

ARMY MARRIAGES

From the Viewpoint of a Local Private's Wife

Marriage has always been one of the juiciest topics for discussion. In Grandma's day a girl was raised knowing the necessities of house-keeping and the niceties of needle work—and perhaps if her family was "genteel" she was taught to tat and paint pretty flowers on china. The ultimate end, of course, being marriage—and pity the poor young thing whose teeth were too large or whose figure too slim—or horrors if she lived to read and discuss the events of the day. She, I'm afraid, was relegated to mournful spinsterhood—while her cameo-like if less intelligent sister, became wife and mother and lived, we hope, happily ever after.

Skipping the years we find hoop skirts and stays have gone—the bizarre suffragettes are just a hazy recollection. Institutions of learning have opened wide their portals—"nice women" use make-up and smoke cigarettes and pretty young things major in psychology, merchandising and art—and bravely—if not brazenly—endeavor to seek a career.

Here we are in 1942—the emancipation of woman has been fought for and won—and still our most pertinent topic for discussion now—as then—is marriage.

Marriage in 1942 does bring with it more obstacles, I'll concede, than in former peacetime years. We are all deeply conscious of the seriousness of the day and the torn-up condition of our world—and undoubtedly wiser heads than ours are trying to guide us in our decisions.

But war or no war the youth of America, 1942 is falling in love, just as youth has always loved. Of course, our snug, well-patterned lives are just a bit different. Our boys are in uniform, bugles are blowing. Irving Berlin is again writing patriotic songs—everyone is buying bonds and stamps and our energetic young women are turning their efforts to can-teen and Red Cross work—and join-ings the WAACS and WAVES—to further help our country in her crisis.

Much has been said about "War Marriages," a term I have come to dislike for it is too much of an implication that scatterbrained youth is madly messing up their lives—without a thought for the future.

There are so many diversified opinions on this subject that I thought

as war bride, I'd add my own humble thoughts on the matter—hoping, perhaps, to help some other young couple to come to a decision. Naturally, I'm for marriage, 1942, or any time, providing the couple involved have carefully thought over the step they are taking. My husband and I had been friends for a good many years. So it was no three-day wonder—rather a natural result of knowing each other and our own minds—when we decided to be married last July. Knowing Jim was going to be drafted we decided to abbreviate our engagement and be married as quickly as possible. We managed despite our haste, to have a wedding in a lovely garden, in the presence of our friends and families. And off we went for a 13-day honeymoon, both of us aware that our wedding trip would be all we could have together. We found a lodge in the Adirondacks and for a week we swam, fished and "roughed it," making the most of our vacation. We ended up with a week end in New York and then came home with a day to spare, for Jim to say goodbye to his family. The next morning he left.

That goodbye at the draft-board we both thought was to be for a long, long time. We made it casual, just as though he were going on a fishing trip. After a kiss and a smile he was gone—and I went home once again to live in single blessedness and wait for the mail.

Jim was sent to an induction center for five days and then shipped to Ft. Bragg for six weeks basic training. I settled down then, accepting our separation, determined to go on painting—and looking for gay little bits to enliven my daily letters. Then Jim wrote suggesting I come down for the week end. Having reconciled myself to probably months of not seeing him, it was inconceivable to plan a visit, but finally the night rolled around, and one month after we said goodbye I was on my way to North Carolina to get my first taste of life in the Army.

I don't want this to be too biographical a sketch, but in order to prove my point I feel the first person speaks better than quoted volumes.

The trip down was a gay if somewhat hectic one. The train was filled with girls, like myself, on their way to visit their respective men in the service. I arrived at the Guest House at Ft. Bragg Saturday afternoon, where Jim had made a reservation for me for three days. After my first shock of seeing Jim tanned and thinner, but looking just like the hundreds of other soldiers, I put my bags in the room I was to share with two other guests (they, too, were young wives) and off we went for a visit to enlighten me about life in the Army.

The Guest House is run on a strict Army basis—G. I. cots, all guests in at 11, and no soldiers permitted beyond the reception room, but despite the strictness, no matter Jim had to be in his barracks by 11, it was wonderful to be reunited and have the rest of Saturday and all day Sunday to be together. Monday Jim

had to work again, and while he was busy marching and drilling I was playing with the idea of prolonging my visit. I noticed there were girls employed in the restaurant of the Service Club and right then and there I decided to get a job and stay on as long as Jim was stationed there.

I'd like to mention here how very wonderful and helpful are the hostesses at Ft. Bragg. They have an enormous job, with constant demands on their time and energies. They deserve a vote of thanks from every wife and mother who have boys in the service for their untiring tolerance and understanding.

I spoke to the senior hostess about a job. No "artists" were needed, but if I'd take a job as a "counter girl" there was a place for me.

Take it I did—and after a day spent in moving into the USO in Fayetteville and notifying my parents that I was remaining for Jim's duration, I went to work. My husband didn't know a thing about my change in plans—till after I had already started. I broke the news at dinner; that night and he was so pleased I'm sure he didn't know what he was eating.

Then started two weeks of a new and strange routine. With some trepidation I donned a white uniform and hair net and set about to make salads—and dish up mashed potatoes and gravy, coffee and pie to hordes of hungry soldiers that poured in all day long.

The working hours were in two shifts, about six girls on each. We were supposed to alternate daily—first morning, then evening, but since I wanted to spend my evenings with Jimmy I managed to switch with other girls and so be free for the evening. For two weeks I rose at five in order to catch a bus, started to work at six and finished my day at three.

I used to bring a change of clothes out with me and spend the remainder of the afternoon at camp, sketching the soldiers, while waiting till it was time for Jimmy to come in and have dinner and spend the few hours before 11 with me.

Picture the bus that came faithfully at 10:30 every evening to pick up its load of Army girls and take them back to town. It was always crowded to capacity and filled with female chatter. Usually three or four of us got off together and had a little coffee before we retired to our re-

spective "spinster" establishments.

The USO clubs here deserve a word of praise in helping the girls find lodging and work and in sheer hospitality to the soldiers they are unsurpassed. The club I stayed at is run by the Salvation Army and my thanks are coupled with those of all the girls who were made to feel so at home.

Friends are quickly made when people with mutual interests and similar ways of life, are thrown together. Our coffee parties became a habit and presently we became a sort of "Army Sorority." We came from all over. We were all sorts and all religions and we were the best of friends. All would make light of the fact we had such little time with our husbands and when one of the boys got an "overnight" every one was as pleased as if it were their own. Due to over-crowded conditions several of the girls shared rooms to conserve space and expenses, and if a roommate's husband got a pass for the night or a week end, their fellow lodger automatically found herself somewhere else to stay. The lack of formality is amazing and everyone met it with genuine good nature. In all, the girls met inconveniences with good humor, the antidote for dissatisfaction.

Most of our husbands get no passes later than 11 o'clock, occasionally one o'clock on Saturdays and so we all sort of pretended we were on a huge house party visiting our fiancés. We met our husbands—as tho it were a "date." If it rained we gathered in the service club, talking and drinking cokes. Occasionally some one would play records and those of us whose husbands weren't too "done in" would dance a bit. In clear evenings we'd stroll around camp and once in awhile we'd walk to the open air theater to sit under the Carolina moon for a few minutes alone—before bus time. And so it went until basic training was over and the boys were sent to their line camps.

Jimmy left early in the morning of our second month's anniversary, knowing we wouldn't be together for it. We celebrated the occasion the week end before with one another. We bought a bottle of champagne and we drank it out of paper cups.

As we didn't know where Jimmy was being sent, I left the same eve-

ning for home, to see my family and again await word of his location. I spent a little over a week at home, then with an additional gas allotment from the ration board, I set off again, bringing our beloved records and victrola and my paints. Jimmy was sent just 20 miles from Ft. Bragg and so I'm back in the South again. This time its quite different. He is in a noncombat unit and is out in the woods about four miles from Raeford. He works in regular shifts and when he's off duty he is permitted to come into town.

Raeford, too, is overcrowded, for three hours I went from door to door, looking for a room. Finally I found one in a lovely little house with grand people. All I have ever heard about Southern hospitality I've found absolutely true and proven by the people of this little Southern town. I looked for a room and found a home. Everyone is so friendly that I feel no longer a stranger, rather a very fortunate visitor who is rapidly becoming a native.

I don't know how long we'll be here but I hope its an indefinite stay. We're experiencing our first bit of domesticity and are getting quite a kick out of it and if I'm able to get a job it will be as near a perfect setup as we can wish in these times.

This first hand account, then is my argument for getting married despite the war. If you have the initiative to seek it, you can find happiness. I think there is only one requisite—Be sure of yourselves. If you are certain of yourselves you'll find a way.

Weigh the subject carefully and from all angles. If you are reluctant to change your way of life—if the inconveniences seem too much, if you are fearful of living on your own or if your jobs mean too much to you—take it all into consideration. Perhaps you had better wait—but if you have an ounce of fire in your nature and the "pride" to take any job that offers itself if it is enough to live on, if you have an adventurous nature and a sense of humor, get married—and you'll get along.

Perhaps we've been exceptionally lucky and perhaps the next place Jimmy goes I won't be as fortunate. But this much I've decided: I'll go too. I've become a camp follower, the monogamous variety to be sure,

and follow I will as long as possible. Into our three months of being a "family" we've packed so much fun and happiness we feel we've been married for years and yet are on a prolonged honeymoon. And when the time comes I can no longer follow, I'll return home knowing we've had wonderful months together and certain that this war can't last forever.

Some day, when we become a portly, middle-aged couple, stuffy in our comforts and contentment, we'll dig out our dusty snapshots and letters and chuckle fondly together over our first months of marriage, in crazy, hectic, war-torn 1942.

—Elizabeth Langsdorf Miller.

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U. S. Treasury Department

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