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# "THEY'RE KEEN, VERY KEEN" Waacs At Work

I found myself outside the establishment where the first detachments of the W.A.A.C. are under training, unfolded my pass beneath the eye of the sentry and was duly escorted to the headquarters of the School of Artillery.

"I want to see the Waacs in action," I explained. My escort right-turned sharply, marched approximately two hundred paces, and left me in front of a glass door. I opened the door.

In the centre of the room a dozen or so laughing girls, in battle dress and field service caps, were sitting on a bench. waiting to be issued with their brown walking shoes. A sergeant stood at one end of the room, supervising the trying on, another sergeant sat at a table, entering names and particulars in her register. The officer-in-charge, the only man in the room, for the n.c.o.'s were women-undertook to explain something of the course.

"These girls are doing a special training course in anti-aircraft work. They're the ones who will be sent out to batteries at the end of their stay here, to man special radio instruments. But they've only just begun their course, and as you can see there's a certain amount of routine work to be done-issuing equipment and so on."

#### "Not All Grind"

"Have they begun their practical work yet?"

"Yes. I'll show you their time-table."

I learnt from this that for the W.A.A.C. work begins at 8.30 with half an hour's P.T., and proceeds to 5.15 with alternating periods of practical and theoretical work. But it's by no means all grind. Games and physical education are included under the heading of practical work, and one lecture period a day is devoted to the more general swinging their trousered legs.



English ack-ack girls work a predictor

T was almost lunchtime before aspects of war training-talks by experts on such subjects as the work of the women's forces in Britain, and the functioning of other branches of the service, and the conduct of the war as a whole.

'What did most of the girls do before they joined up?" I asked, and was shown another list of names, ages and previous occupations. "Shop assistant" figured most prominently on the list, but a wide field of previous occupations was represented-theatre usher, stenographer, bank clerk, schoolteacher-and I noticed that several of the recruits had previously been ladies of leisure. And most of them were bringing to their new work the undimmed enthusiasm of the early

#### "It's Really Very Simple"

But I had no time to brood over the list. The officer-in-charge was at my elbow. "We'll just have time to see the other detachment before they knock off for lunch," he explained.

We reached one group just before they dismissed, and I was shown the equipment with which they were training. 'No wonder the authorities indicated that girls with mathematical qualifications were needed for the radio-location section," I remarked.

"Oh no, it's really quite simple. All you have to do is work this" (indicating a lever) "so that you get this in line with this." She demonstrated.

"Just a matter of turning a handle," remarked another.

"Only you have to know which way to turn it."

#### Proper Army Boots

The squad was dismissed, and I followed the group back into the building. This time I was able to see all the ack-ack girls assembled together, and to appreciate the fact that large numbers were already in training. Lunch had begun, and everywhere girls were sitting at tables munching sandwiches, or on the benches, balancing bowls of soup and

> "Look!" The girl sitting next to me stretched out her legs, displaying large army boots at their extremities. "Proper army boots. And only four of us have them-the first four to come into camp."

"And are you all going to have them?"

"No, we're having proper women's boots - brown, These are men's." She eyed them proudly. "Not that I'm looking forward to breaking in another pair."

"The men were most helpful," said her companion.



ENGLISH A.T.S. GIRLS (corresponding to our W.A.A.C.'s) 'plane-spot from their gun-site near London

They told us to soak them all night. We had to wear them wet to parade the next morning, but they're quite a decent shape now." She displayed her feet, though it was impossible to tell from the outside whether the boots had changed shape inside or not.

#### 'Wouldn't Change For Anything"

"You seem to be enjoying it here," I remarked.

"We love it!" said the first speaker, with all the enthusiasm of her eighteen years. "I didn't want to be an ack-ack a bit at first, because you see I'd done shorthand and typing and I wanted to do clerical work. But then the officer suggested that as I had matric. I'd be better here. And now I wouldn't change for anything!"

"It's so different from the sort of things we did before. And we spend three-quarters of our time outside. Lots of drill and marching."

"And we're going to play basketball as soon as we get a court."

"And we're going to start living in as soon as the barracks are ready. Then we'll have a mess of our own. This isn't really our mess. We share it with the OCTU."

To me this sounded unpleasantly like OGPU, but I was reassured to learn that it was merely the Officer Cadet Training Unit, members of which were now beginning to straggle in.

"That's another nice thing," said the twenty-year-old. "The men here have been awfully decent to us. We expected them to sneer rather, but they've taken the idea of women in the army quite seriously, and they've done all sorts of things to help us. And our instructors are jolly fine too."

I was dragged out into the corridor in time to waylay a sergeant on his way to the mess. The introduction was effected.

"How do you like teaching girls?" I

(Continued on next page)