during confession. Tell him their deepest and darkest secrets, she guessed. It was a wonder to her that anyone would even think of doing that. Why, she would have to cough up an awful lot of stuff that might make her look shameful. Not that she wasn't a good girl. But still, a girl is a girl and she needs to kick up her heels sometimes. Especially with strict parents like Helen and William. So, Marjorie decided that the less Helen and

William knew about her social life, the better. She knew that the likes of Farley worried both of them so she tried to keep their relationship more about tennis and dancing when speaking of him to her parents. She and Farley were stuck at second base by the time he shipped out. Jo told her that first base referred to kissing, second base to fondling under the sweater, third base to fondling under the skirt and a homerun was the whole shebang. Well, she wasn't about to experience the whole shebang until marriage and she was certain that Farley was ready to move from second base to third, so she was a little relieved when he turned up in his uniform to wish her a goodbye. Now it seemed she never would get to third base or beyond with him because she was going to, as William said, 23 skidoo. She knew in her heart that Farley wasn't the one and she didn't need any confession box or chaplainly advice to convince her of that.

Having met all the chaplains and seeing the work for her starting to pile up in the workroom, Marjorie decided to work right through lunch and whittle away at some typing and mimeographing, squeezing in sessions of organ practice in between, in order to assemble the various Sunday service programs that would be needed in just a few days. She left the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy" dangling in the rafters as she scurried down to type out Father Mac's rough draft of his upcoming Catholic service. She hadn't touched a typewriter in a month of Sundays but was still able to slam out the program in no time. With her back to the workroom door she didn't see the young man at the threshold who stood



awkwardly clutching a trumpet to his chest. He announced his presence with a gargling and clearing sound from his throat. Marjorie swung around in the wooden office swivel chair thinking one of her three bosses needed something. Instead she saw a young G.I. holding an old beaten-looking trumpet. On the short side, husky with curly brown hair he had a boyish, well-scrubbed looking face with a wide smile that crinkled the corner of his eyes

“Can I help you?” she asked as she smoothed down her skirt and jumped up from the swivel chair.

“Gosh, you must be the new organist I heard about,” he said as he walked toward her with a look of open book friendliness. He switched his horn to his left hand as he offered her his right hand as a formal introduction. “I’m Johnny Gross”, he said and explained that he stopped by the chapel around lunchtime whenever he could get away from his other duties to practice his horn. He liked the acoustics of the chapel with the high ceilings and the wooden rafters. “The chaplains are really swell about letting me blow my brains out and they hightail it out of here at lunchtime anyway.”

“I’m Marjorie,” she replied taking his hand and looking straight into his hazel eyes. “I just finished practicing for a while so if you’d like to blow into the rafters you’re welcome to it.” He was just a smidgen taller than she with rosy cheeks and freckles that gave him that All-American Van Johnson kind of look. He laughed and reassured her that he wouldn’t practice too long. “I’ve just got to

wet my whistle,” he said with a wink as he exited the workroom. Marjorie swiveled back to the typewriter and continued to work on Father Mac’s Sunday program as she listened to the background music of an arpeggio of scales followed by a quick rendition of taps and reveille. Upon hearing Reveille she stopped cold. “So, he’s the one,” she thought as she remembered the early a.m. jazzy rendition of that most ordinary tune. He then progressed to a couple of popular big band tunes, both of which were familiar to Marjorie. Just hearing them made her feet itch for a good swing. As there was a lull in the practicing, Marjorie hurried out into the chapel to ask Johnny about a band on the base, chasing down her fantasy of singing with a dance combo. He was going over some sheet music and making a few notations when she marched right up to him and asked about a dance band at Hendricks.

“Yeah, we’ve got a sweet little combo that plays every Friday for the dance on base. We’ve got a piano, sax, drums, horn and clarinet. Gosh, you should come by and listen this week,” he said with a blush running up his already ruddy cheeks. Marjorie couldn’t contain her excitement and told Johnny of her dream of singing with a big band. “Gee Marjorie, that sounds swell, we could really use a singer. I’ll talk to the guys and maybe next week you can sing a couple of your tunes for me.” Marjorie’s heart beat in syncopated nervousness like the timpani she used to pound in her high school orchestra. Now, in addition to practicing that beast of an organ she would also have to tune up her vocal chords. She

could hardly wait to tell Marilyn the news.

Marjorie hurried back to her barracks, having put in her first real work day and was happy to have finished all the typing and organizing for the various church programs she was charged with producing. She wanted to clear the decks of those tasks so Friday could be devoted to mimeographing copies for the Sunday services, more hours plugging away at learning the organ pieces and squeezing in some vocal exercises. The 10-minute walk to the barracks from the chapel was a chilly one as it looked like a spring storm was on its way. But weather wasn't on Marjorie's mind nor was the buzzing of the B-17's coming home to roost with their green pilots at the helm, like fledgling eagles finding their nest. No, Marjorie had just two things she was batting around in her brain as she headed toward the evening mess, the possibility of singing with Johnny Gross' little big band and the notion that she must get herself a new pair of shoes, since hers were looking way too beaten up for a prospective singing gig. She looked up and saw the dark clouds swallowing up all of the sunshine and lengthened her stride to avoid the downpour that was brewing.

Marjorie dumped off her purse and organ manual, which she carried around like the holy scriptures, and headed down to dinner spotting Marilyn sitting alongside Ruth Talley and Rosie and some of the other gals from their barracks floor in the area now designated theirs. Marjorie knew that Ruth was a singer before she joined the WAACs with a few gigs already dotting her singing

resume. How odd, she thought, that the Army might be the pathway to a musical career or at least avocation. She waved to her friends as she stood in line, grabbed a tray and was given large dollops of chicken and dumplings, making pit stops at the green bean and Jell-O areas. She squeezed in between Marilyn and Rosie ready to burst with the day's events and ravenous, since she had foregone her lunch in lieu of working and listening to trumpet practice.

The mess hall was again buzzing with a cacophony of conversation, laughter and updates on the day's trivia and Marjorie was certainly adding her two bits to the light roar. She told the girls all about Johnny Gross and the band and the trumpet and her singing. Well, maybe her singing, and the chaplains and how Johnny looked like Van Johnson and was very sweet.

"Marjie, have you already thrown over Father Mac for a trumpet player," teased Rosie, still attired in her grease monkey overalls. She went on to lament the condition of her nails and how working under the hood of jeeps did very little to help with the beautification process. "Tomorrow night I'm finding myself a man and fingernails be damned," she announced. Marjorie rolled her eyes at her pronouncement but knew, with a couple of cocktails under her belt, Rosie would score another triumph at the NCO club. Marjorie, on the other hand, would be heading to the weekly base dance to check out the band and cut a rug. Marilyn was coming with her. But for now, the girls had to make an early exit from mess, scarfing down their apple cobbles, in order to beat the bedtime bathroom crowd

and turn in early. Tomorrow was KP, which meant they would be up well before Johnny started blowing his horn.

Marjorie and Marilyn turned in before lights out and kept their yacking to a minimum, since in a mere few hours they would be up readying themselves to slop oatmeal onto 150 breakfast trays. Marilyn gave Marjorie a breakdown of her busy day running errands for the Captain, which included learning how to handle a Jeep for the first time. “Margie, I had to drive into Sebring today to pick up something the Captain forgot at home,” she said. “It’s a sweet little town and is right next to a big lake, Lake Jackson, which looked swell. That’s where the married officers have their homes.” Marjorie had no idea there was a lake so close to the base. The girls agreed that a weekend excursion into Sebring when the weather cleared up would be on their agenda. They fell to sleep serenaded by a downpour belting the barrack’s roof, rapping on the windows and howling through the base. Marjorie had heard that Florida was hurricane country and hoped this big blow wasn’t going to rip the roof off and send her flying off to Oz. Well, that was a Kansas tornado, but still, she couldn’t help but think of that powerful storm and Dorothy’s house flying through the sky. She felt comforted knowing that Marilyn and Rosie were tucked in close-by.

At 4 a.m. Marjorie felt her bed shake and a slight rustle of her covers. No Oz, no Munchkin Land, no wicked witch, it was simply her quiet cue to fling aside the bed covers and head on over to the mess to help the cooks ready for the

day's culinary frenzy known as breakfast, lunch and dinner. The wake-up call was done gently by Ellen, who was on Charge of Quarters duty. Marjorie in turn gave Marilyn a shake and the girls slipped on their uniforms quietly, noticing that the noise from the storm was replaced by dreamy whimpering, heavy snoring, light snoring and an occasional outburst, not an unexpected chorus of sounds when 36 women share sleeping quarters. Although it was as dark as the hole of Calcutta, as William would say, there was always a light on over the staircase which threw out a few rays down the floorboards of the barracks and assisted Marjorie and Marilyn as they silently scooted outside and one building over to the mess hall to report to the kitchen staff.

“How in the world do the cooks do this every day?” Marjorie inquired of her friend as they slogged through the muddy remnants of the overnight storm, trying to keep their brown oxfords from feeling like blocks of cement. “That would truly be the worst job in the world,” she continued as the girls walked arm-in-arm to the mess entrance.

“Thank goodness we have KP just every couple of months,” Marilyn said as she wiped and cleaned all of the Heinz catsup bottles while Marjorie tackled the French's mustard dispensers. It seemed like there were hundreds of the dreadful containers. “I'll never look at catsup the same way,” Marjorie answered, laughing. All of the salt and pepper shakers had to be filled, the orange juice concentrate, sitting in large cans like popsicles, had to be made in oversize

dispensers, which were then lugged to the end of the serving line. Marjorie thought it odd that it wasn't fresh squeezed orange juice, but at least the concentrate was made from oranges grown in Florida. The worst job of all, which the cooks insisted be completed by the KP "volunteers" was the emptying of the grease vat into a large hole back behind the building. Marjorie had been warned about this odious task but no warnings could quite prepare her for the uneasy wake of stench that drifted past them as they walked the heavy vat to a large hole in the ground and poured out its contents, remnants of past greasy meals. Marjorie nearly upchucked on her empty stomach. The girls were kept busy with kitchen chores and meal prep for a full two hours up until their comrades entered the mess following the morning march, of which Marjorie and Marilyn were excused. At that point they served a big dollop of oatmeal onto every plate that passed under their noses. After slopping out over a hundred bowls of oatmeal, Marjorie couldn't face fixing one for herself so opted to be content with a cup of coffee and a couple pieces of toast. The morning KP duty wasn't complete until mess time was over and the long tables cleared, wiped down and set up for lunch. Marjorie was so eager to get over to the chapel and start practicing that she was revved up like those characters in the Marx Brothers movies, and was done with a.m. KP in record time, dragging a protesting Marilyn along with her.

"Marjie, what's the big hurry," asked Marilyn who was happy to use the KP excuse to go into work late and leave early. Marjorie explained to her friend

that she needed to start practicing her vocals in addition to the organ because Johnny was going to audition her next week to sing with the band.

“Well, he didn’t actually say ‘audition’, but he did say that maybe I could sing a couple of tunes for him. So, I’ve got to get a couple of tunes ready in a jiff,” said Marjorie as she and her friend exited from the mess to get ready for work. She already knew a couple of Harold Arlen tunes by heart, having pored over the sheet music back home. She first heard his hit, “Stormy Weather”, on the radio when she was about 12 years old, featuring Ethel Waters and it just about knocked her socks off. ““Don't know why there's no sun up in the sky stormy weather since my man and I ain't together, keeps raining all the time.” Waters had such a lilt to her voice and Marjorie remembered hearing that tune on the radio, live from the Cotton Club in New York City, and wondering if she could ever find that special something in her vocal register. How could she describe it to Marilyn? Sort of a husky, breathless lilt. She knew Waters cut her teeth on gospel songs so maybe all of this hymnal practice might pay off outside of chapel life. Now Marjorie just had to transpose the tunes from piano to that beastly organ and synch it to her voice. A tall order to fit into a short timespan. She only had a couple of hours at the chapel to practice before she and Marilyn had to return back to the chow hall and help the cooks ready for lunch. She felt a sudden pressure start to envelop her, like a heavy weight pressing in against her chest and her heart felt like it was working double time. Marilyn must have seen



something in Marjorie's demeanor that looked unhealthy for she grabbed her arm and stopped her right in her tracks. "Marjie, you look like you're about ready to pop a panty button," she said. "You're being a little whacky about this crooning stuff. Just relax and think about the dance tonight." In her reverie on uncertain singing stardom, Marjorie had forgotten all about the dance on base and had worked herself up into quite a frenzy of anxiety about singing for Johnny. It was not unusual for Marjorie to break into orbit over seemingly small matters. She thanked Marilyn for plucking her out of orbit and landing her firmly back on base. They headed to the barracks under a bright sky dappled by retreating clouds that put a renewed spring into both of their steps as they linked arms and synched their steps to Marjorie's rendition of "Over The Rainbow", another Harold Arlen tune.

"Dear Family," Marjorie snatched a few minutes in the chapel workroom to finally write the letter to her folks that she kept falling asleep over. Grabbing a few minutes at work while she was bright eyed and bushy-tailed and brimming with news was her new strategy.

"Would like to write each one of you a nice long letter, but I find that there are not enough hours in the day, so here is one for all of you! Am on KP today and hence I'm not so chipper because I had to rise and shine so early. I believe tonight I will sleep like a log. Everyone gets KP about twice a month, which isn't so bad. It eliminates permanent KP's. Only about 43 days before you see me.

Time flies down here, so it really won't seem nearly as long as it sounds. I sure am counting on that furlough. Expect to see a lot of people and do a lot of things.

Mother, is there any chance of you buying me a pair of shoes? Do you have a ration stamp for me?" I could write you a check and you could go to Gimbel's and buy them for me. They cost \$12.95 and I wear size 6 ½ A regulation WAAC shoes. If you think it would be better to wait until I come home, just say so. I really want them for my furlough. Have worn my GI's so hard and so long that they really look a mess.

We have been having a tropical storm for two days. I believe it is coming into the rainy season now. It's supposed to rain every night from about 4:30-5:30 at which time it cools off a bit. So perhaps I'll be able to live through the summer. Am sending you a program of this Sunday's service. I think it's rather attractive. I type these programs and then cut a stencil, then I run them off on a mimeograph machine.

By the way, what shall I do about my income tax? I did pay the 1<sup>st</sup>. quarter Of \$16.75 but I do not feel as if I am going to be able to pay the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Installment. These furloughs cost money. That's what I'm saving for. Do write and tell them I'm in the WAACs or what! Well, my boss just came in and it is time for me to practice the organ. But before I do I must tell you that I miss all of you, think of you often and anxiously wait to hear from you. Hope you'll all be home when I get there. The 4<sup>th</sup>. Of July is a Sunday, so perhaps you will be. Good bye for now

and more later.

With love, Marjorie.”

“What a relief,” she whispered to herself, surrounded by her mimeograph stencils and Sunday programs. The letter was short and not too informative but at least it was done and she could post it, await a reply and dispel that pang of guilt about being a selfish daughter with no time for her family. She would have to keep her fingers crossed on the new shoes. Perhaps Helen would feel the pride of getting a letter from her WAAC and find it in her heart to spring for a new pair of those unattractive shoes. Marjorie looked down at her scuffed oxfords and decided another coat of polish might just have to do if Helen didn’t come through. She could almost picture her mother walking out to their mailbox, down the long circular drive to the road below and opening up the silver creaky and squeaky metal box, waving to an occasional neighbor and smiling with that pleased and satisfied look, as she saw the cream-colored envelope with the stamp of Sebring, Fla.

The image of her mom faded from view as she checked her Hamilton and saw that she only had an hour of practice before she had to run to KP lunch edition. She showed Father Mac the program she put together for his Sunday service, which was typed from his notes on the order of worship. His nod of approval gave her the OK to print 150 copies for the Sunday mass. Then she high-tailed it up to her aerie where she warmed up her fingers and the Hammond

on some scales. She had three hymns to learn: No. 311 Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned; No. 345 Oh Happy Day and No. 343 Just as I Am, in addition to squeezing in a smidgen of practice on the songs that would wow Johnny. It just occurred to her that “pulling out all the stops”, which is what she intended to do when he listened to her play and sing next week, must be referring to the stops on an organ. She made a mental note to tell Father Mac that tid-bit of discovery as she was certain he would get a big kick out of that.

Her first complete day of KP experience, with Marilyn by her side, was not as bad as expected. Yes, it made Marjorie lose her appetite as she spooned hundreds of mounds of oatmeal, macaroni and rice pilaf throughout her three-meal duty and watched the bedlam and breaches of sanitation that occurred in the kitchen but once through a complete cycle, she was free for another couple of months. Plus, tonight, following dinner duty, which marked the culmination of KP, she looked forward to attending her first on-base dance and cutting the rug to the tunes of Hendricks Field’s little big band. The good news was by the time Marjorie and Marilyn completed the checklist of KP duties, it was nearing 8 p.m. and the showers/latrines area were clear sailing. Marjorie thought that an upside to wearing a uniform was there was little to no fussing when getting dressed to go out and there was little to no fashion competition among the ladies, unlike in civilian life, where keeping up with the latest trends was tantamount to survival.

“Marilyn, have you seen how short the hems are getting”? Marjorie asked

as she buttoned up a fresh khaki shirt she saved for the dance. As always her reference came from Women's Daily Wear, a magazine she was delighted to find at the base commissary and the likes of which was now staring at her from its position on her bed. "They seem to be inching their way up past the knee, which my mama would never go for."

"I think it's to save on material," Marilyn chimed in. "You know how we're supposed to skimp on everything, so I guess the fashion designers have to skimp too."

"Well, it's a real shame that the Army doesn't have to skimp on its uniforms," Marjorie said, tucking her shirt into the A-line skirt with the hemline well below the knee. "I sure would like to hike the hemline up just a smidgen above the knee, but that would be an immediate gig."

The barracks had all but cleared out with everyone dispersing to various social destinations on and off base on the Liberty Belles first Friday night to kick up their heels. Rosie had already left for the NCO Club to slip onto a barstool next to a good-looking GI and small talk or more over cocktails, or at least that was the line she gave Marjorie. The girls put some finishing touches on their hair and faces: rouge, light pancake, a whisper of eye shadow and the thinnest application of eyeliner possible without poking their eyes. Although the task of beautifying was somewhat tedious the results were worth it.

"Oh piffle," said Marjorie, taking a gander at her reflection in the compact

she liked to set up in the window near her bed. “I should probably pluck my eyebrows but I really don’t feel like it. What do you think Marilyn?”

“Your eyebrows look grand Marjie, but I think you need a little more color on those lips,” Marilyn said, giving Marjorie the once-over. “Here, try a dab of my red lipstick, it’s that Montezuma Red by Elizabeth Arden. You know, the color she designed for the Marine women,” she added.

“Yeah, why would Elizabeth Arden want to design an olive drab lipstick for us Army girls?” Marjorie said more as a statement than a question. They both bust out laughing thinking about what an application of olive drab on the lips would look like.

“How do I look Marjie,” asked Marilyn, smoothing her skirt and fixing her Hobby Hat onto her well-tamed curls as she spun around the barracks floor.

“Like a million bucks,” answered her friend, taking a long, approving look. “Why, those fellas are gonna eat their hearts out when they know you are already sweet on someone,” said Marjorie.

The girls lit out of the barracks headed for the community room and some sorely missed big band blasting.

Marjorie had never seen such a packed dance floor as she witnessed at her first dance at Hendricks Field. She and Marilyn had to elbow their way from the entrance to the large wooden floor now sardined with khaki couples exuberantly attempting to jitterbug, lindy hop and swing without elbowing or

stepping on their neighbors. Naturally, the odds of easily snagging a dance partner, or two or three were great for the Liberty Belles in attendance since there were 10 times more men on the base than women. The band was pumping out a swing beat that made Marjorie step in rhythm as she held onto Marilyn's arm and pulled her along to just below the stage where Johnny's band was set up. He was playing a lively horn accompanied by five other band members playing piano, drums, stand-up bass, clarinet and saxophone. Marjorie noted the lack of a vocalist, which she hoped to change shortly, but for now she just wanted to dance. Johnny saw her and winked and she was proud and thrilled to be noticed, especially in front of her friend. She gave him a quick wave.

"Why Marjie, I think Johnny might have a crush on you," Marilyn said with a wink of her own. "I think he's blushing."

"Oh piffle," came Marjorie's standard reply when she wanted to discount what was being said. Before she could further expound on her and Johnny's mutual interest in music, she was whisked away by a tall G.I. who exerted a very strong lead. "Gad zooks," thought Marjorie, "It feels like I'm being run through mom's washing machine." For a quickstep second she thought of that Maytag, a funny little tub sitting on four legs and gyrating like mad agitating both the clothes and her mother as it would jerk itself across the back porch. This G.I. seemed to sport those same jerky movements, not that she cared one iota, since it was such a delight to be dancing again. She would spot Marilyn in between spins

and they would laugh and size up each others dance partners, which changed with every song the boys of the band played. It was the most fun Marjorie had since being a Liberty Belle. Some of the boys got a little too fresh and wanted to cut their dance short and go outside to neck but Marjorie could usually spot the wolves and would quickly bolt over towards Marilyn if she felt threatened. The dance lasted until 10 p.m. and Marjorie sat out just one dance in order to gulp down a large glass of a lemonade punch concoction that was set up at the refreshment table on the far end of the dance floor. She also took a moment to chat with Johnny on the one break the band took and told him what a swell job the band was doing, pumping out so many great tunes.

“Gee thanks for sayin’ so Marjorie,” said Johnny. “I talked to the boys about bringing in a singer for a couple of songs and they seemed pretty keen on the idea.” Marjorie glowed with excitement and gave his arm a squeeze of appreciation.

“I’m working on a couple of tunes to play for you next week,” she said breathlessly. Johnny nodded and excused himself to get back to the stage for the final set. Marjorie’s heart was beating way faster than the 4/4 time of the band’s beat as she looked around to find Marilyn while ducking under the radar of the dancing Maytag. “Gosh,” she thought, “We could start our own little USO troupe.” Well, first things first, she’d have to get her repertoire up to snuff at least to impress Johnny and then, who knows...



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The United Service Organization, better known to American soldiers as the USO was founded in 1941 at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His vision was to bring together six civilian charitable organizations under one marquee to help lighten the load of U.S. soldiers, now swelling in ranks as a response to the Axis threat. The organizations included: the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), National Catholic Community Service, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board. Together these organizations pulled resources and created a number of "home away from home" centers to help serve the recreational and spiritual needs of servicemen and women starting with the dawn of the war. USO centers, like everything else in response to the war effort, were established amid a flurry of quick delivery using churches, barns, railroad cars, museums, beach clubs, log cabins, among their creative quarters. Any space that would accommodate dances, movies, room to just relax and imbibe in the centers' signature free coffee and doughnuts, would do. Of course, the essential ingredient to the establishment of a USO center was having a nearby population of servicemen and women to cater to. Sebring had a USO center right in the middle of town, which Marjorie hadn't yet visited. She was much more tickled by the other and more noteworthy role played by the USO, the live shows, known as Camp Shows, which brought together key

members of the entertainment industry, bands, singers, comedians, actors and actresses to entertain the troops. In 1941, the U.S. Army made a plea for entertainment for troops preparing for the war in training camps around the country. The Citizens Committee for the Army and Navy responded and, in May 1941, sent out seven traveling show buses, bringing entertainment to servicemen in Army camps east of the Rockies.

Back at the hub of the entertainment industry, the glittering and glamorous Hollywood, another committee, comprising big-time Hollywood agents and producers, along with an assist by the Screen Actors Guild, put on a couple of big shows for the servicemen on their home turf of California. The first such show, held at March Field on May 1, 1941 was headlined by comedian and all-around entertainer Bob Hope and a sprinkling of other minor celebrities and was received with ringing applause and a plea for more. The demand for this kind of Hollywood entertainment production as a pick-me-up for the troops increased and the entertainment ante was upped.

Later that year, the Citizens Committee for the Army and Navy, the USO and show business representatives met to come up with a solution for how to quench the growing thirst for entertainment by the troops. The result was USO Camp Shows, Inc., which officially launched Oct. 30, 1941, as a separate corporation affiliated with and supported by the USO. USO Camp Shows, Inc.,

was designated by the War and Navy Departments as the "Official Entertainer" of the men and women of the armed forces and worked off the previous "Hollywood" model using entertainers to deliver a fully produced show. A new kind of star was born. Much to Marjorie's chagrin, The Camp Show hadn't yet made a stop at Hendricks Field. But her vision was set on creating her own "camp show" on base.

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Scanning the crowded dance floor, Marjorie spotted Marilyn over by the punch bowl smashed against the chest of a pencil-necked corporal who she recognized as working in the garage alongside Rosie. She caught her friend's eye and read an S.O.S. that sent her wading through the maze of jitterbugging, lickety-split to spring her from the arms of an unwanted snuggle. "Marilyn, it's time to make that call to your fiancé," she said, stressing the word "fiancé" as she grabbed her away from pencil-neck's hopeful clutches and started a long and breathless diatribe about how Hendricks could put on its own version of a "Camp Show." The girls walked arm-in-arm away from the dance and exited into a crisp spring night bustling with activity as the Friday night gyrations of a base filled with 2,000 men and 150 women were winding down and the mandated "lights out" was looming. Marjorie spotted a number of her barracks mates in the final throes of necking, lots of unsteady walking from too many beers and the ever present

MP's watching over all of the merry making.

“Hi de ho dolls,” slurred a gassed corporal, held up by his slightly staggering friend, as Marjorie and Marilyn breezed past them on their way to the barracks. “How about a smooch?” The girls laughed. “Not tonight soldier,” said Marjorie, noting that the boy reminded her of her brother Bill. She cringed at the thought of Bill carrying on like these boys, grabbing at any skirt passing his way. Helen would have an absolute hissy fit after putting so much effort in making him into a true gentleman. Booze and broads seemed to do a number on these young men. She figured the real culprit was the war. At least she knew she wouldn't be shipped out and thrown onto some treacherous island shore or a muddy trench somewhere in Europe. She could see why they were all getting sauced. These swirling thoughts took a lightness out of Marjorie's step, but she was no wet blanket and wasn't about to put a heavy edge on Marilyn's night, managing to shake off that blue streak while seamlessly chatting about the USO Camp Tours as they headed up the stairs, beating out curfew by a half hour.

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