

Commanding the WACS was Major Charity Adams, later Col., standing next to Lt. Gen. John Lee, commanding general of the communications zone.

Mention women in the Armed Forces, and you'll get very little response. It has become universally accepted that women serve in all branches of the military.

But it was not always so. While it is generally known that members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) served overseas



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The sparkplug who pulled the Barline pieces together for the 1st N.Y. re reunion after 33 years is Mrs. talk ab Mary Rozier of Cincinnati. wearing

## On arrival in Birmingham, England, the battalion immediately put on a dress parade.

## First Black WACs Overseas

During World War II, a group of 800 WACs were assigned to the 6888 CPD, which served in Birmingham, Eng., Rouen and Paris, France. They recently held their 1st reunion, and DAWN Magazine was there.

during World War II, one unit has received very little recognition.

The 6888th Central Postal Directory WAC Battalion was a unit of 800 black women who volunteered for overseas duty while the fighting in Europe was still raging.

All this happened 33 years ago, and just this month, the first reunion of the 6888th CPD was held in Cincinnati, Ohio. Coordinated by former WACs Mary Rozier and Mary Daniels, it took almost a year to pull all the pieces together.

DAWN Magazine helped to spread the word of the reunion, when a letter from former WAC Pat Matthews, drew an enthusiastic response from 6888ers.

And thus it was that DAWN Magazine attended the reunion. Held in a downtown hotel, nearly 50 members of the group wept, reminisced and gave up-to-theminute accounts of their doings since the memorable ETO stint.

They talked about that first parade in Birmingham, England and had a great chuckle when Earline Reeves Bollin of Jamaica, N.Y. recalled: "You hear all this talk about when people started wearing "Afros," but we wore

Afros by necessity when we first got to England. After all, there were no hairdressers for our hair."

A history of the unit and life as a black WAC was written by Lucia M. Pitts and formed the basis for a condensed history of the battalion, along with official information supplied by the Historical Services Division of the Army.

The European theater was the only overseas theater to employ black WACs. ETO politely



On break in Rouen, France was a group of 6888ers, waiting for chow with their mess kits.



Standing at attention with the colors was the honor guard.

vacillated. Blacks were requisitioned in 1942 with the declaration that in time of war it is the privilege of all American citizens regardless of race or sex to serve in and with the Armed Forces.

Hobby, director of the Women's Army Corps, refused to let the women be scattered in uncontrolled small field units near male black troops, the theater hastily cancelled the requisition and stated that colored WACs will not be requisitioned until such time as the War Department announces that their shipment to theaters of operation is a necessity.

Pressure of civil rights groups finally forced the War Department to direct the European theater to accept black WACs. As directed, the European theater submitted a requisition for approximately 800 women to set up half a central postal directory. Declaring that these women would not fill any existing military jobs, the theater asked and expected an additional allotment of grades, but none was received

The unit, the 6888th Central Postal Battalion, was selected from both the Air Forces and the Service Forces in order to give all women a chance at overseas

"Meanwhile, rumors had been going the rounds that we were all

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Attending the reunion were former WACS, who enjoyed a bit of buffet at the gathering. Included were: Earlina Reeves Bollin, Jamaica, N.Y.; Mary Peterson, Largo, Md.; Dörothy Bartlett. Detroit, Mich.; Althea Dun Buchana, Brooklyn,

N.Y.; Blanche Scott, Alexandria, Va.; Frances Sherman Barnes, Queens, N.Y.; Bessie L. Robinson, Cincinnati, Ohio; Mary Daniels Williams, Cincinnati, Ohio; Rose Doty, Cincinnati, Ohio.



Margaret Barbour, Los Angeles; Esther Marshall, Seaside, Calif.; Jetta Flagg, Jamaica, N.Y.; Emma De Friese, Queens, N.Y.; Effie Sutton Brown, Raleigh, N.C.; Fannie Lynch Howard, Vineland, N.J.; Grace Thornton, St. Louis,

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to be shipped overseas. But rumors on Army posts are rife and frequently wrong, so we put little faith in this one until in December of 1944 several of us were asked if we'd care to volunteer for overseas duty.

"We were rushed through physicals and other processing honored at a special dinner in the mess hall, extolled by a proud Col. Hardy, presented good conduct medals. Monday morning, serenaded by the post band, we were escorted by Col. Hardy, Lt. Consuela Bland, and a great many others, to the bus which would take us to the railroad station in Hereford for overseas furloughs at home, happily coming at Christmas time.

"We reported at Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia, and were put through intensive training, Mo.; Mary E. Overton, N.J.; Jennetta Schooler Blythe, Hartford, Conn.; Eunice Wright, Ft. McClelland, Ala.; Hattie Boyce, Cleveland, Ohio; Catherine Nelson Bowie, Dallas, Tex.; Tessie O'Bryant Barr, Detroit, Mich.

including a five-mile hike in full regalia (pistol belts, gas masks, canteens, packs and helmets) under active war conditions, learning how to climb up and down a cargo net, going through the gas chamber, in addition to a full day of classes, the usual cleaning details, caring for our own furnaces, KP and doing our personal washing, ironing and cleaning."

"On a Saturday, the last of

January, the 500 of us then assembled at Oglethorpe (WACs were coming in from everywhere), were told to pack our duffle bags and get them outside. Sunday morning we were marched to the rail center where we boarded a special train which got us to Camp Shanks, New York, Monday morning. Col. Hobby came to bid us bon voyage."

"Chilled to the bone, we cer-(Continued on Page 27)



Bertie Edwards, Takoma, Wash.; Ruth Smith, Detroit, Mich.; Enid Clark, San Francisco, Calif.; Myke Coleman, Springfield, Ohio; Johnnie Walton, Hempstead, Tex.; Mattie Allen,

Los Angeles, Calif.; Novella Auls, Hampton, Va.; Gurthalee Clark, Los Angeles.