

DES MOINES REGISTER

July 21, 1963

Letter to REGISTER from Alice Amyx Hugo, former member of WAC in 1943.

Hugo reminisces about her time spent at Fort Des Moines. In particular she discusses the experiences she had walking guard duty. She tells of Col. Frank McCoskrie, Fort Des Moines commandant, has is protectionist attitude towards the women guards. She also discusses camp life activities and procedures.

Recalls When WAACs Became WACs in 1943



Col. Oveta Culp Hobby swears in several thousand WACs at Fort Des Moines as members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) back in the summer of 1943. A member of that first group tells about it in the letter below.

To the Editor:

In July, 1943 — just 20 years ago—women were accepted in the Army. We were WACs, not WAACs. At Fort Des Moines, where I was stationed, Colonel Hobby, director of the corps, swore us into the Army with pomp and ceremony. This took place on the parade grounds with movie cameras and V. I. P.s from Washington. We took the oath over and over again, until we got the proper enthusiasm, holding up two fingers—"V" for victory.

Quite a few women were disqualified from a physical standpoint. Others quit because they had been disillusioned by recruiters who had pictured Army life so glamorously, and by the attitude that some men took toward women in uniform.

A few weeks after we had taken the oath, we were assigned to guard duty. Because my last name began with "A" I was one of the first

to walk guard. It was the first step for WAC personnel toward replacing soldiers. Over 100,000 women took basic training at Fort Des Moines.

Reporters were thick that momentous evening when we walked guard. Cameras clicked as the major put us through the ceremonial paces on the west drill area. The sunset was crimson and gold. WAC insignias on hats and blouses captured this brilliance and we felt as though we were knighted. . .

Two guards were assigned to each post, walking a beat for three hours from 9 p. m. to 6 a. m. A public relations script writer, whose name I've forgotten and whom I'll dub "S. W.," accompanied us. We walked in a circle around the Boomtown training area, the S. W. timing us in 20 minutes.

When we got to a dark corner of the area, the shrubbery looked mysterious. But all we had for ammunition were exploding lipsticks and loaded powder puffs. There

were no holsters with guns, as the male M. P.s had, only flashlights, pencils and notebooks.

All recruits were to be in bed by 11 p. m. No males were allowed on the premises after dark. But the headlights of a car almost blinded us. We recognized a young male lieutenant. He pulled rank on us and refused to leave until he deposited his date, a WAC trainee.

This was something we hadn't expected, an officer pulling his rank. We were to carry out Army regulations while on guard. But the corps was still an infant. The rest of the beat dragged on normally. . .

Girls hated to wear their dogtags. So on inspections—and now on guard duty—WAC guards checked to see if the trainees were wearing them. Just before we turned over our charge to the next couple, we met this trainee, past bedcheck time.

"Let's see your dogtags," I said.

"But I ain't got a dog," she flipped.

We took her name and serial number and commented on the freshness of the new trainees.

A week after we walked guard, the late Col. Frank McCoskrie, our commandant, held a meeting on the parade grounds for the "pioneer" women guards.

The colonel was quite protective toward us. Only on inspections, when he wore his white gloves to test for dust, was he strictly G. I.

"Is this guard duty too hard on you girls?" he asked. "Will the lack of sleep hurt your health? Women must eventually take the place of all men at the post. Think you can take it?"

Take it! I was indignant and so were the others. Even my encounter with the male officer and the flippancy of the WAC recruit hadn't discouraged me on my mission—to replace a soldier.

We women, the assigned personnel at the training center, knew we soon would have to face the biggest envy of all — when our recruits would be sent overseas. But this guard duty . . . had lifted our status. At long last, we were lady soldiers, replacing men.—Alice Amyx Hugo, 1734½ Hawthorne Court, Independence, Mo.