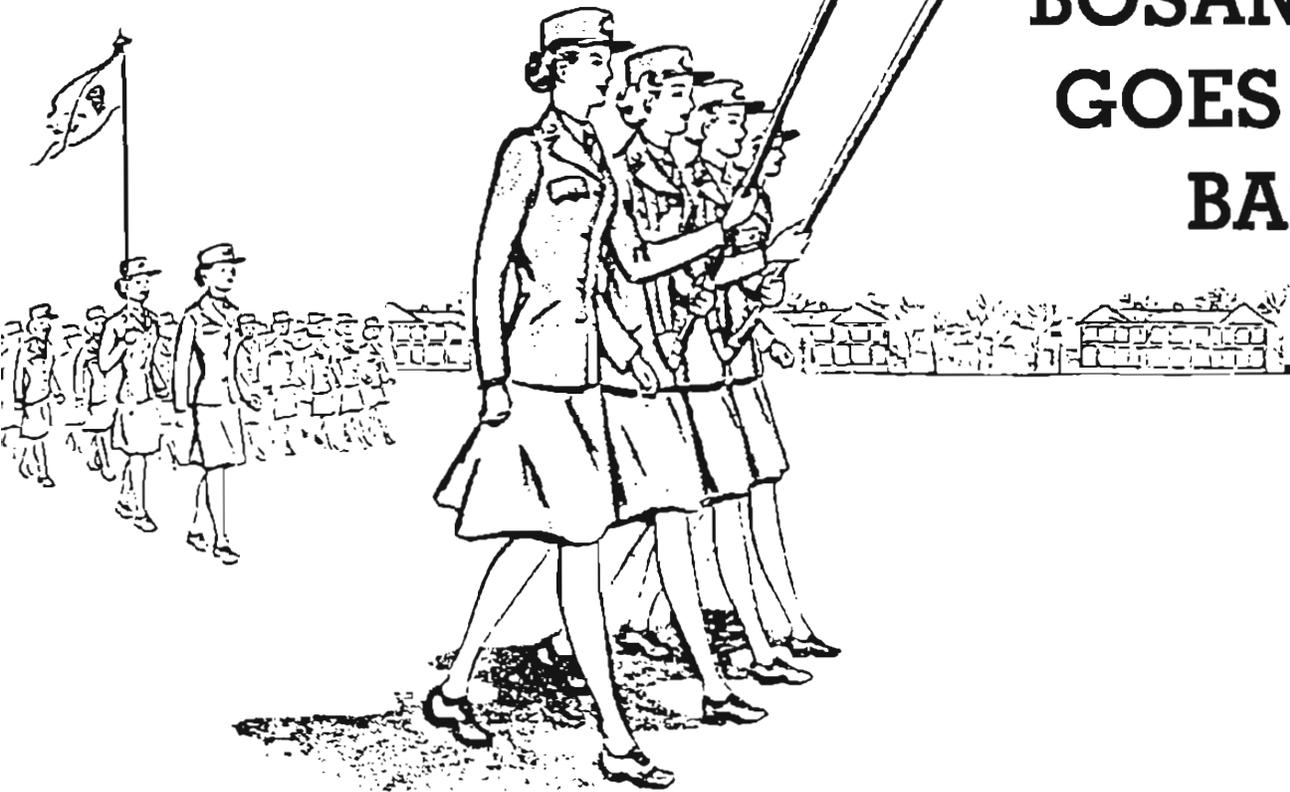


**PRIVATE
BOSANKO
GOES TO
BASIC**



ON SEPTEMBER 20, 1944, her 20th birthday, Anne Bosanko, a young Minneapolitan who had just completed her second year at the University of Minnesota, joined the WAC. Created in 1942 as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and restructured a year later as the Women's Army Corps, this new military body existed primarily to free able-bodied men from clerical work and to move them into combat units. Motivated by "a combination of patriotism, idealism, and the urge for adventure," Anne Bosanko decided to enter the service at a time when the war news from both the European and Pacific fronts was bad from the Allied viewpoint.

Her parents, Paul and Blanche Wadleigh Bosanko, and her young brother, Michael, applauded her decision. It was to this trio that most of her wartime letters were addressed, although some were written to a close friend. The following article, which includes a few letters from her family, is adapted from the first chapter in a new book issued by the Minnesota Historical Society Press entitled *One Woman's War* by Anne B. Green. It is the intensely personal, yet universal, experience of women in war revealed through letters home.

A MINNESOTA WOMAN IN WORLD WAR II

Anne Bosanko Green

Minneapolis, Minnesota

June 19, 1944

Dearest Carrie,

Two months whiz by awfully fast, don't they? But then I seem to remember getting a Christmas thank-you letter along towards the end of February, so we are both culprits. Upon reading over your letter I note that your father is overseas. I hope he is still all right. Our father is in the Army now too. (Got you excited, didn't I?) The truth of the matter is that he is a corporal in the State Guard, which is having a two-week session up at Camp Ripley [near Little Falls]. You can calm down

now. Mother and I went down to the station to see him off, and put on such a scene (in fun, of course) that I bet people thought he was going at least to France. What were you doing on D-Day [June 6, 1944]? I was sound asleep and took a Humanities test in the morning. Missed any really exciting news. But a friend of mine was up late studying with her radio on and heard the first dispatches. They turned the station over to the news room and the announcer walked around reading the news as it came in, and she could hear the tickers. Also they kept going to London and she heard Churchill and the Belgian Prime Minister and other notables, and heard them broadcasting in French to the French Underground. It was all very exciting. Coming home on the streetcar that day, I was reading a man's paper over his shoulder which inspired me to write a poem:

Allies advance
And push into France;
Summer savings at Grant's . . .
Strike closes down plants . . .
Blake boys give a dance . . .
Go to Krantz for your pants . . .
The newspaper chants,
While the Allies advance
Into France.

I haven't gotten back any grades from exams yet but I know I got an A in Zoology. Happy day. As to English Lit., English History, and Humanities, my fate is in the lap of the Gods. I am letting my mind lie fallow this summer while I work part-time in the [Minneapolis] Star-Journal Want Ad Department and read murder mysteries the rest of the time. Everyone seems to have broken out into a great rash of summer school and nurses' aid this summer, but not me. I ain't so dumb—I know about crop rotation. Spring Quarter my life was very hectic what with being:

AWS (Associated Women Students) Junior Council president
Treasurer of Cosmopolitan Club
Secretary of Arts Intermediary Board
Secretary of Commonwealth Party
Member of Sigma Epsilon Sigma, honorary Sophomore Women's Society which did committee work for the post-war conference

I can't escape dear old activities this summer because I'm in charge of the Big Sisters tea in the fall, which is different this year involving counselors, etc., and has three huge committees and no less than 23 sub-committees. But after the tea is over, I will leave that stuff forever BECAUSE I'm joining the WAC just as soon as I'm 20 which is September 20. It's a really good proposition because when I get out I will get some government subsidy if I go back to school. Even if I don't go back to school I will have a good solid Arts

foundation plus invaluable experience. Mom and Dad both approve wholeheartedly. I decided this spring to do it because I felt so useless going to school and being Big Deal On Campus (big sucker on Campus if you ask me,) and I felt that I could do some good in the Army and it certainly will do me some good. In fact, it's a good deal all around and I'm very enthusiastic about the whole thing. Think of the interesting people I'll meet and the places I'll see. I might even get to go abroad, though I'll be satisfied doing anything they give me. . . .

Well, my dear, when are you coming back, if ever? You aren't going to work for Mr. Schlage all your life, are you? Who knows, maybe I'll be stationed out in San Francisco near you. That would be a truly happy coincidence. Just think if we got together how much we would have to talk about and what fun you could have taking me around. It probably never would happen, but it's nice to think about. Please write a huge letter soon and I'll answer it right away 'cause I'm not busy now.

All my love,
Pansy¹

P.S.. Please don't write to any of the kids here about my joining the WAC because I want it to be a secret (except from you).

Fort Des Moines, Iowa

October 4, 1944

Company 2 Receiving and Staging Battalion, Army Post Branch, Wednesday morning, crack of dawn (almost) . . .

Dear Family,

What a God-awful night I spent. That train was a horrible local that stopped for twenty minutes at least at every station. Bumpy and draughty and sooty. We trailed into Des Moines at 1 a.m.—no sleep at all of course—were bundled into Army trucks and bounced out to the Fort. We had breakfast and were checked in, and got to bed at 3 a.m. At 5:45 we were dragged out and had more mess [meal]. The barracks are quite nice and hold about 100 girls I think. Look like horse barns from the outside—only one story and made of red brick. Inside is cream whitewashed and sort of mapley double-deck bunks. SOS! I have no towels or washcloths and they aren't issued. Those dopes at the recruiting office didn't tell us anything right, so I'll probably be writing frantic letters or sending back packages for the next three weeks. You can't write to me for a week, so I'm told, because we don't get in our regular barracks till then. My fellow rookies are sort of dopey but no doubt they'll improve with time. Our Sergeant, called Sergeant Mac, is young and peppy and nice but

firm. Good gal. I'm going to try to catch up on my sleep now so goodbye and love and I don't think I'll die.

Later: We've started close-order drill and I'm scared to death of all my Sergeants. They all scream at the tops of their lungs and I can't understand a word they say. Ergo, I do everything wrong and get glared at. Very humiliating. I'm worse than Private Hargrove.²

5 October 1944

Thursday

Dear Family,

Well, here I am before dinner in the Day Room sitting at a nice maple desk, drinking a Coke and inhaling a fag [cigarette]. I suppose you'd like a more coherent account of what has cooked and is cooking. My last letter was written about 7 a.m. and I had just found out about no towels and was understandably hysterical. I've been going to bed wet since then and trying to make the best of it. Tried to buy some at the PX [Post Exchange] but with no success. You can't write or send me anything till next week but then I would like a supply of bath towels and washcloths. I'll give you my permanent address before then. . . .

Wednesday morning: Got our clothing issue which I will list for you

Clothing issue:

- 2 Winter jackets
- 2 Winter shirts
- 3 Winter skirts
- 2 Summer jackets (known as blouses)
- 4 Summer skirts
- 7 Summer shirts
- Khaki underwear pants (rayon—ick)
- Woolies (long sleeves)
- Shoes, 1 pr., service
- Shoes, 1 pr., field (high)
- Shoes are *comfortable*
- 1 pr. wool gloves (nice)
- Purse [commodious, with shoulder strap]
- 1 pr. dress leather gloves
- Wool knit hat (cute)
- Fatigue hat
- 2 Winter hats
- 2 Summer hats
- 2 Winter Garrison caps
- 2 Summer Garrison caps (no, I'm not crazy, they aren't called overseas caps; they *are* Garrison caps)

¹ Pansy, sometimes written Panzy, was short for "Anne-sy-Pansy," a nickname applied to me by my friend Carrie.

² Pvt. Hargrove was the hero of a comic novel by Marion Hargrove, *See Here, Private Hargrove*, about the life of an army draftee. The book was also the basis for a Broadway musical of the same name.



Gay little green seersucker fatigue dress with bloomers to match (this is what the recruiting office said wasn't issued—the dopes)

Khaki wool sweater

Various socks and stockings

Two-piece green striped flannel PJs

Toothbrush

Comb

Everything except TOWELS

We look very bunched and feeble now but maybe later we will look nifty like the other gals.

We went into uniform (fatigue) this morning. Damn the recruiting office—nothing they told us was true. I have to have more of my hair cut off. Anyhow, we sat around most of the day. At night we got to go to the PX. Mom, the juke box was playing an old favorite of yours, "Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight." I nearly flipped. You should see the cigarettes. Cartons and cartons piled up. I'd send you a carton but they let us buy only two at a time. I'll tell you more about the PX later. It's very gay and buzzing with people, all looking horribly neat and smooth in their uniforms, of course. . . .

I saluted twice tonight. Boy, am I good. This is really fun and I love everything once I got over thinking the bawlings-out were aimed straight at me. I had a guilty conscience for hours after I had a letter returned with the wrong address on it. They screamed my name out over the whole barracks. . . .

Heaps of love and kisses,

8 October 1944

Company 5, Third Regiment, APF, Des Moines, Iowa
Sunday

Dearest Family,

The irony of something or other. Yesterday I was finally issued three GI bathtowels and today I get your package of towels. Thanks much anyway and I can use the washcloths. Yesterday I sent off that library book which in my excitement at the station I forgot to give you. There is 30 cents due on it (rental book) and I'll send you a money order if you want. Today being Sun-

day we have it easy. Sleep till 7:30—two hours extra. Went to RC [Roman Catholic] Mass in the morning with Ruth K. who is very congenial. Wrote letters till mess at 12:30. Got dressed up in my uniform, at last, and went over to the Service Club which is tres deluxe. Library, cafeteria, big game room, dancing, ping pong, phone bar for long distance calls. All decorated very nicely. Mess at 4:30 and write letters in evening. You can write me now; my permanent address will probably reach you soon.

Yesterday we got our first series of shots and vaccinations [smallpox, diphtheria, and tetanus] and last night the whole barracks was groaning and moaning enough to wake the dead, namely me. I can't recognize any of my little pals now that they have their uniforms on. They all look like human beings now instead of convicts. I've found out that there is absolutely no chance of a furlough after my basic and probably not even after my training. Of course, it's mostly in the lap of the Gods but the Gods are usually malignant according to all the gals I've talked to. You must really plan to come down in about a month. We could really have fun. After basic, we go into what is known as Staging, which is much like Receiving—crowded barracks, no room, and much confusion. The kids have to be ready to go out on a moment's notice so they have to be all packed and everything all the time. Some kids have been in Staging six months waiting for their orders. That must be a horrible strain. Our little Company is getting better and better at drilling, and we stood inspection yesterday. It's almost like really being in the Army. But next week I guess the heat really goes on. The sergeants probably won't be as fun and as easy on us. I actually heard one sergeant say, "Group Six up front on the double, *please!*" I'm feeling some reaction from my shots, a kind of tired feeling. Went to a movie again last night to take my mind off my troubles. Wrote to Mrs. Nelson, Mom; I am a good girl. Guess what? Our group has latrine detail. Mom, you will appreciate that fact no doubt. Also the fact that every morning I eat a big steaming bowl of Sturdi-Wheat. I'm going to gain pounds and pounds I know. A couple of days ago we were taken to see a parade and it was very thrilling. Huge numbers of WACs all marching in cadence, and a band, and the Colonel, and stuff. Our Sergeant got a Good Conduct ribbon.

Please, I wish you would ask me lots of questions 'cause it's so hard to remember all the little details of things. The sun has finally come out and we can see what the Post looks like. It was an old cavalry post, since 1903, and nearly all the buildings are red brick with white front porches and many tall elms and oaks and flower beds and a big green parade ground. Of course, it's lovely this time of year with the trees just beginning to turn. Got beer at the PX the other night—

what a treat.³ I felt like a fiend, but “Wot the ‘ell, a soldier’s got to have her relaxation!”

Goodbye for now and please write soon and lots. Much love and kisses and I miss you all immensely.

15 October 1944

Sunday

Dearest Family,

Sunday at last! Well, I’m still alive after a week of Basic. Boy, am I tough. I can take everything—putrid chow, no room for my stuff, obnoxious Southerners, pushups, and KP [kitchen police], all in one week. Am now prone on my little bunk engaged in pen pushing like mad and trying to relax. I felt pretty low at 5 a.m. on Saturday morning while cleaning out the grease trap over at Number 3 Mess, but my spirits popped up again after a couple of beers and some singing at the PX last night. I got a kick out of your frantic queries as to whether or not I had gotten your letters and what was the right address and towels and stuff. I was right in the middle of the letter which said you were going to send me another package of towels when the mail orderly handed me a package, at which point I gave a loud groan with visions of gigs [demerits] for my overstuffed foot-locker dancing through my head. I was much relieved and delighted to find it was [chocolate chip] cookies, and I am now the most popular girl in the barracks (see ad for Toll House Cookies, Inc.). A small amount of extra money would be appreciated since I’ve decided to send out all my laundry on the advice of a fellow KPer in her sixth week of Basic. Irons are impossible to get hold of, time is nil, and there are only three washtubs for our whole platoon, so you can see the situation I’m in.

We have very little time to ourselves. In the morning we have three 40 minute classes: Physical Training, Drill, and one Indoctrination course. Afternoon finds us with three more classes, then retreat, then mess, then mail call, then a clothes check, a Detail or two, put up hair, take shower and collapse on bunk. Studying for one of the weekly tests might be squeezed in there, too. We are now having stuff like Customs and Usage, Uniform Regulations, What to do on KP, Where we can and can’t go in town, What to do on Guard Duty, What the Army says caused the War, Urgings to Go To Church, Military Sanitation (Please Take Baths), and so on. PT (Physical Training) is quite the stuff. We started out with the hardest stuff first for a test and later they will compare notes to see if we have improved. We do push-ups (called full dips); that is, *some* people do them. I can’t, to save my soul. I can do only knee-dips and my knees are a lovely shade of indigo. There are also wing-lifts (ouch!), sit-ups (can’t touch anything with your hands), squat-thrusts (puff, puff). Imagine KP on top of this *plus* another shot in the arm.

I’m getting to be a second Atlas. A violent bull-session is raging around my bunk, so I’ll adjourn till later.

Later: People were madly exchanging pictures—they’re at that stage now—telling all their life history and all about their three or four husbands. . . . I had interesting conversations with one of the Indian girls in our barracks. She’s a Chippewa and was telling about how silly some of the Easterners she’s met are about Indians. One of these Indians is named Redelk; the others have Yankee-sounding ones like Beale and Eastman. I feel sort of detached from myself because nobody calls me anything but “Hey, You.” They haven’t bothered to learn it—my name, I mean. The only time I hear my name is at mail call. Gives me sort of a funny feeling. You better send me those pictures before I forget who I am.

You asked about mess. They are one story, brick buildings with three long rows of tables—beamed ceilings—wood stoves, *comme ca*. We grab a plate and get it cafeteria style. We have thick white plates and mugs. Silver and paper napkins are on the tables. They’re very strict about eating absolutely everything and if we leave anything the Sarge makes us eat it no matter how foul it is, like fat and gristle. We have lots of green vegetables and the menus are varied. Very few Hot Dishes. *Much* better than St. Mary’s Hall [in Faribault where the author attended high school], anyhow. I’ll try and send you some postcards showing views of the Post. . . . I’m sending you a copy of *Yank*—some of the articles are quite hilarious. . . .⁴

16 October 1944

Monday

Hi Family,

I’m really a soldier now. Got three gigs today—right in the swing of things.

“Bosanko, A. . . . Shoes out of line
Wall Locker open
Unauthorized object on
bed(!)”

How do you like dat? Well, I don’t have any hard labor yet, but two more gigs and I will. Things is coming along fine and I’m existing.

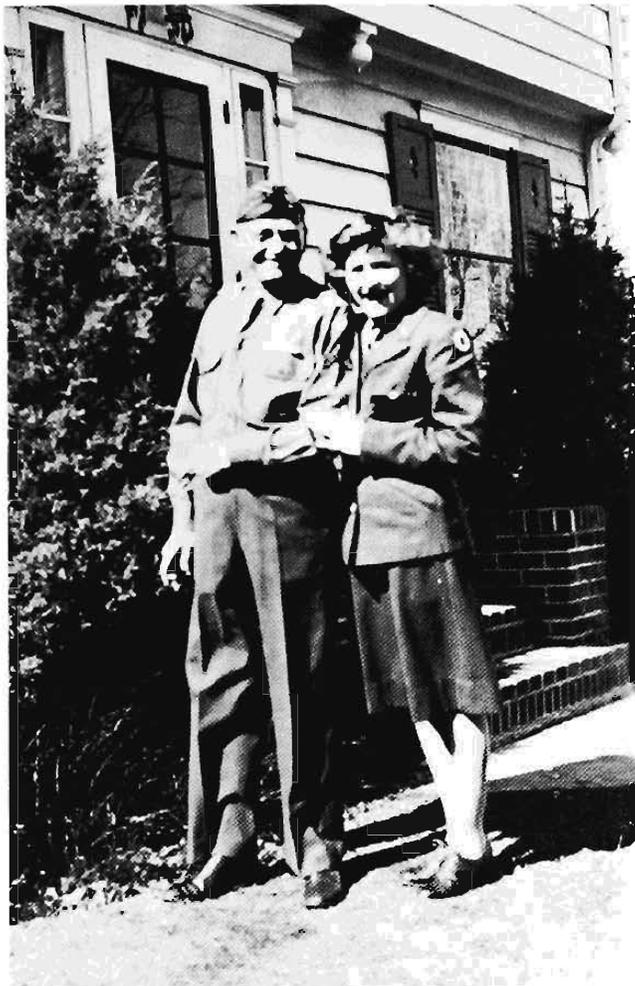
All my love,

From Dad—Oct. 11, 1944:

Your letters are a delight and take me back to the bygone days when I was a rookie. Armies do not seem

³ In the 1940s the national age requirement for drinking and voting was generally 21. There was a tacit waiving of this requirement for people in uniform, however, that varied from state to state and from place to place.

⁴ *Yank* was a national magazine put out by the armed forces for and about service personnel; it contained cartoons, articles, and news items.



ANNE and her father, Paul Bosanko, who is wearing his Minnesota State Guard uniform

to change much except that you are getting a better deal. It does something for you to be part of a first-class outfit, doesn't it? Just wait till you have been in long enough to get the real feel of it, to learn proper Army grousing and know that your outfit is the best damned outfit in the Army. The old Metal Corporal envies you, kid!

Sorry that there is to be no leave, but don't worry: we'll be down for a good weekend even if I have to put another mortgage on the garage. In the meantime we shall hold down the Home Front, look after Civilian Morale and I shall work on my company in the Guard with renewed enthusiasm, knowing that we are both working on the same kind of job. How's about both of us getting together some fine day with three stripes? Heaps of love and things, Pvt. Bug. . . . Your old man.

⁵ Section Eight was a section in the army regulations that referred to discharging people from the service because of mental illness or emotional problems.

22 October 1944

Sunday

Dearest Family,

Gosh it was swell to hear you. I could just see you gathered around the phone in the back hall and Mike hanging on upstairs, a fire in the living room, no doubt, and toasted cheese sandwiches and cocoa. At least that's always what I think of when I'm picturing Sunday night. After I left you, I was walking back to the barracks and I passed the Chapel from whence hymn singing was issuing. So I popped in and they sang "Day is Dying in the West." All of which affected the emotions of little Annie, and I sat and bawled like a sap. I don't know what's happening to me lately—tears roll down on the slightest provocation and I'm really homesick. It's probably just nerves and it doesn't last long. I'm not a Section Eight case, however, so don't worry.⁵ The cookies came and thanks much. They were gone in about fifteen minutes. Mom, you're really popular in the First Platoon.

Friday night in the Army is known as GI night. GI in this case means scrubbing, and I do mean scrub, with a bristly GI brush and hot water in a GI can (very large size empty tin can) and GI soap—horrible brown stuff that's mainly fat and lye and is death on skin. Everyone has what we call KP hands. I use the backs of mine for an emery board, no kidding. You would get a kick out of seeing all us gals on our hands and knees scrubbing away and the whole second floor singing:

"Lay that gig sheet down, Sarge

Lay that gig sheet down.

Nasty mean old Sargie,

Lay that gig sheet down."—to the tune of "Pistol Packin' Momma"

We sluice water around like mad and wash the pipes, rafters, bed springs, and polish everything in sight and everything out of sight. Then we fix our foot and wall lockers so that nothing that isn't GI shows. Then we polish our shoes—even the bottoms. THEN we collapse in bed after taking a shower, putting up our hair, pressing clothes, etc.; and the hell of it is that we have shots every Friday afternoon. Maybe they fix it so we can work off some of the soreness scrubbing. "There's a reason for everything in the Army." Next morning we arise at 5:30 and make our beds fancy, with six inches between pillow and top of sheet and a six inch fold of sheet, and bed roll a certain way, and . . . oh, Lord! After that we re-scrub our areas, dress, rush over to mess at 6:30, rush back at 7:15, clean the laundry or whatever, dress in our uniforms, and are ready by 7:45 for inspection. Of course, by this time the dust has settled in the barracks and we do a last minute swishing around. Then comes Inspection when we stand at strict attention for about a half hour while the inspecting party goes around. Pop, you know what a

strain that is. After which we have a song fest. This last Saturday, we had a parade for some visiting English dignitaries. It is a very gorgeous sight to see, especially in the fall. The parade ground is bright green and ringed with bright yellow, red, and green trees, and the red brick houses of Officer's Row show between. The sky is blue and the sun is warm and the band plays—it's really fun. Usually we parade on Mondays and Thursdays for Retreat. Family, I will write more tomorrow but I've got a splitting headache and the kids are banging the piano over here in the Day Room. I'll write a longer letter tomorrow.

From Mom—Oct. 26, 1944:

Dearest Annie: We were glad to have your letter which came yesterday. I'm sorry you were homesick—talking to us probably brought it all on! But don't be ashamed of crying; it's a very good outlet for the emotions. A "good cry" really helps sometimes. I hope you are feeling lots happier and I'm sure you are. You are too independent and buoyant to be down for long.

Monday I went to a lecture meeting of the Study Club down at the YW. Dr. [Walter H.] Judd spoke; he has just returned from China and told us about some of the terrific problems China has had in fighting this war.⁶ He is a very fascinating speaker and kept us entranced for an hour and a half!

You should see the way we still scrounge around to find enough cigarettes. We have discovered that they generally come in on Tuesday, so beginning then we start putting the pressure on Ray at the grocery, Bertha at System Drug (who, by the way, asks after you frequently), and Art, up where Dad and Mike take the street car. Then by finding an extra pack or two in other stores, we manage to squeeze by for a week! . . . Lots and lots of love. We miss you a great deal, but are carrying on! Be sure to let us know the probable time off you can have on Saturday and Sunday so we can make our plans.

24 October 1944

Tuesday

Hi people,

Here I am again. Last night I couldn't continue my missive because I had to study for a test on the various stuff we've been having, like Guard Duty, Articles of War, and World History. I didn't study at all but the test was really very simple. The nice thing about the Army tests is that all we find out is whether we pass or fail. No one ever knows whether she was highest or lowest or anything. Of course this doesn't make for much scholastic motivation, but we only have to pass three out of five tests. . . .

Thanks for the picture (mental) of the new living room arrangement. It helps in my visualizations of



BLANCHE BOSANKO and her soldier-daughter, pictured in front of their Minneapolis home during Anne's first leave, March, 1945

home. The Service Club is having a competition barn dance, and our Recreation Officer rooked me and some other gals in on doing some sets. We practiced last night and tonight and Wednesday is the gala affair. I fling myself around with such abandon and enthusiasm that my leg muscles are all strained. I can hardly walk upstairs, poor little miserable me. Life jigs along here in its usual happy rut, and after my wild (!) weekend I sort of appreciate it. Saturday night Jerry Dodack and I had dinner and a cocktail at Babe's—a sort of second-rate Charlie's,⁷ but the best Des Moines offers. Then we thought we'd go to a movie, but this dear hick burg's theaters had movies that I saw months ago, like *Double Indemnity*, and *Private Hargrove* and such. So we re-

⁶ Judd was a Republican congressman from Minneapolis and a postwar leader in Congress of the so-called China Lobby that fiercely opposed any contact with or recognition of the Communist regime in that country.

⁷ Charlie's was considered the premier restaurant in Minneapolis from the 1930s to the 1970s.

paired back to Babe's knowing nowhere else to go and found most of Company Five in the back tap room, where we had fun and spent huge amounts of money. . . . Then on Sunday we were suckers and went into town again. This time the only thing that was open was the USO [United Service Organization], which you'll see when you come so I'll not bother to describe it. All the restaurants were closed until later in the day, so we had to grab a snack at the said USO. I played the piano to myself for awhile and we hung around, and Jerry went to sleep, the other kids went to have their pictures taken, and I started playing solitaire, when a sailor came over and offered to beat me at checkers, which he did. This led to Gin rummy and Pitch, and Black Jack (no money involved however) and after awhile he suggested going to the movies. I took Jerry along for protection although he seemed quite respectable. But when we got in, the old octopus routine started. I kept it down to hand-holding by my brute force acquired in PT, but my poor hand is still black and blue from the mauling he gave it. That's why I sounded so pooped on Sunday. Down with all sailors. Never trust a sailor . . . etc.

SOS: Please send at least ten coat hangers *immediately*. They can't be bought at the PX for love nor money and I'm regarded as the plague of the barracks for borrowing them. Please send them as soon as you get this letter. VITAL! But here's a note: Try not to send food and stuff so it will arrive on Friday or Saturday because we have inspection on Saturday, as I told you, and nothing can be around that isn't GI. This package business can be reciprocal, you know. I'll send you cigs, candy bars, chocolate bits (when they have them) and gum, if you like. Just say the word. . . . That's all for now, people. Station WAC now signing off for the evening. All my love and a kiss and hug for everybody and a pat for Midge [the family dog].

29 October 1944

Sunday Night

Well, here I am again, family. Your correspondent is exhausted. Reason: obvious. It's Sunday—the end of the day of rest. I was really going to rest this week, but Ruth K. persuaded me to go to the Cathedral downtown with her, and that entailed taking a bath after breakfast, and leaping into my clothes and rushing across the parade ground to the street car. It was a beautiful service, though. Good choir, and the church wasn't over-decorated, amazingly enough. The windows were lovely, too. Then we went out to dinner and

⁸ We went through a class that gave information about chemicals used in warfare, their effects, and survival of a gas attack and let us practice wearing gas masks while going through a real gas chamber.

to Babe's for a nip (tsk!). It's fun to exercise my privilege of buying liquor. Don't worry—Babe's drinks are very anemic. Next on the list was a walk up to the feeble Capitol, where we climbed up thousands of circular stairs to the top of the dome. We could see out over the whole of Des Moines and that, for sure, wasn't much. This is really a burg—absolutely minute.

Last week was really tough. That dance business took up Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday night. Then we GI'd the barracks Thursday night and had a GI party, namely food—hamburgers and cokes and cookies—and songs which I'll sing for you when you come. Of course, the barracks were dirty by Friday night so we GI'd again. Also, Friday I had a tetanus shot which really did me in. It still aches like mad. Saturday morning inspection and another parade for some more British dignitaries. Curses on the English. Saturday night a bunch of us went to a show on the Post and then I came back and did laundry and fell into bed. Every week gets more and more hurried, but only three more weeks to go. Last Tuesday we had a test on the work we covered, and we have four more tests coming. By now our courses are more difficult: Map Reading (fun), Company Administration, Gases, etc.⁸ A couple of days ago we got our Off-duty dresses and mine fits perfectly for a wonder. I'll wear it when you come. We also got our gas masks. I can hardly wait to

PRIVATE Bosanko in her off-duty dress, October, 1944



try it on and scare people. Happy day—I got KP again tomorrow. But that may mean I'll escape other kinds of details over the weekend." I hear that the train gets in about 5:30. If so, I can meet you at the station. Let me hear more about your plans. I've got to write some more letters now, so goodbye and I'll write Tuesday or Wednesday.

All kinds of love,

6 November 1944

Monday

Hi people,

Of course I don't need to say that it was wonderful having you down. To keep me from being too lonesome after the train left, the Finches took me back to their apartment where I sat in comfort, listening to the radio, smoking, sipping cooling drinks, and talking. They really are swell and lots of fun. They talked and talked about their son, Chuck, and about Mary Ann, and finally decided to call her. I got to talk some—the first time since two years ago at the SMH [St. Mary's Hall] houseparty.¹⁰ Then they took me out and bought me a super gorgeous steak dinner. AHhh. They're taking me and Ruth K. to the Des Moines Club next Saturday.

Love,

Me

8 November 1944

Wednesday

Well, this has been a very eventful week—a sort of "November crisis" as you might say. Company Five has been naughty. We are bad WACs. Tuesday, during the day, the officers made an inspection and found quite a mess in some unidentified platoon (it *couldn't* have been the first platoon) and as a result the whole Company was restricted last night. It was suggested that we do a little scrubbing during the evening, which we did. Then, all of a sudden, at two minutes to eight, the cadre [noncommissioned officers] came upstairs and said, "Formal inspection at eight o'clock! AT EASE!" Here our wall and foot lockers weren't prepared and so on and so on. Lt. Whelan went through this place like a tornado and by a miracle Little Annie was neat and didn't get a gig. . . . We have the floor now so we can eat off it.

Speaking of eating, we had a spread tonight—ice cream, fruit cake, and pork tenderloin sandwiches, and black olives. I gave you some indication of my nice Sunday afternoon with the Finches. It was really swell to relax in a house. Next Saturday ought to be fun, too. The Des Moines Club is like the Minneapolis Club.¹¹ Exclusive, ain't I? This evening we got our off-duty scarves and gloves—smooth yellow deals—two of each—and of course we had to stand in line for hours. I'll be glad when we finally get all of our issue and I bet

the Supply Sergeant will be too. About all we have left now is our gold buttons, but one never knows. Today we had our first gas mask drill and we nearly had hysterics at the way we look. Definitely anthropoid or something. We don't look like death's heads, contrary to popular opinion. Tomorrow we have to go through the gas chamber. Hope we don't kick off, but probably no such luck; the drill comes off in the afternoon and sick call isn't until 7:30 p.m. It wouldn't be GI. Well, folksies, I can't think of much more to say except . . . how about some more cookies? Toll House preferred. Love you lots. Say hello to people for me. Much kisses and hugs and a snappy salute. . . . I won't be able to write and Friday is GI and Saturday is my date with the Finches, so Sunday I'll pen a real letter. Thanks for the *New Yorker*.

12 November 1944

Dearest Carrie,

This is a dirty trick, sending you a postcard, but really, child, I don't have *any* time to write a decent letter. This is the beginning of my sixth week in the Army and I'm not dead yet. In fact I like it, but we are rushed to death in Basic—always scrubbing, drilling, lining up for something: classes, physical training. On weekends we stagger into the bustling metropolis of Des Moines. What a dump—nothing to do but spend all our money on liquor. It's fun on the Post but I wouldn't like to be stationed here cause it's getting cold and rainy now. Been perfect Indian Summer weather before. Pretty countryside. I should be moving out soon and when I get in the field I should have time to give you the gory details, and arguments pro, and stuff. Do drop me a postcard, however, to show me you ain't mad.

Much love,

Pansy

¹⁰ Detail, pronounced "dee' tail," was a name for a chore and a name for the group of people assigned to do the chore. Another name for these chores was "fatigue." This term was applied to the chore itself ("fatigue detail," "going on fatigue") and to the clothes worn while doing it ("I'm changing into my fatigues").

¹¹ Mary Ann Finch, a classmate of mine from high school days at St. Mary's Hall, was from Des Moines. Although she was away at college, I got in touch with her parents who were most kind about entertaining me during my brief stay in Des Moines. When my parents were visiting for a weekend, we also got together with the Finches. The next weekend Dr. Finch did some "civilian" dental work for me. I had been fearful of having any dental care during Basic. The rumor was that the army never put in any fillings; they simply pulled your teeth if you complained.

¹² These were prestigious private clubs for business and professional men.

15 November 1944

Wednesday

Dear Family,

Here I am again. A gay social life has prevented my writing sooner. I quickly recovered from my indisposition of Sunday night—hope it didn't upset you to hear about it. Saturday evening Ruth K. and I met Dr. Finch at the Service Club and he drove us in to the apartment where we were greeted with lovely long cooling mixtures of Johnnie Walker. We sat around and talked and then whizzed into the Des Moines Club—a tiny edition of the Minneapolis Club—where I made away with a *beautiful* sirloin, almost too beautiful to eat. Then we pub-hopped and saw some of Des Moines' anemic night life. They really are fun people; I like 'em a lot.

Sunday morning I had to get up and come in to the dentist. He filled that one place with a silver filling—drilled first, of course—for which he nicked me \$6.00. How about some remuneration? . . .

You know, I am a much afflicted individual. I thought I was getting away from activities and such, and what happens? I get elected to be in charge of the Company party. Oh, well, what is a mere dinner and entertainment for 200 people after a tea for 2,000? Our courses are getting to be very boring—Organization of the Army, Company Administration, Military Sanitation and Supply. I find this Army stuff rather dull and will be glad to be getting on with some medical subjects. LRs [latrine rumors] fly around like mad as to where we go. Nobody knows definitely about Camp Atterbury, [Indiana,] and how long we will be in Staging, so even if I knew I couldn't tell you. I'm afraid a Delay en Route is kind of a lovely dream.¹² The cadre say that Basics seldom get them going out to their first posts. The suitcase finally came and the cookies muchly admired and appreciated as usual. Mike, thanks for the [Minnesota] Daily and "Fighters Digest."¹³ I'll write you Sunday but till then I'll be horribly busy, this being the last week we have classes till late every night. How would Sunday be for a phone call? Yes? "I hear a voice hummin', bed check is a-comin'," so, goodbye. Will write more gory details on Sunday.

All my love,

Have you had any snow yet? It feels sort of like it here. . . .

¹² A person moving from one assignment to another was allowed a brief delay or vacation.

¹³ The "Fighters Digest," a Saturday feature of the *Minneapolis Daily Times*, contained a four-page "weekly summary of home news and sports for men and women in service."



BROTHER Michael Bosanko with Anne and the family cocker spaniel, Midge, during Anne's leave

19 November 1944

Sunday

OK, OK, so I ain't GI—it's too much effort. This last week has been very hectic as I intimated and I'm drawing a moderately deep breath today preparing for my gruesome weeks in Staging. I will tell you all I know about my future, which isn't much, so you won't be up in the air about it. But, *please* don't tell *anyone* because they're very strict about this kind of stuff. I know you'll be careful but I just thought I'd mention it. Here's the deal, culled from LR's filtering up from Staging. Camp Atterbury is full up and the next group isn't going till December 10. That's three weeks from today and we go into Staging this Tuesday. However, here's a note of hope. There are a couple of other medical training schools, one in Denver and one in the East somewhere. Now, my orders (which you sent me—thanks) don't have "Assigned to Camp Atterbury" on them. It just says "Assigned to a Medical Installation as Surgical Technician after further training at the Surgical Technician School upon completion of basic training." Sooo, maybe I'll be sent to one of these other schools instead of waiting in Staging for three weeks. . . . Pray for me

that I get sent east or to Denver; Indiana doesn't appeal to me much.

A week ago, I forgot to tell you, we had our White Glove Inspection and came through with Flying Colors! Your little daughter was in the primaries in a cute little posture contest staged by Major Milligan.¹⁴ I didn't get into the finals though. I wrote you about my social week. Thursday I went to a Company basketball game and screamed my lungs hoarser than they were before. When I call tonight you no doubt will notice my deep bass voice.

Last night our entertainment and dinner came off very well . . . muchos fun. I had to sit at the officers' table—it felt like being at head table with Mag. One of the numbers was to that song . . . you, Dad, probably know it:

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
The long and the short and the tall.
Bless all the Sergeants we have to obey
Bless all the Corporals who drill us all day.
Cause we're saying Goodbye to them all,
As back to the barracks we crawl.
No ice cream and cookies for flat-footed rookies
So chew up my lads, bless 'em all. . . .

This whole last week everybody has been so silly. We're all under such a strain not knowing what's going to happen to us that we let off steam with horseplay. My face still hurts from laughing so much. Pop, did you ever see some training films on Lice and Flies, made in England? They are rare, and I do mean funny. Here are these gory shots of dirty latrines and foul mess halls—flies and lice and stuff, all accompanied by commentary in a veddy, veddy correct British accent: "Nasty little blighters, aren't they?" And then a shot of a fly on a biff; well-modulated voice says, "And now it's time for tea." We were all rolling in the aisles. One of the gals gave me a dog-tag bootie made of blue crocheted silk. It keeps them warm and stops the jingle-jangle-jingle, like so. . . . We got our last tetanus shots Friday. Double dose and they didn't faze me—am I tough. Also, in my PT test, the following results: Push-ups: 1 (hot dog); Sit-ups: 48; Wing-lifts: 84 per one minute; Squat-thrusts: 20 per one-half minute.

23 November 1944
Thursday

Happy Thanksgiving to you,
" " " "
" " " " , dear family
" " to you!

I have just returned from an enchanting one-hour's wait in line at the mess hall and the joyous discovery that there wasn't much left by the time I got there at the end of the line. The hall was fixed up rather quaint-like, though, with little wagons filled with fruit on the tables and nut cups with hard candy, and menus at each place, but that still doesn't calm my not-too-full stomach. Your very welcome fruit cake and cookies will have to fill up the gaps. Curses on mess lines. Today, believe it or not, is a Post holiday—sleep till eight and so on, just like Sunday. Only, of course, I was on mess serving-line detail and had to get up at 6:00 and serve from 6:30 till 9:30. The hungry hordes seemed as though they never would stop pouring in. Mess line serving isn't bad though and a hell of a lot better than KP. It's fun to watch the civvies fresh off the train with their trailing locks, high heels, and mink coats. Of course, I'm an old veteran by now and mentally pat them on the head and greet them with a gruesome cheery smile and a "Happy Thanksgiving!" "Heh, Heh!" I really am cheery, too, in spite of the temporary annoyance regarding Thanksgiving dinner.

Staging is really fun and very comfortable on the whole. . . . The atmosphere here is very exciting with people waiting and packing and yelling around—sort of a continual pre-Christmas vacation feeling. It's also restful, if you can imagine the combination. What I mean is that there isn't so much pressure on us about uniforms (except at our daily morning inspections), sitting on our beds, and various things. I've had lots of time to wash and iron clothes, read, take baths, and stuff. All in all, Staging is quite decent and I don't think that a couple of weeks will kill me.

Of course, the rumor mill is functioning full force. It's rare to watch the kids cluster 'round every time someone says, "Guess what I heard today?" The wildest surmises are floating around and it's fun to think about them even if they aren't true. I found out the reasons for no Delays en Route: we haven't accrued enough furlough time (rate of two days a month). Our Delays come out of furlough time, you see.

Tonight we are having a treat for the small sum of \$1.83. We're going into town to hear Marian Anderson.¹⁵ I understand she was out at the Fort today visit-

¹⁴ This contest was to see who had the best military posture, which consisted of (1) standing straight, (2) eyes straight ahead, (3) chin back, (4) shoulders back, (5) rear tucked in, (6) feet at a 45-degree angle, (7) arms back with thumbs along the seam of the trousers (or skirt, as the case may be).

¹⁵ Marian Anderson was a world-famous concert contralto. There was widespread national outrage in the early 1940s when the Daughters of the American Revolution in Washington, D.C., would not allow her to sing with a symphony orchestra on their auditorium stage because she was black.

ing some of the mess halls, but she didn't drop into ours when I was there.

Know what I did? Give myself a two-inch haircut! I look rather like a sacrificial lamb, but I was sick and tired of having my locks bush out every time it is damp. We've been having much mist and anemic snow, so off came my hair. Today is lovely, though—crisp, clear and sunny with fluffy, drifty white clouds in the sky. . . .

Kisses and hugs,
Pvt. Bug

29 November 1944

Wednesday

Dearest Family,

Calm down, I'm not gone yet. I've just been too lazy to write which shows you the condition I've degenerated into. All my training has gone for naught, somewhat. The concert Thursday evening was fine. Anderson was in prime form—sang "Ave Maria" for an encore. At intermission Ruth K. and I decided to go out for a smoke, and not knowing how the Shrine Auditorium (Des Moines' cultural center) ran its schedule, I went up to an aged usher and asked in a dignified tone, "How long is intermission?" to which he replied, "Downstairs and to your left, lady." Everyone within ten feet of us laid back and howled.

Friday the first kids from Company Five shipped out, and since then more and more have gone, and the rest of us meds are rather sad and lonely. . . .

Saturday: went to a movie and read. Sunday: went to a movie and read. Monday: went downtown in the evening to look over Younkers' [Department Store] Christmas efforts. Not too bad, but not near as gay as Dayton's [Department Store]. I really miss good old Nicollet Avenue and all the greens and lights. Hope I'm not stuck in some grim place for Christmas. . . .

Tomorrow, Barbara and I are going over to Arts and Crafts to make Christmas cards. Whee . . . gay, mad fun on Post. Staging is getting more and more irritating every day. . . . But I grit my teeth and realize that I'll never get a nice rest like this again. We're having formal inspection tomorrow so I must rush now and do my squad duty.

Goodbye and much love,

Here I am again. Just finished madly scrubbing the aisle of our barny barracks. Am very hot and dirty. The snow is snowing all around. It snows on field and tree and parade ground and all looks very pretty and

¹⁶ A national touring company was doing Shakespeare's *Othello*, starring Paul Robeson, the famous black actor and singer. Des Moines obviously had a fine selection of cultural events coming through the city.

Christmas cardy. Mom, please do procure that iron for me and save it till I get settled. Likewise the snapshots, save them, I mean. For Christmas for GI Annie: Box of homemade cookies and candy and stuff would be marvelous; flannel nightgown with fleurs; writing case; new watch strap; those sock things with felt or leather bottoms for whizzing (not lounging) around the barracks; any purty smells (small), powder, lotions, creams, nail creams [for cuticle removal], and stuff; any bright ideas you can think of. How's that for a suggestion list? Much love again,

6 December 1944

Wednesday

Dearest Family,

Well, here I am again, still at good old Fort Des Moines. How I love this happy place. Last week I was pretty well disgusted, mainly because I was suffering from the pangs of a cold and fierce headache (which I am over now), but yesterday I got my second wind and snapped out of my depression. Braun and I had hysterics all day, making feeble puns and giggling around, and that sort of cleared the air. I can't say anything about prospects for leaving even if they were good, so be patient and someday you will hear from me with the return address some glamorous place. . . . Tomorrow night a party of us is going to *Othello* which ought to relieve the monotony.¹⁶

Last Sunday I went in to church, then met some kids and had dinner and went to a movie and messed around and didn't get home till late, so no letter written to you. Monday I was feeling foul, so had some beer with the kids, and on to the Service Club Library where I got involved in Angela Thirkell's latest, *Marling Hall*, which, by the way, Mom, stinks. It's rather forced and about depressing people and not nearly as funny and spontaneous as her other books. Too bad. Last night Barbie and I went up to Arts and Crafts and made Christmas cards. My evenings, as you can see, are quite human and I enjoy myself, but during the day I feel like a sheep. But such is life. Had a nice letter from Ruth K. who is very impressed with Fitzsimons hospital [in Denver] which I didn't know was the largest in the world. But the poor gal, who is a graduate med tech with a year of experience besides, is spending her time putting labels on bottles. It seems that there are lots of civilians working there and they won't give up their jobs to WACs. . . .

Well, family dear, I must bid you "au reservoir" if I am to get in on the new Humphrey (ahh) Bogart movie, so goodbye and pray that I leave, but soon.

I miss you hugely,

The Hangover

Thanks for the clippings [from the neighborhood

newspaper] and stuff from your party—sounded like a wild time for you-alls.

From Dad—Dec. 9, 1944:

Dearest Private Annie:

Omigoodness! I am pained! Armies seem to be just what they always have been: slow, uncertain, and motivated by forces beyond the mind of mortal to comprehend. Wish I could get hold of the diary of an Egyptian captain during the Fourth Jewish War. Anyway, one learns to cultivate patience, if nothing else, and some time you are bound to be sent somewhere to do something. How well I remember the happy days I spent picking up cigarette butts and paper in Rouen. Have fun when you can and take things as they come and you will live to be a grandmother! . . .

The next evening I came down with the indigoshdangest pain in my right shoulder and managed to sleep about an hour. Next day it was even wuss, like to kill me dead so no work Thursday. This morning I had a date with Dr. Johnson who checked around and said I was in fine shape and that my shoulder was bursitis and was caused by a strain and what had I been doing. I blushingly told him about bayonet drill on Friday and that the piece weighed ten pounds. Then he blew up, told me I was damphoool and no commando and told me to lay off drilling with anything but my feet or I could look after my own shoulder. So it looks as tho the



WAC
PRIVATE
Anne
Bosanko,
1945

old Metal Corporal's drilling days were done. Now I am going to try to sell the CO on letting me stay on with the Guard at some kind of a damn desk job. I'd rather do that than turn civilian. DAMN: I may be 50 plus but I do not like to have to act the part.

El Paso, Texas

10 December 1944

Company D, SMDT, WBGH, El Paso, Texas

Sunday

Dearest Family,

Surprise! Surprise! Here is your little daughter in glamorous surroundings and out of Staging at last! I was a very mean girl and played a trick on you. The morning that I wrote you my last letter which sounded very dejected, I had just heard my orders telling that I was going to El Paso. I was dying to tell you, but I didn't dare. The thing was that the orders were read for all the meds to leave that day, and after they finished, they said "Transportation is canceled—but you'll go out soon," and I didn't know whether it would be a week or the day after. As it happened, we left Friday morning and was I glad. Thursday evening we went to *Othello*, which was wonderful, and I dragged to bed at 1:00 and then they woke us up at 4:00 a.m. to get ready to go. . . . I left Des Moines the same way I came in—in trucks, in the dark, and very bleary-eyed. This time it wasn't raining though.

The train was a very old-fashioned Pullman. We occupied four cars and had the same ones the whole trip, though we were shuttled around from engine to engine, and other cars were hooked on and off. We had green plush seats, dark red woodwork and tin washbasins. Not too uncomfortable and it was fun because we were all in a happy group, but I don't see how people traveled in them and kept their dignity or their modesty. The next installment I will describe our trip—three days and two nights—in detail, and the next will give an account of this joint. I'll mail this now so you'll know where I am. Got to fall out for class now, so goodbye.

Yours in ecstasy,

The weather is cool. Sunrise is gorgeous—blue, pink, orange coming up over the mountains! Ahhh. SMDT stands for Surgical, Medical, Dental Technician, and WBGH equals William Beaumont General Hospital.



THE ILLUSTRATIONS on p. 246 and 249 are from the WAC Handbook published for the First WAC Training Center, 1944; all other pictures are in the author's possession.



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