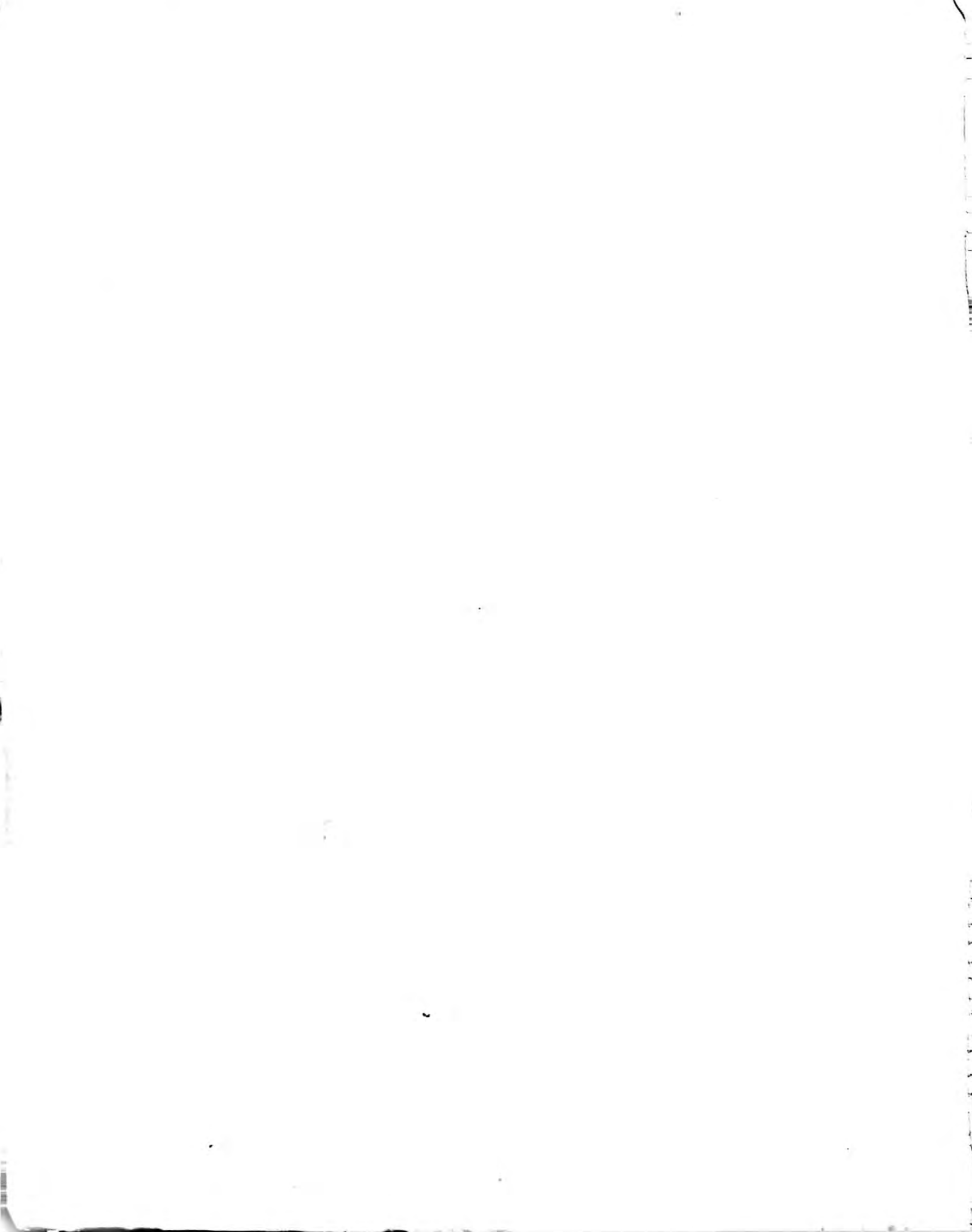


THROUGH THE RAINBOW

AND INTO
WORLD WAR II

THE OVERSEAS DIARY
OF A
RED CROSS GIRL

BY
BETTY BAKER SPOHR



THROUGH THE RAINBOW

and into

WORLD WAR II

The Overseas Diary
of a
Red Cross Girl

By
Betty Baker Spohr

TO THE MARTINS
WITH LOVE
YOUR MOM,
Betty

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The story told here covers the months of
World War II
between
January 31, 1943 and December 22, 1944.
It is taken from the diary I kept while working for
The American Red Cross in Enlisted Men's
Clubs overseas. Most of the drawings were
done as I moved through the Mediterranean
Theater from
North Africa to Sicily and Italy.

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STARTING OUT

JAN. 31 TO MAR, 5, 1943



Washington, D.C., Jan. 31, to Feb. 25

Off to War! With Charlie's two white orchids, two suitcases, and for company, Charlie's best friend, Tom, tall, handsome in his brand new Ensign uniform.

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Checked in to Harrington Hotel. Called home to tell folks I had a good trip. Arrived safely. Miss them. Called Charlie to tell him I love him.

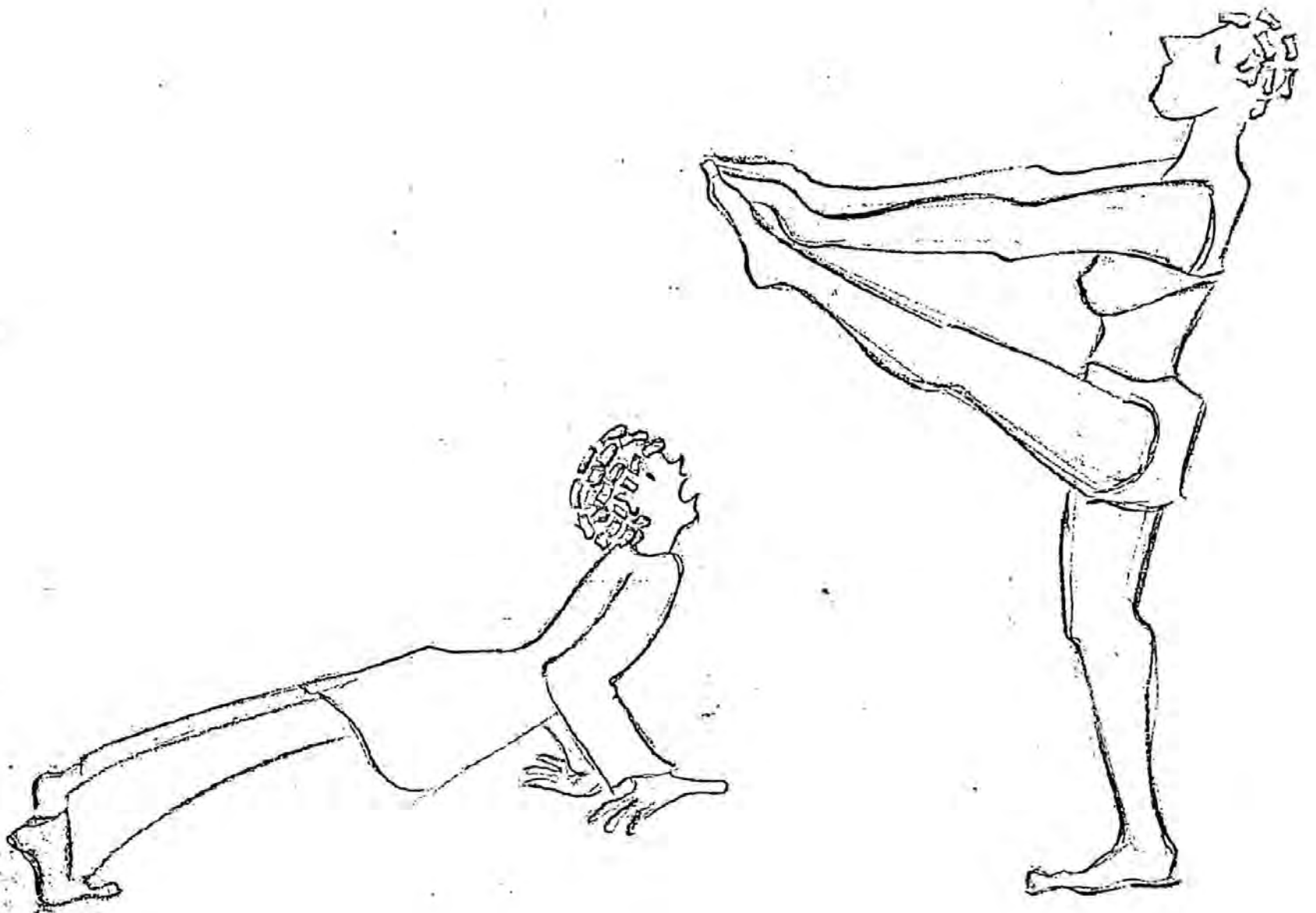
Should I have taken Charlie's ring? A beauty. Three diamonds set high so they really caught the light. Just before leaving Black, Starr, Gorham to join Red Cross, I bought it for him. Employees got thirty percent off on all purchases. Why didn't I know for whom it was intended? Everyone else did.

Funny me going. Charlie staying. He did try to enlist. Army turned him down. Too skinny. He went to bed. Gained necessary five pounds. Army still wouldn't take him. He's 4F. Heart murmur. Has an essential job. They'll never take him. He'll be safe.



Ex-P.E.-teacher roommate has enrolled me,
her only student, in her "Victory Exercise
Program". Starts at 6 a.m. every morning. It's
killing me.

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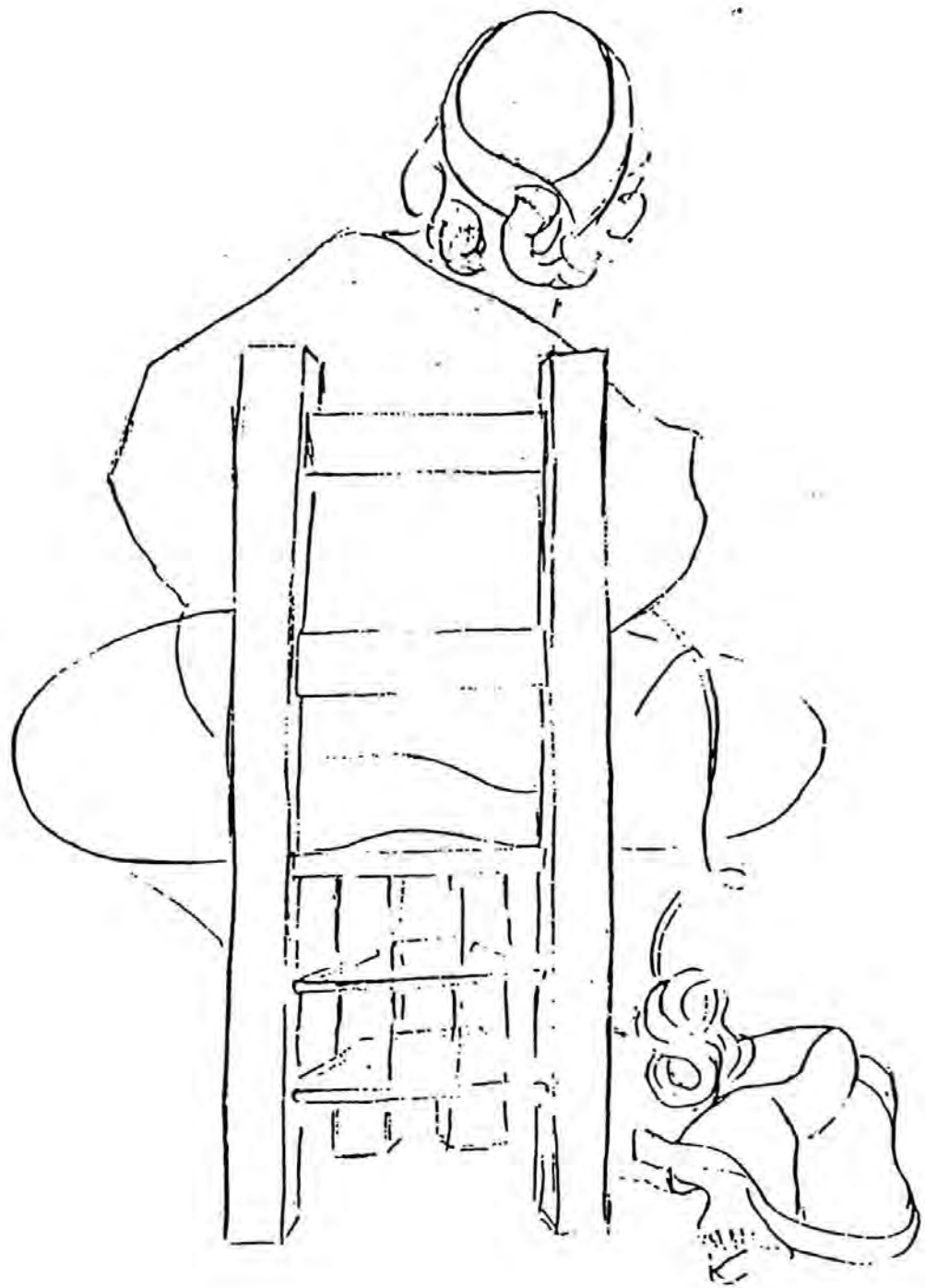
How naïve we were in college! All those anti-war rallies we attended! All those venomous songs like "Poisoning The Student Mind" we sang! And then, when we walked out of classes to prove we'd walk out of war, did we really believe we'd do it? Doesn't look like it. Now there's a real war. We're running right into it!



Caught quick bite with Tom before I had to go meet classmates at Ambassador Hotel pool for Mae West drill. He had to go help Navy move their office. Hope buoyancy of those kapok pillows equals their bulk.



Am getting Charlie's sweater finished, but endless hours sitting, listening to orientation lectures is giving me premature middle age spread.





To Pentagon for more shots. If that building was designed to intimidate, it sure worked with me.



Mary here for weekend. Biked all over town.
Saw new Jefferson Monument. Smithsonian.
Everything in, around, between them. My sister
has scads more energy than I do but by the time
we hit Mellon Museum even she had had it.

Now in uniform. But can't get all the belts, buttons, straps under control. Still, nice being bona fide member of the Armed Forces at last.





How to get 36 cakes of soap, five pounds of sour balls, two years supply of everything from underpants to Kotex, cold, warm weather uniforms into one footlocker?

To make matters worse, there's always something more needed. Little is available. Seems everything's gone to War with Lucky Strike Green. Was overjoyed when finally found footlocker, three cards of bobby pins.

Training sometimes gets a little silly.
When will we ever get a bunch of GIs to do the
bumps-a-daisy?

Got a lot better training at the Hudson
Hotel in New York before joining RC. Those city
boys who came to Servicemens' dances there
were jitterbug pros. They taught us a lot. When
civilians, they got their exercise dancing at the
Gloria Place or Roseland Ballroom.

Soldiers stationed at Fort Hamilton on Long
Island came, too. Nice to talk to. Not great
dancers. Even had to loan one a nickel for
subway fare to get back to camp he was so
broke. I gave him a dime.



Brooklyn, N.Y., Feb. 25 to Mar. 5

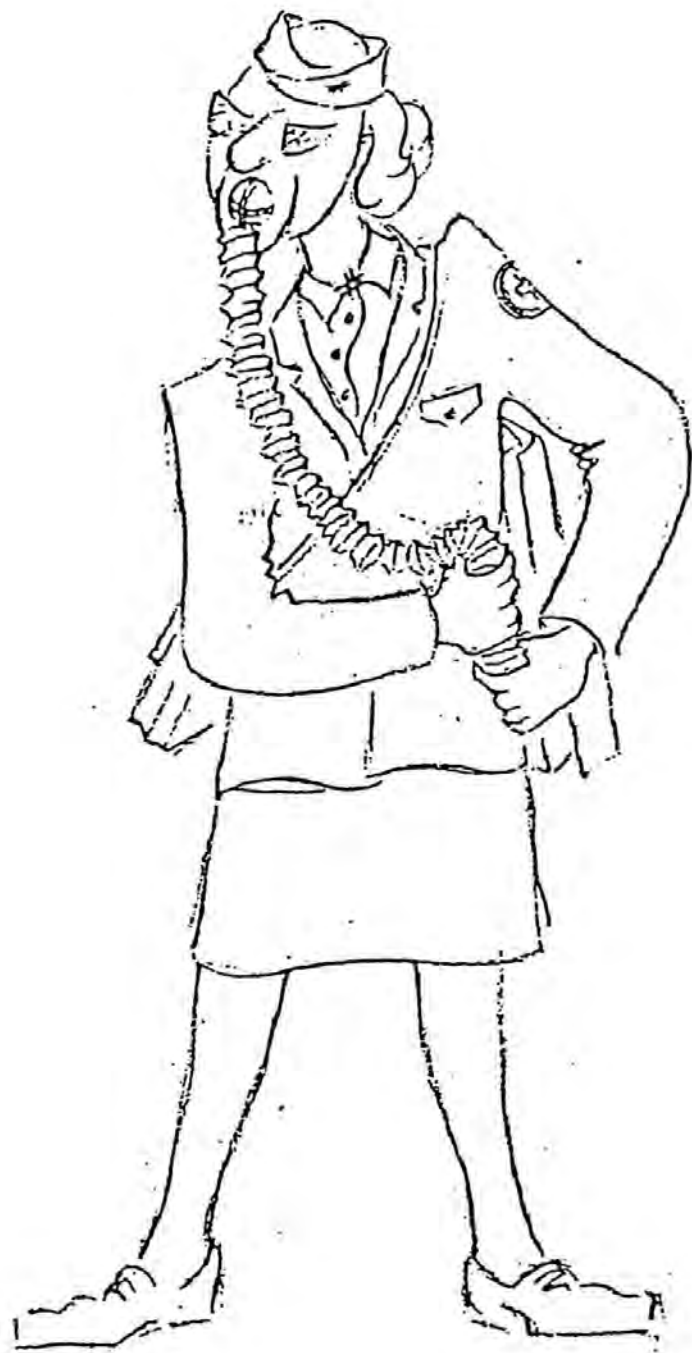
Tom at Union Station to see me off for Brooklyn last night. Found a little Navy pin on my lapel when I got to St. George Hotel.

This morning sent off pronto for another (and last?) once-over physical, dog tags, passports. Taking temperatures is one sure way of keeping 46 women quiet.



Gas mask drill. By the numbers, 1,2,3. Do it fast! Through the gas chamber, go slow.

Afternoon free. Went into City with Ann. She did what every lowan seeing New York for first time should do. Hung out the taxi window, oohed and ahed at all the tall buildings. Saw "Random Harvest" at Radio City Music Hall.





Crisis! Footlockers, cameras ordered home. My favorite white rain boots have to go, too. Too bright in the night. Getting everything into a bedroll seemed impossible. But I did it! Even able to stuff in my civilian plaid dress and my aintbox.

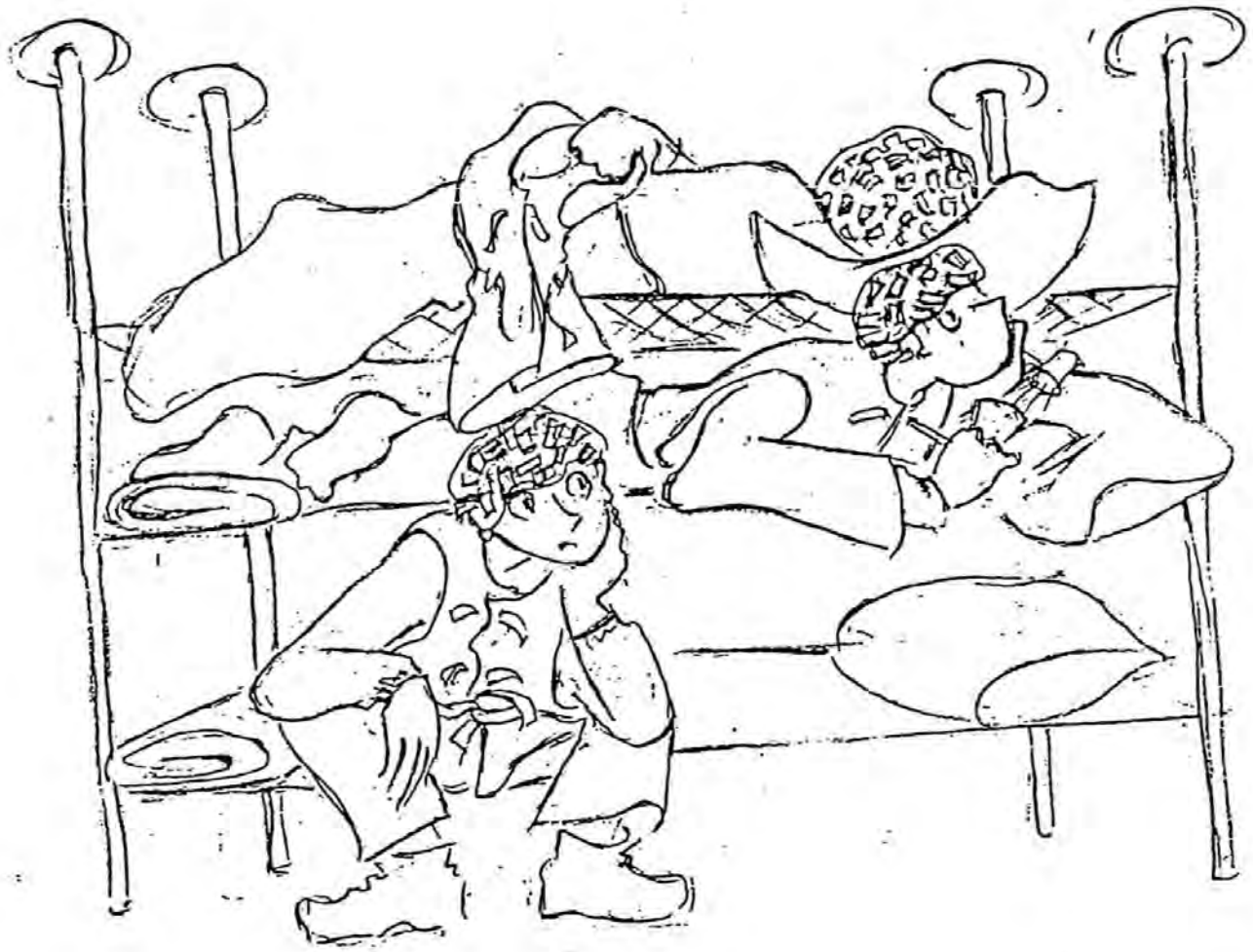
Weekend on our own. Went to Maplewood. Probably last time I'll get to New Jersey to see folks, friends for another two years. Lots of tears when I hugged them all good-by. Charlie came all way back to Brooklyn with me. Won't feel his arms around me again for a long, long time.

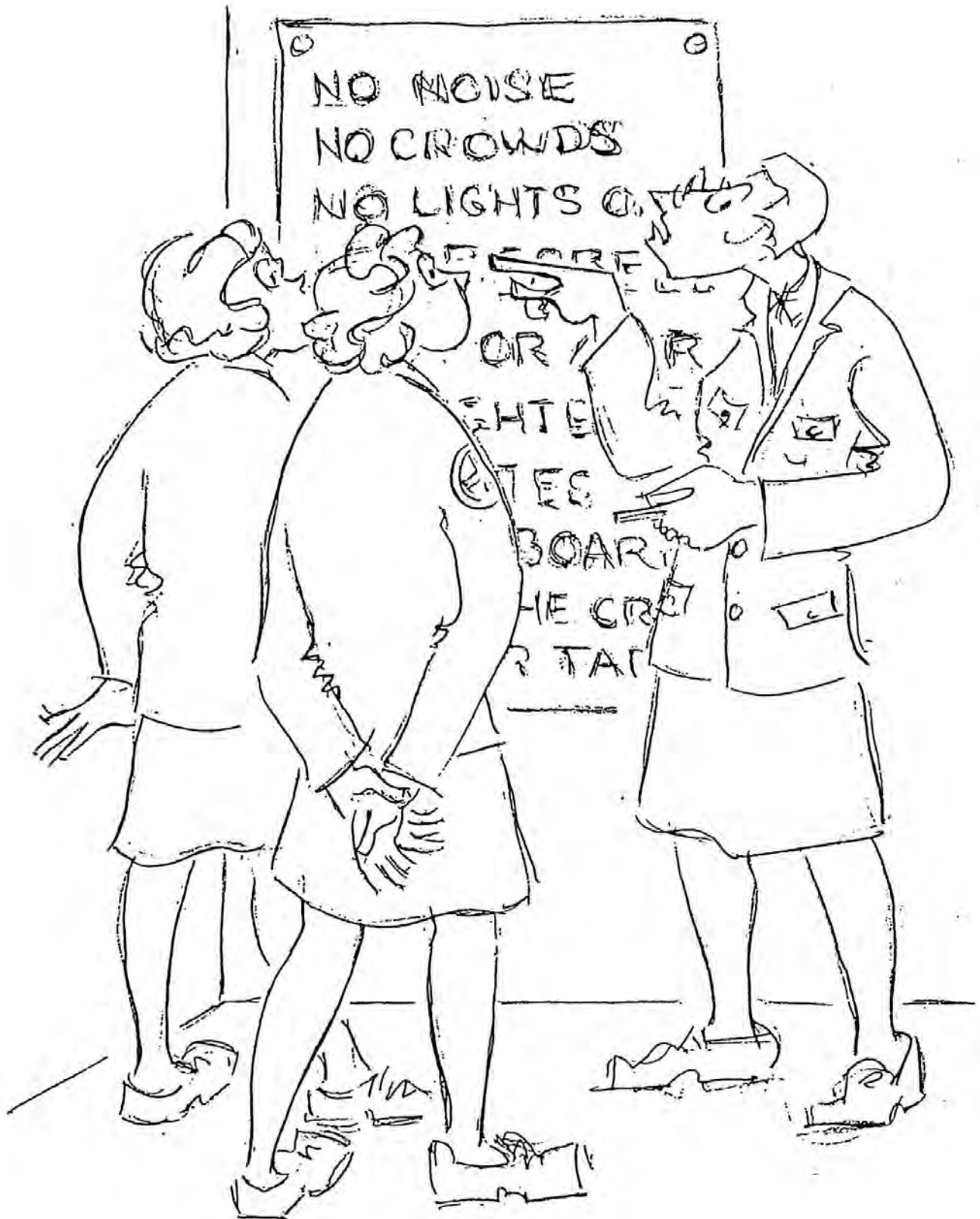


We've been put on Alert! Confined to quarters! I'm ready. If I need anything more I'll have to carry it on my head.

Though I couldn't tell him, am sure Charlie guessed why I had to cancel our date. Won't go to dinner, dancing with him tonight. Instead had to settle for a say-nothing phone call.

Waiting. Nerves on edge. Smoking like a chimney. Pace the floor. Sit. Write letters. Stand up. Can't sit still. When will final orders come?





By order of Maximally Else, Shawnee's commander, rules for convoy conduct are spelled out on signs all over ship. Peering through her pince-nez glasses, Evenly May, our austere RC leader, wants to make sure we obey them.

NO NOISE

NO CROWDS

NO OUTSIDE LIGHTS OF ANY KIND

After dusk or before dawn

Lighted cigarettes included

NOTHING MAY GO OVERBOARD

NO FRATERNIZING WITH CREWMEN

ONLY C DECK AFTER TAPS

Ann with her music is belle of the boat.
Troops crowd around her in smoke filled rec
room. Exits to deck all double-draped to ensure
against light leakage.

IN CONVOY

MAR. 5 to 19

Half way to ship, remembered letters I hadn't mailed. We'd been warned to leave NOTHING! Laden down with gear, in a frenzy for fear of loosing the others, had to go back through tunnel to hotel to get them.

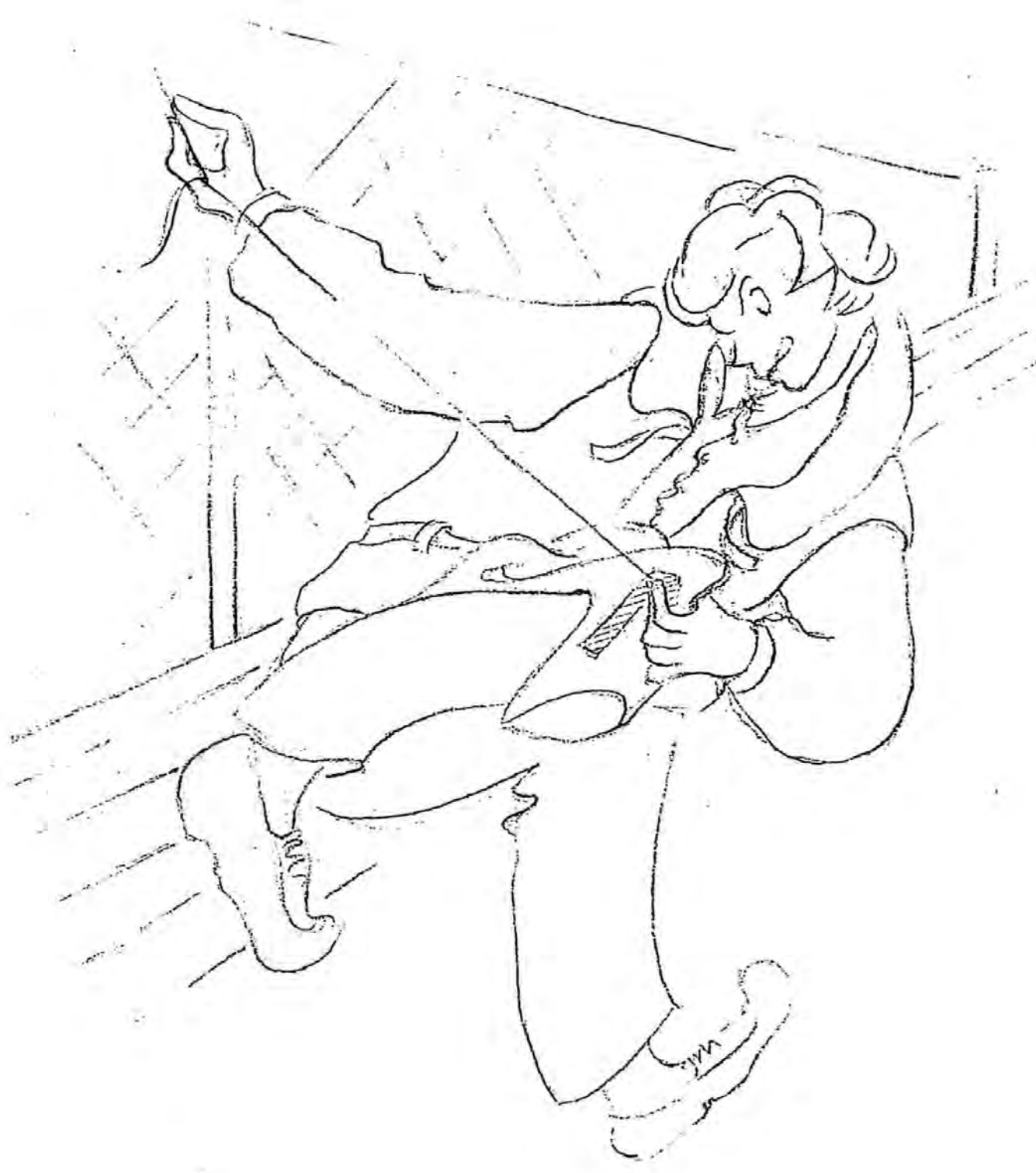


Glamour gone. Bundled up in everything we own from curlers to Mae Wests, we're ready to sail. Fourteen of us in stateroom meant for two doesn't leave much room for maneuvering. But we're in luxury compared to troops bedded like sardines down below.

In drizzle tonight, nearly collided with ship moored next to us.



My activities aboard ship are much more functional than Ann's. I spend most of my time sewing on buttons, chevrons, patches.





Seasick soldiers hug huge trash barrels to make sure everything that comes up goes down into them. Those on deck say stench in crowded quarters down below so bad, makes the well ones sick.



I make tracks around and around deck.
Breathing in chilly air helps keep chow down.
Am a little embarrassed to be one of few
showing up for meals in mess hall.



4

Women ordered to Hurricane Deck while men have physicals in the nude, below. As we wait, a rainbow arches the sky for us to sail through.



Before we learned to love them, dolphins scared us half to death. As they swim in our wake, they look like torpedoes coming at us.

Spent whole day zigging, and zagging around off course to confuse U-boats that were thought to have been sighted. Ships have to keep up with others. Convoy can't wait for lagers.

Where are we going? We can only guess. We'll know when we get there.

After almost two weeks without one, a shower is first thing I'll look for when we hit land. At least we're all, literally, figuratively, in the same boat.





NORTH AFRICA

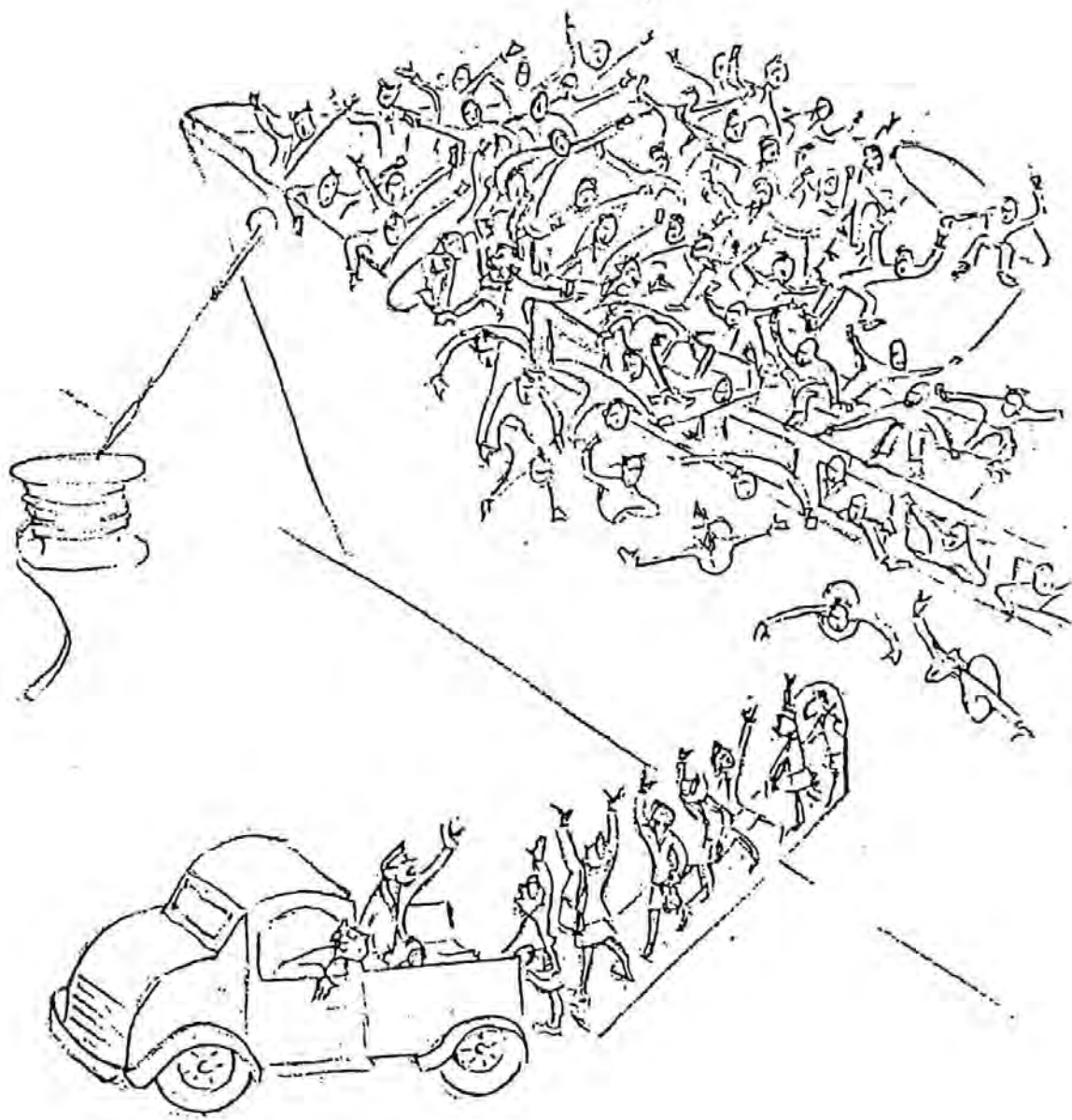
MAR. 19 TO AUG. 15

Oran, Mar. 19 to 21

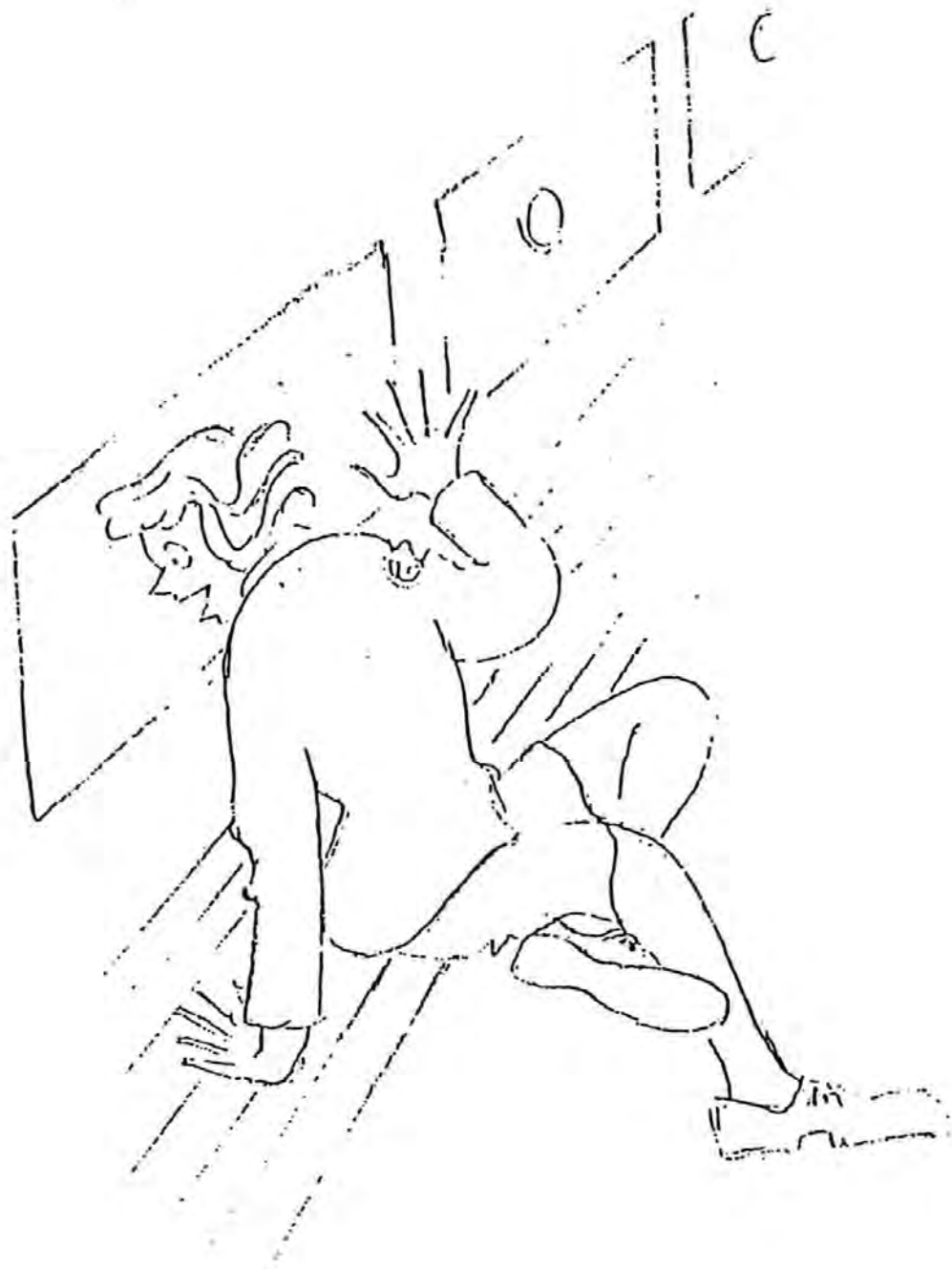
Oran! We made it! Alive! The thrill of a lifetime. 1800 men shouting, waving us good-by and on to a waiting truck.

Up the hill. Into bustling Oran. A city of tiled streets. Down below, its crescent harbor now jammed with ships of every kind from every nation.

Billeted with nurses. Got a shower!



My first plane ride. In cavernous cargo plane, Gunga Din. Glorious! Atlas mountains looming tall, dark, foreboding on one side. Mediterranean stretching serenely, sparkling, blue on other. Whole world underneath.





Casablanca, Mar. 22 to 26

Brief stopover on way to new job in Rabat, capitol of Morocco. About an hour's drive north of here. We're stopped at every step by soldiers just wanting to "talk American".

Bumped into John Gramlick, doctor friend from home, married to a neighbor. Now a pilot. He asked, "Can I do anything for you?" I shouted, "A REAL bath!" and, not thinking it possible, "A trip to Gibraltar."

He found me the former. I wallowed in it. Almost pulled off the latter but he had to fly. I had to leave. We did get to Anfa Hotel, where Roosevelt, Churchill recently met, for dinner. A short moonlit horse and buggy ride up the Atlantic coast. Very romantic. If only John had been Charlie.



Rabat, Mar. 26 through. 15

Lorraine and I are roommates. A lovely French family share their home with us. We live in back. Have a room, bath apartment with a separate entrance.

The extra bathroom fixture baffled us. We used it to freshen flowers until we learned it's for female hygiene. Called a Bidet.

Bulletin board in lobby is hub of the RC Club. Troops gather there to find out what's what, where, when and who's who. Overheard soldier there describe me as "that brunette from New Jersey." What a shock! Always thought I was a blonde!

RC took over Music School for our Club. There's a large auditorium, a number of classrooms, library, kitchen on first floor. On second, little practice rooms accessed from open air walkway. Boxing ring, to be named "Ammonia Square Garden" is planned.

Club staff, Tally Reed, Margie Sable, me, staff assistants. Jack Morrison, assistant club director. Frank Cleverly, director. Dick Smith, Dorothy Marsh rule us from Casa. Officers' club housed over Movie Theatre, is around the corner. Lorraine works there.

AMERICAN RED CROSS
SERVICE MEN'S CLUB



WHERE
YOU
FROM?
SIGN
HERE

SERVICE + CLUB
MAYNARD'S COOKIN'

OFFEE

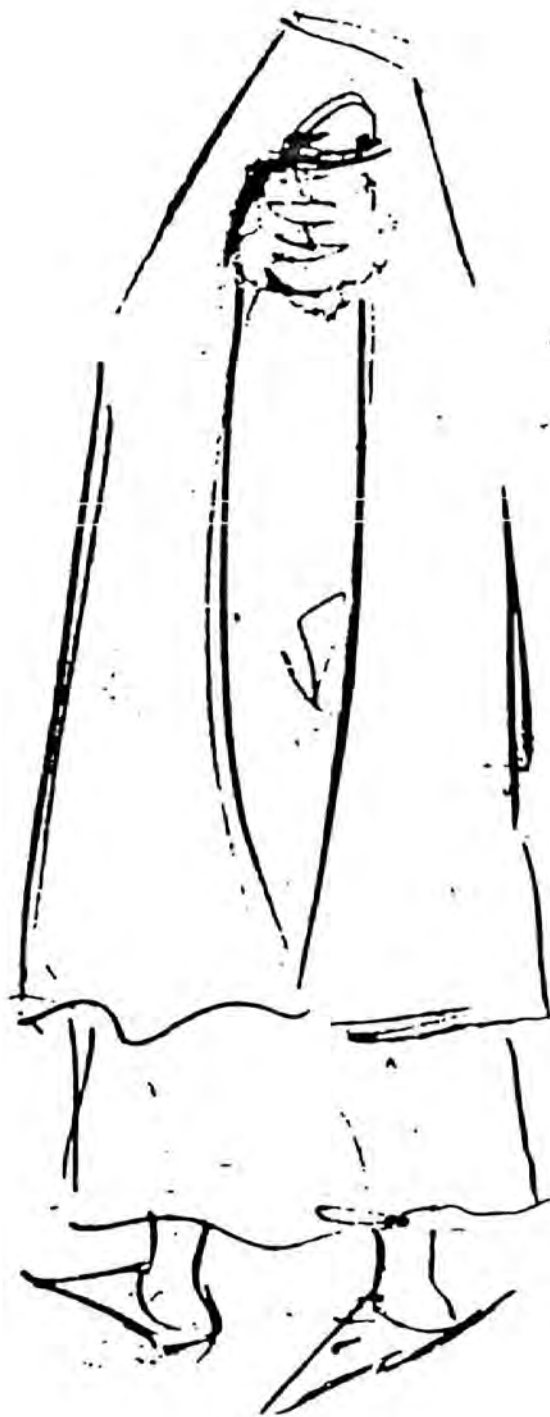
RS
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P.M.

A whole new world! Veiled women wearing pointed leather sandals. Sweet mint tea sipped in cool of Tour Hasan. Daily spectacle of dazzling horsemanship, brilliant color at changing of guard at Sultan's palace.

Soldiers ordered to get rid of all pets. Most of them have come to us. Margie adopted a loveable Springer spaniel-type dog. Named him George. A monkey named Jiggs has adopted us. Have to find homes for the rest.

Made a deal with Hy Bizinsky, ex-cartoonist for one of Atlanta papers. A private now. Gave him my paint box. He takes me sketching with him, some times. He's so good, am embarrassed to show him my stuff.





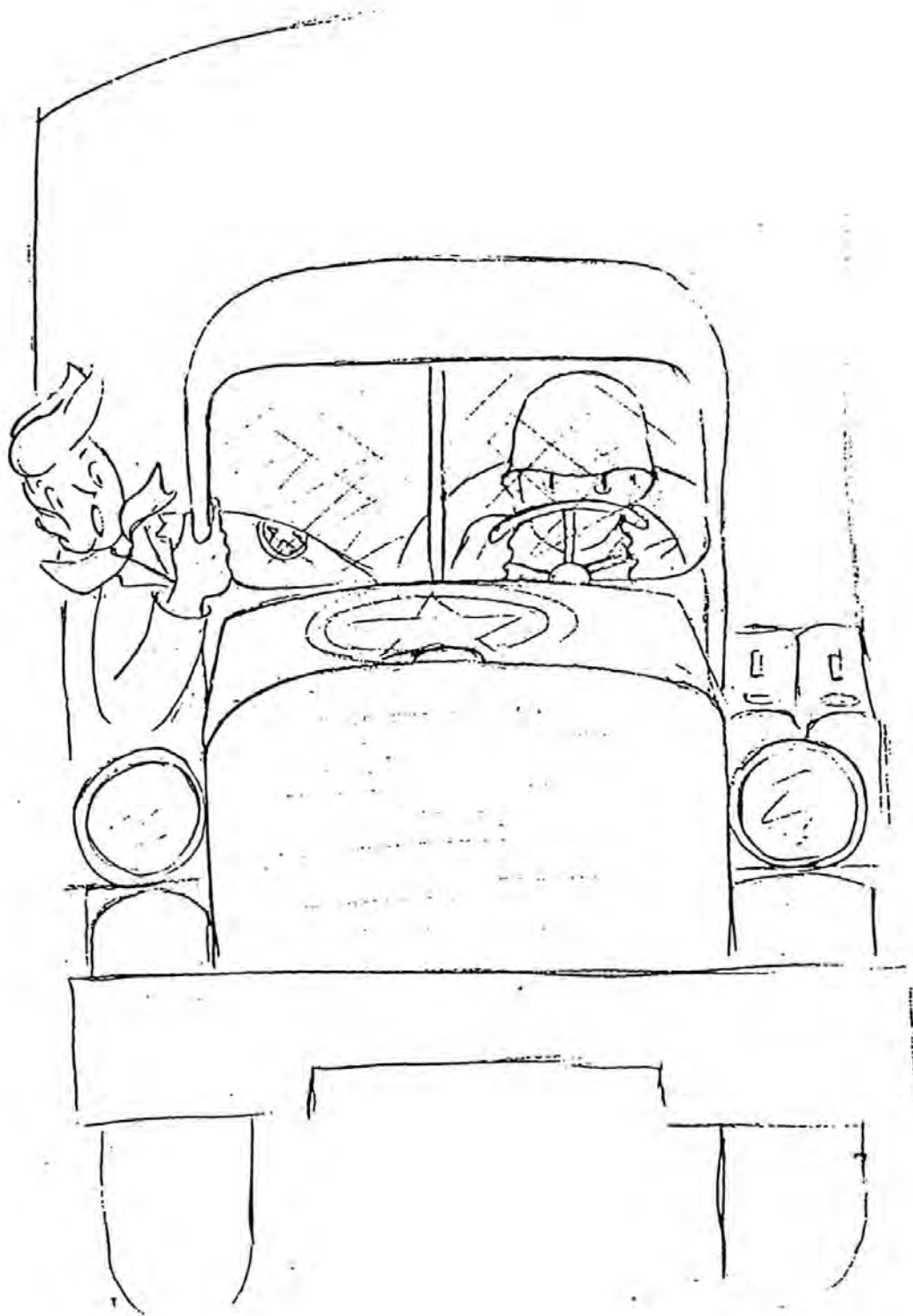
Gala club opening Sunday. Every French, Arab, Allied, American big wig for miles around was here. Even the Sultan. He brought his twelve-year old son.

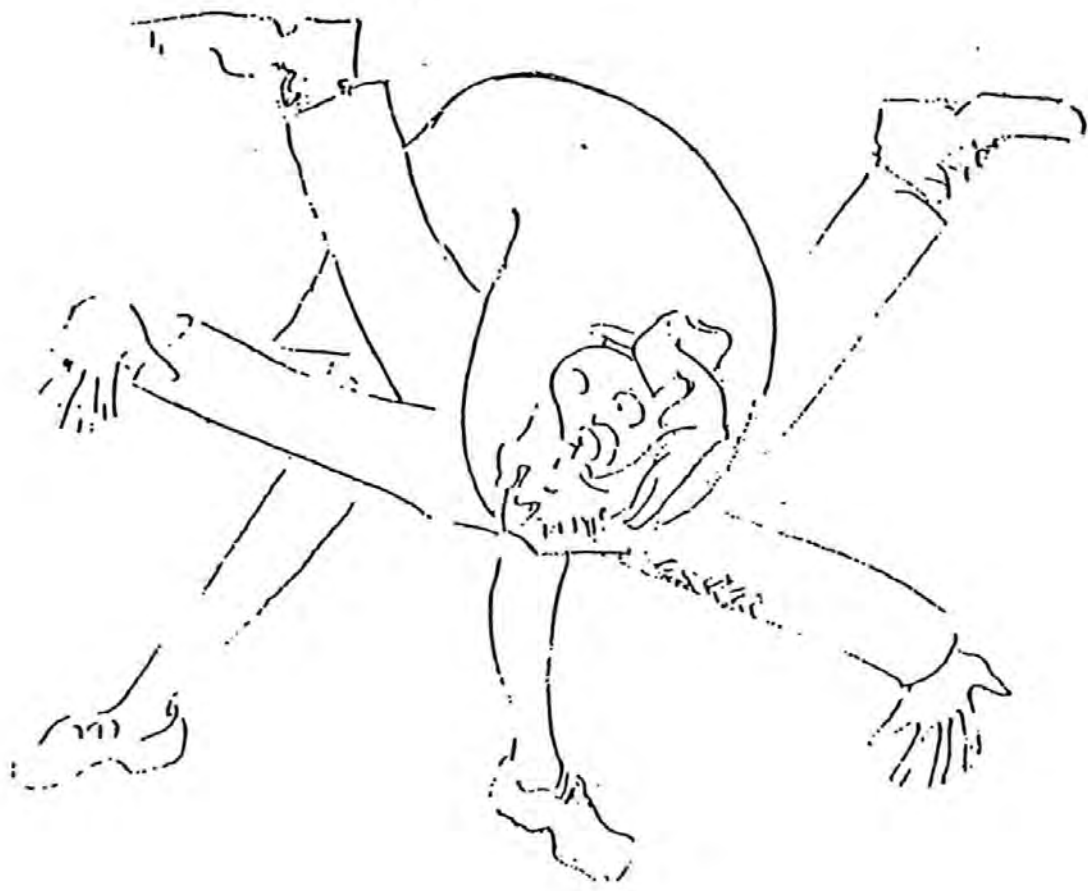
I nearly caused an international incident. Offered Arab dignitaries cigarettes. Robes flying, they fled the horseshoe pits like they'd been shot from cannons. How was I to know cigarettes are taboo here?

Charlie finally caught up with me. Says he took folks into City for night on the town. Dinner and new Broadway hit, "Oklahoma!"

Never have to worry about getting back and forth to work. From bikes to trucks, military vehicles thunder past our door at all hours. Have no transport of our own, but can always hitch a ride. Every morning as we wait, Lorraine picks an hibiscus from bush by our door. Tucks it in her hair.

Our hours are nine a.m. to eight p.m., one day off. Mine is Monday.





Thought I was getting to be a pretty good jitterbug. But tonight Ginsburg sprang a new routine on me. It floored us both.

Having dances twice a week now. Enlisted men from a different unit come each time. A select group of young French girls come to dance with them.

MP on duty at big glass double-door entrance has tough job keeping "ladies of ill repute" out. They push, shove, crowd him trying hard to get in.



It wasn't the five course, three wine luncheon. It wasn't sitting under warm mid-day sun in Grades' lovely garden. No. What made me feel so sick? Turned me the bilious yellow of Atari tablets we all have to take for Malaria? It was the Jaundice!

I'm the only patient in 45th Division's 300 bed hospital just set up to receive casualties from the front. My arms look like pincushions from all blood drawn. Shots I've gotten. Feel like Medics' prize Guinea Pig.

I get a lot of visitors. Soldiers come to town early a.m.. Carouse all day. By time they get around to delivering flowers bought in morning, neither flowers nor soldiers are in very good shape.

A letter from Charlie would make me feel better. Tom writes. So do folks. Mom says her Victory Garden yielding chard, squash, lettuce, tomatoes.

Cornfield, Quantico, ordnance officers we see a lot of, are in a mess. All clothes their unit sent out to be washed came back clean, pressed. In one big heap! Laundryman had mixed up all Identity slips! No one knows who owns what.

Something's going on between Tally and Cornfield.



Released from Hospital. Still feel queasy.
Back to work, but part time.

On streets, as always, besieged by young boys in Pillsbury flour sack pantaloons begging, "Bonbon! Cigarettes!"

Beside our snack bar, best services we offer are clean latrine and showers. We combined several little cubicles on second floor into one shower room.

After his shower this afternoon, a soldier went out onto adjoining deck to sunbathe in the nude. Dropped his cigarettes on roof below. Jumped down to get them. Went through the roof. Landed ker-punch spread eagle on kitchen table. Arab staff, terrified, hit the deck. Thought German paratroopers had landed.





Heavy woolen robes Arabs wear must give them at least some protection from cicadas that are bugging us. They fill the sky. Devour everything that grows. Are everywhere. In everything. Our hair, eyes, clothes, food. Had to go to Casa for much needed supplies. Pummeled by cicadas all the way. Jeep windshield so plastered with them could hardly see road.

Patton here with his Second Armored Division. He strode into club unannounced. Swagger stick in hand. Looked place over. Chastised us for calling the men "Boys". Left.



Went back to Hospital for hair cut.
Flamboyant barber, Corporelli, really clipped me.

Tally and I rode hospital train from Port Layeute to Rabat. Some of men so bandaged could see only their eyes. Others, in obvious pain, tried hard not to show it. Still laughed, joked, welcomed us, our candy, cigarettes like gifts from heaven.

Is trouble brewing? Last week French General Noges, a presumed Vichy sympathizer, gathered all his top brass at French Royal Theater. They came for exclusive showing of 8th Army film. Film didn't arrive. Seems Sultan got it instead. By mistake? De Gaullists thought that was a great joke!

Last night Noges' showing went off as planned. A mob, rounded up by some of our favorite RC volunteers, including Suzie Roland, her brother, on bikes, and entire De Carcasses family with whom Lorraine and I live, met Noges and guests as they were leaving Theater. Angry shouts of, "Kill Noges! Long live De Gaulle!" greeted them. Vichyites don't seem to be popular.



RC acquired another Club. Tamara Beach Club. Beautiful! On unspoiled stretch of white sand reaching to horizon along Atlantic coast. To get there to work this morning, hitched ride with dare-devil biker. He screamed at me over roar of motor, "Want to see me stand on my head on the handlebars while I drive?" I didn't.

“The OK French Method Handbook” Army puts out isn’t much help. Soldiers following instructions it gives have little luck connecting with local females. Relying on their own tactics works better

Needless tragedy. Late Sunday niter, two officers, two nurses whooping it up on way back from Tamara long after everyone else had left, came to Command Post. Soldier on duty ordered them to halt. They didn’t. Drove in their open jeep right through. Soldier aimed. Fired. Killed a nurse. .





Must have been crazy to go horseback riding with Culbertson on my day off. He's a Virginian. Practically born in the saddle. Of course I fell off. Cork forest floor so deep in soft, powdery soil, falling into it like falling into feather bed. Nothing hurt but my ego. No return engagement suggested.

A sailor galloped by having time of his life. Stirrups flapping. Reins flying. Completely out of control. He stayed on!

Ping pong match between American, French seemed like good idea. At first. President of French Ping Pong Association called. Why hadn't HE been invited? Couldn't tell him we didn't know he even existed. Not able to resolve problem to his satisfaction. Match cancelled.

Quick trip to Marrakech with Jack. Through desert. Volcanic sand. Here, there black rock outcrops, scruffy foliage. Careened around hay carts. Passed oasis full of date palms. Marveled at how sticky dates are kept free of sand.

Reached Marrakech at dusk. Glowing city of rosy buildings, brilliant blooms. Throws out a sunset all its own.

Jack suggested we share a room. "Everyone thinks they know what we're up to. Why disappoint them?" I declined.

In market, Jack bumped into American actress-entertainer who took Paris by storm, Josephine Baker. He knew her. They had met when she was on tour with her troupe of black entertainers and they had stopped in Rabat. She asked us to lunch at the Pasha's palace where she now lives. I said we couldn't go. If we did, we'd be late getting back to work in Rabat. How could I have passed up such an opportunity?



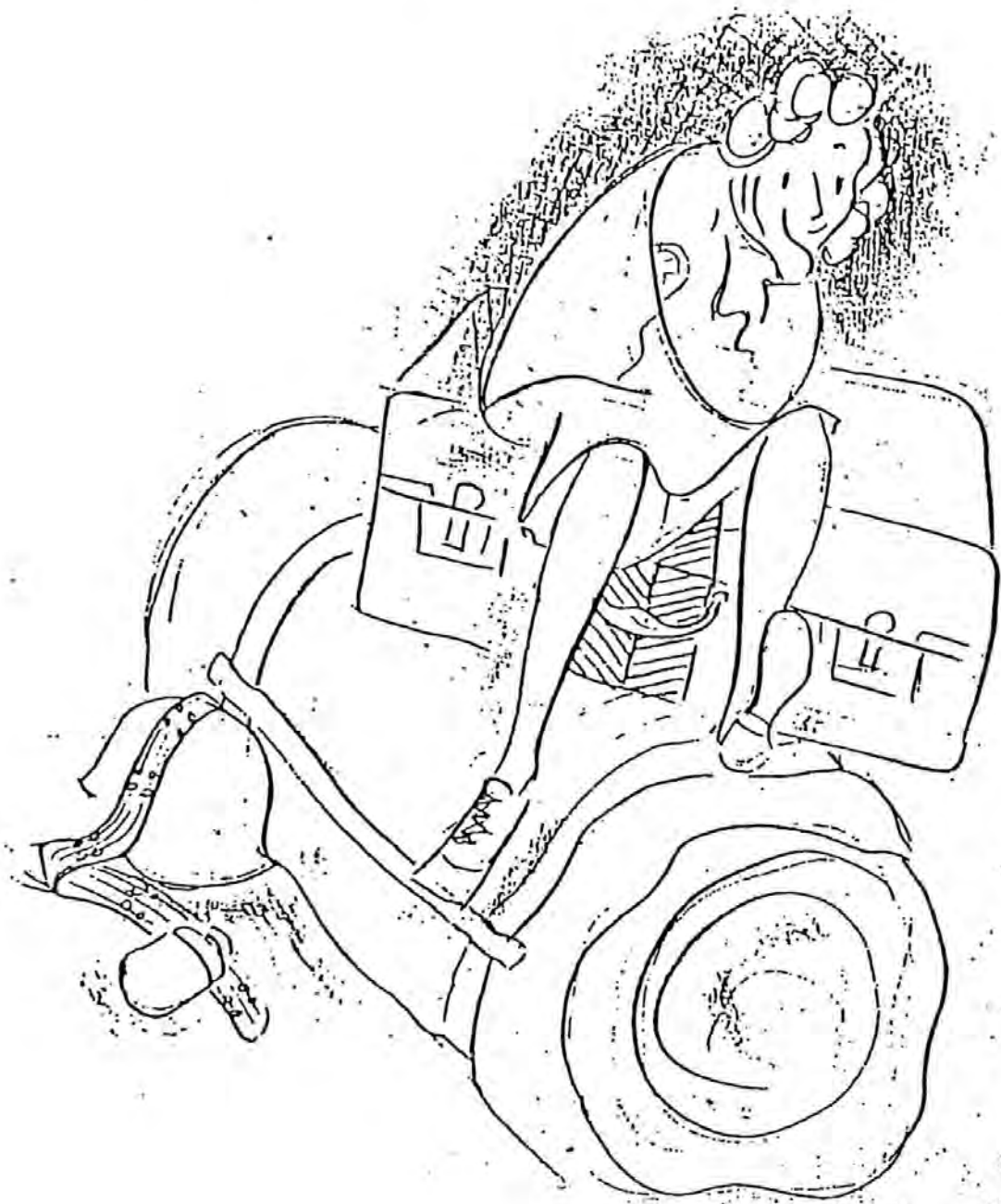
The weekly French lessons Izzy gives me have yet to have the slightest effect. She tries valiantly, but doubt if she can ever make a linguist out of me.



Our cook, Mohammed, invited Jack, Margie, Tilly, me to his wedding. He also invited Ordway, our soldier-helper, an ex-pro football tackle from Montana. Went through dark, narrow, winding alleyways to get to his home in the Medina. He presided over feast of couscous, chicken like a Sultan. We were careful to eat only with first three fingers of our right hands. Big kitchen alarm clock on shelf behind us ticked off the time. A fabulous celebration. But a wedding? We never saw a bride. Have to take Mohammed's word for it.

Have orders to leave Rabat. Palermo next stop.





En Route to Sicily, Aug. 15

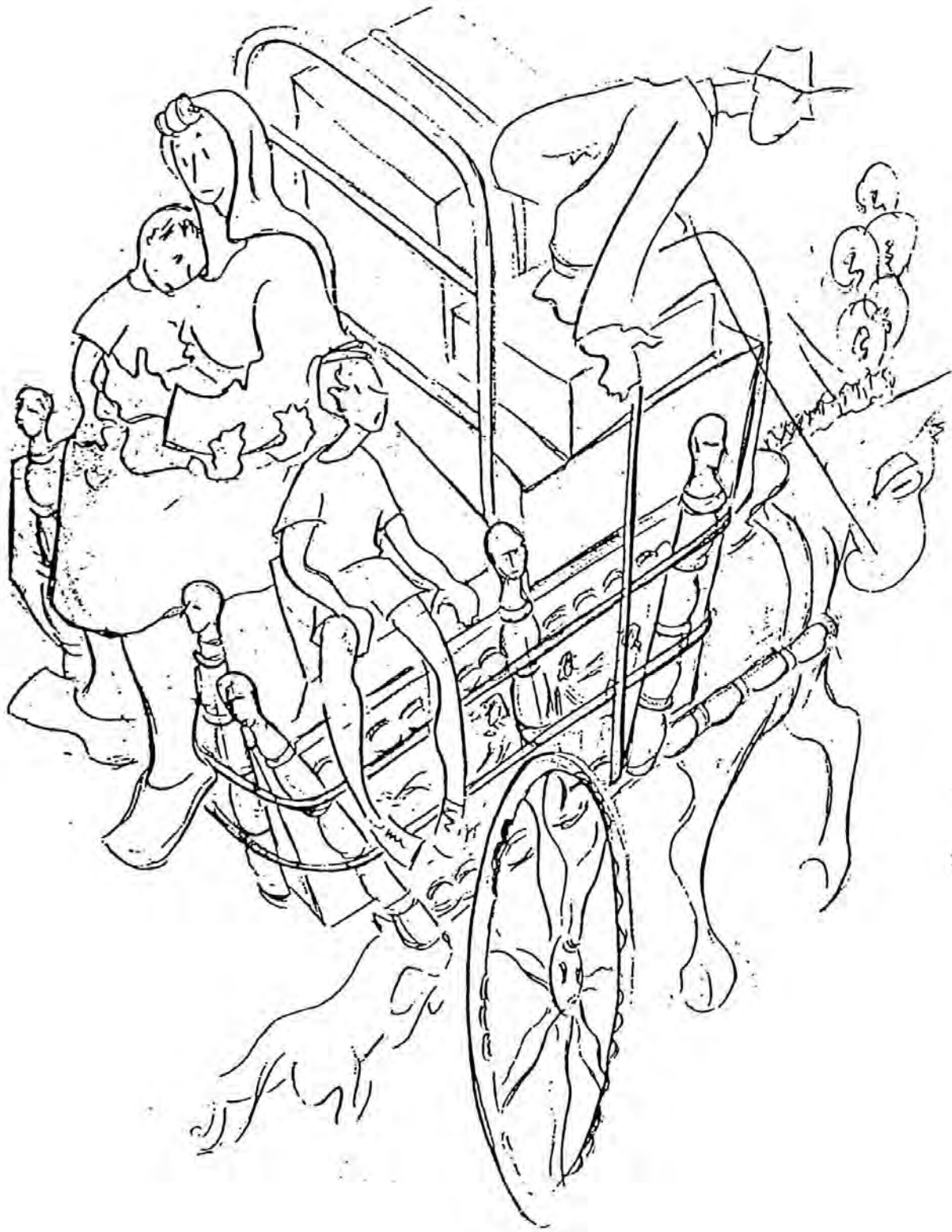
Hated to leave. Loved Rabat. Was stuffed into A26 with pilot, two special service officers, my luggage, parachute, Mae West.. In open cockpit all the way, made 500mile flight to Tunis in an hour fifty-six minutes. Touched down. R`efueled. Took off again. Made Palermo with my head swimming.

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SICILY

AUG. 16 TO DEC. 5



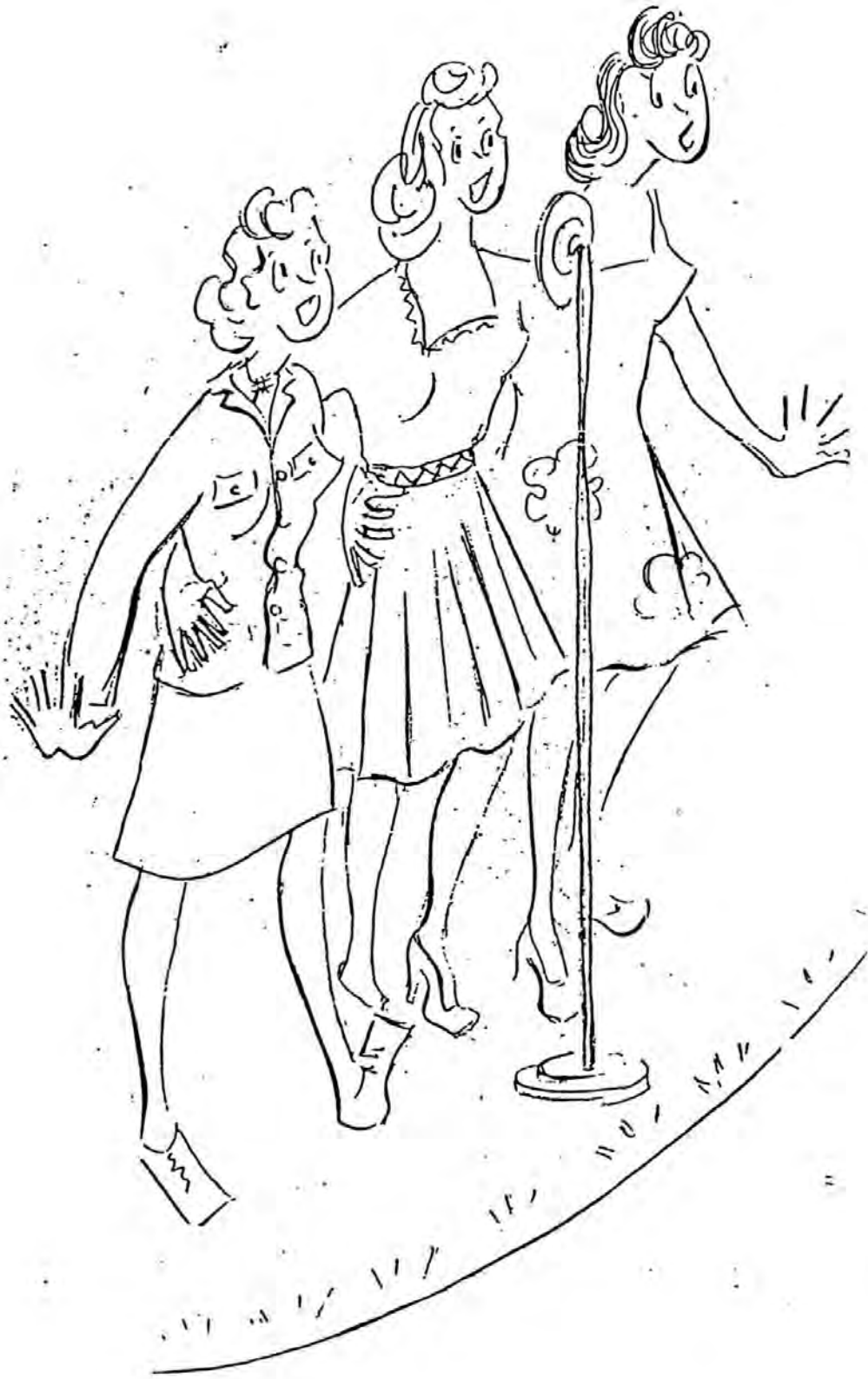
Palermo, Aug. 16 to Oct. 15

City heavily bombed. Civilians in their bright, beautifully painted, carved carts, piled high with everything they own still leaving city in search of safety, somewhere.

Col. Poletti, former Adjutant General of New Jersey, is City Administrator. No small job. Prices soaring. Food scarce. Riots feared. Long lines of women form on one side of the street, men on other. They wait for bread doled out by Allies. There's never enough.



As in Rabat, young boys hound us. Beg for same things, but here it's in Italian. "Caramelli! Cigarette!" Hand gesture for "Niente!" acts more like a come-on than as a deterrent.



I'm a showgirl! With 25 RC gals here, lots of us are unemployed. Eileen Tyler gave Gladys Patton (no relation to the General) and me a job. Eileen collected entertainers, musicians, and stage crew. Found band instruments. Scrounged transportation. Put together a variety show, "So This is Sicily!"

I'm part of a trio. It's really a duet. Eileen, Gladys sing. I can't sing. Just mouth words. I'm scenery. But get to do a jitterbug with Buddy Boland at end of show.

Show opened Friday. Troops loved it. Movie House packed for all performances. Never enough seats.

Now on tour. First stop Trepan on east coast. Took our five-truck convoy six hours to drive 80 miles to get here. Detoured around bombed-out bridges. Zigzagged through potholed, narrow streets. All 50 of us, cast and crew with our equipment, now bivouacked in field outside of town.

On tour, theater is outdoors. Under stars. Stage crew assembles platform for stage. Soldiers sit on ground in front. Always enough seats. Each show, literally a howling success. What a high, playing to thousands of men!



Sept. 5! Italy capitulated! Troops went wild when stage manager, Smutty, announced it from stage tonight.

Have been in San Stefano for two days. Eileen, Gladys and I traveled here in style. Eileen wheedled a command car and driver out of Patton for our exclusive use. Riding over the countryside, waving, calling to troops building and repairing roads and bridges, makes us feel like royalty.

Privacy on tour is non-existent. Finding a place to take a bath, if you can call it a bath when the bathtub is a helmet, takes ingenuity.

Sept. 11! Allies finally made a landing at Anzio, just south of Rome. We celebrated with Eleventh Evac Hospital on way back to Palermo from Sam Stefano. Did show from back of trucks for them.

Arrived in Palermo in time to join celebration of our Mondello Beach Club Opening. Volley ball, horseshoes, boat and swimming races still going on. Band blaring.

Official Army photographer recording event for publication back home, was there. Had my picture taken with General Patton. Held a bunch of grapes for him to pluck from. Pix supposed to appear in Sat. Eve. Post. Wow!

Bob Hope, Francis Langford here while we were gone. Sorry to miss them.

Picked up letters from home. Several from Tom. None from Charlie. What's going on?



I've begun staring at everyone I pass. Since hometown friends, Steve Belcher, Courtney Yule showed up and Barbara Twitchell is expected, keep hoping I'll see more old Stateside friends.

New friends are here, too. Went to Catacombs with bunch of Ordnance men from Rabat, Cornfeld, Quetnick, Jackson, Moore. A sight to see. Buried in about 1000 AD. Rediscovered just 20 years ago. Climbed hill to visit lovely little church at Montreal. Had dinner at sidewalk café.

After more than a month, show days are over. "So This Is Sicily!" closed. Final show Saturday, utter chaos. Jerry Malone's wig flew off into audience. Buddy and I danced so close to edge of stage nearly fell off. Gladys had a cold. I had to sing. Now it's back to work at Montello Beach.



RC billeted five of us in a third floor apartment at Via 20th of September. It has become a very busy place. Since getting a kerosene cook-stove, servicemen flock to our door with all kinds of stuff to swell our larder. Three sailors arrived at midnight with 24 cans of milk, 4 cans of real American beer. Milk was for us. We shared the beer.

Went to see sailors from bombed battleship. Only 90 of the 2000 or more aboard were found. Picked up after spending 24 hours in the sea. A terrible ordeal. How do our men go through so much and still come up smiling?

Two more friends showed up in amazing way. Old beau, Johnnie Sheldon, flew in. Actually crashed in. Not supposed to land in Palermo. Thought he might find me here. He ferries planes to war zones. Just divorced. Wife of two years cleaned out their bank account. Left.

Crash repairs delayed him long enough to find first me, then his Williams College classmate, now Captain, Howie Smith who just happened along on the street!

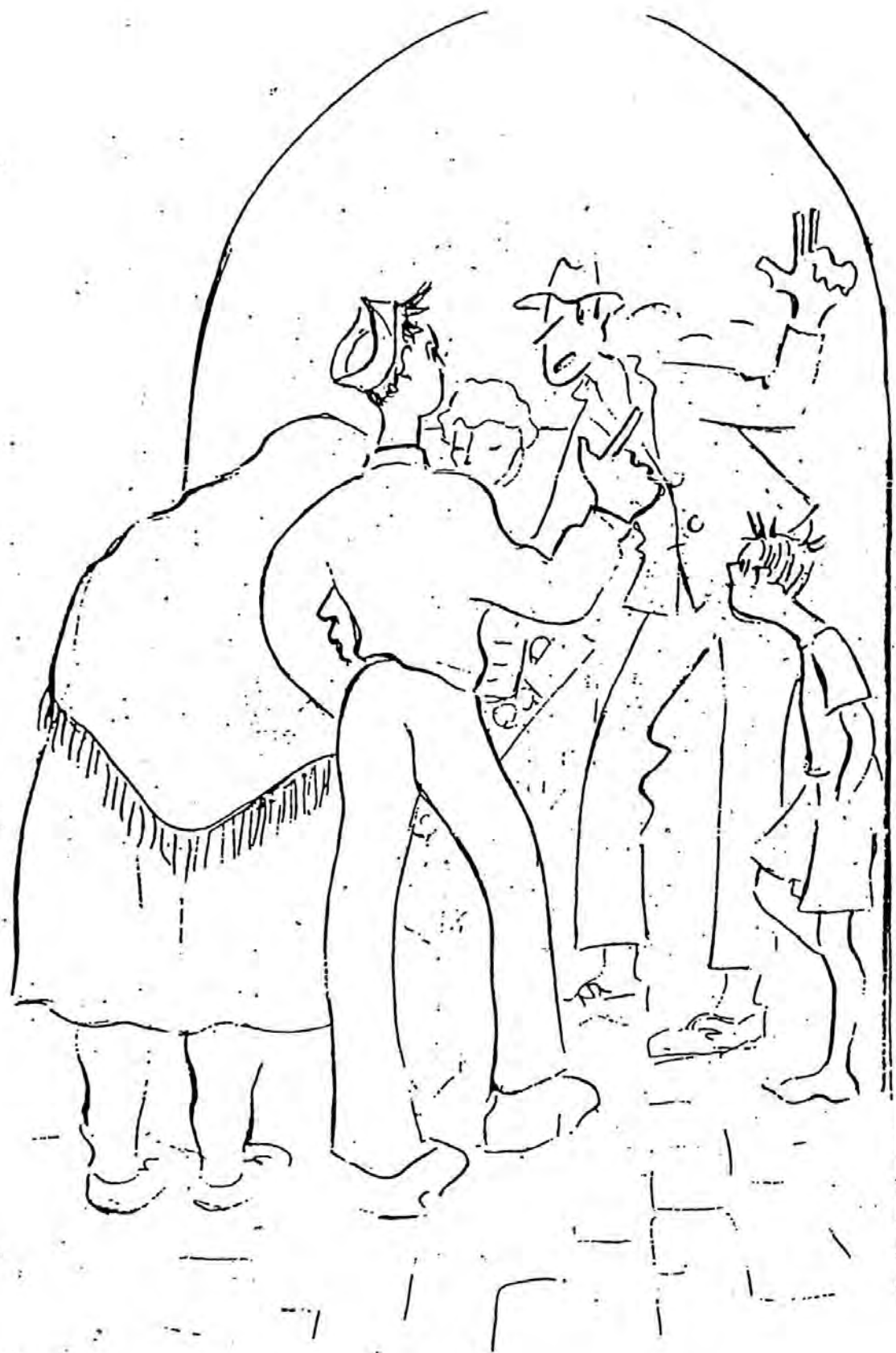


Girls come to our dances well chaperoned, often by whole families. They'd rather eat cookies we serve, than dance.

Five of us from "So This Is Sicily!" cast took mini-show to Agrigento. Show bombed. Theater half empty. To liven things up, Eileen offered a dance with me as a door prize. No takers. A devastating blow! Can't win 'em all.

Allies landed there in Agrigento and in Licata on southern coast. Sicily on invasion routes of Romans, Greeks, Saracens, Moors, Christians. All left their marks. A rainbow glowed as we walked through ruins. It made trip to Argent worth while.





Entryway to our apartment clogged with bustling Black Market. Vendors peddle a wide assortment of military hardware, rations, equipment. Young boys peddle their sisters. I hate to think about it. Heartbreaking to know the people are so needy. I have to focus on my job. Not get carried away with things I can do nothing about.,

Things slow at club today. My best friend at home has a mom who taught us a bit about reading palms. Thought I'd try it. Started a deluge. Hands popped up all around me. "Read mine! Read mine!" Most want to know about their love lives. The future. I did a lot of guessing. It's fun. Will have to be careful though. Want to spread hope, not gloom.

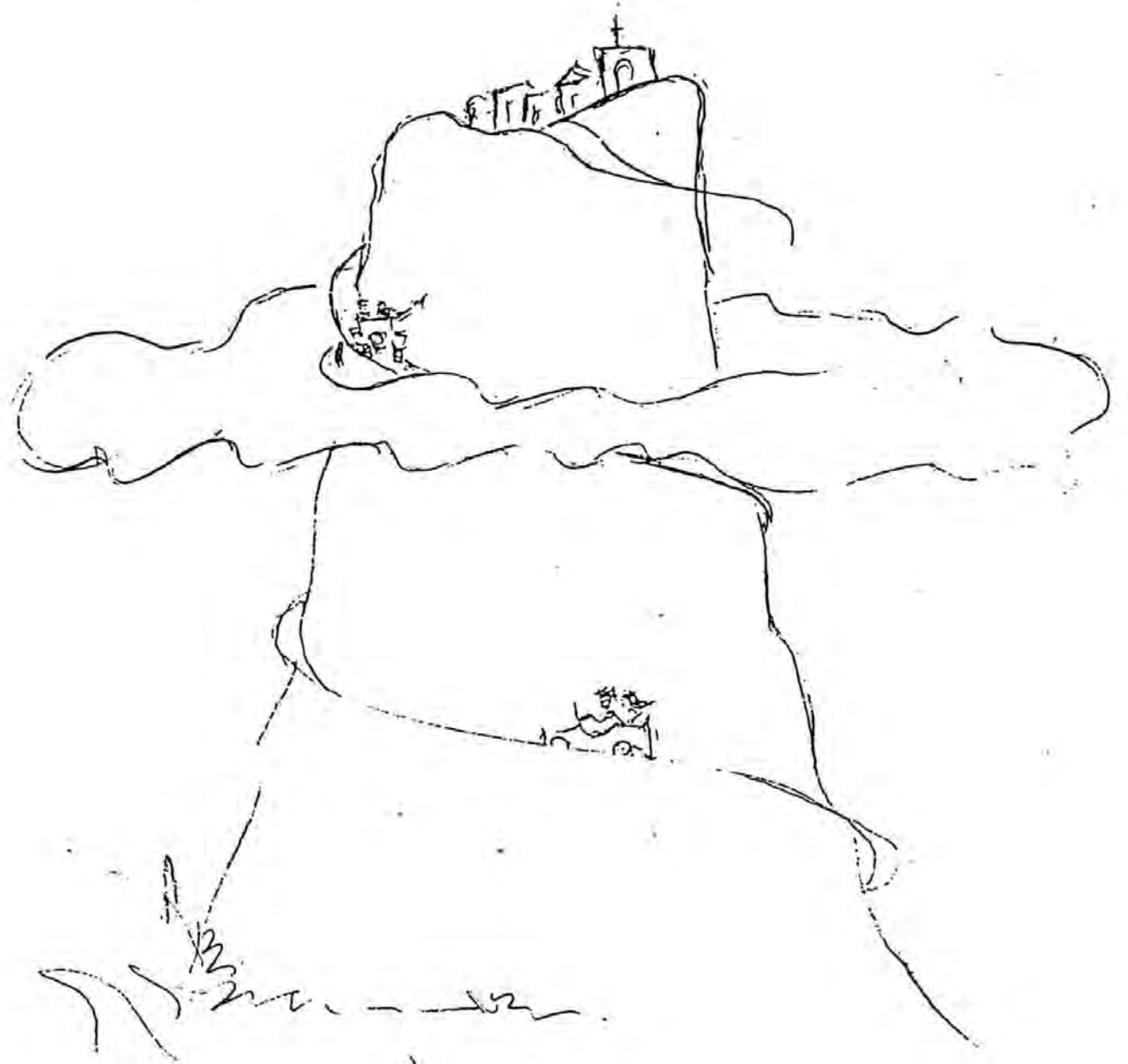
Trepan, Oct. 15 to Nov. 27

New APO address, #550. Here in Trepan again, this time to run RC club while manager, Mim Martin in hospital in Palermo.

Almost have my eyes poked out by local ladies prodding me, exclaiming, "Americana! Americana!" Intimidates me and Chummier, Mim's ersatz cocker spaniel I'm dog-sitting.



Like stepping into Middle Ages. Erice, an old world town untouched by war. Sits above clouds on top of mountain that rises like Ziggurat from plain below.





Feel as cocky as Chummier acts. Dad wrote that his friend, Lute Pease, cartoonist for Newark Evening News, Pulitzer Prize winner, saw my drawings in his paper. Likes them a lot. Simon Schuster does, too. Sent editor all the way to Maplewood to see them. Wants to publish. Needs twice as many as I've already done.

Read palms. Helps fill some of the empty hours for the troops. Try to make them feel good about themselves. Shudder when I see a short lifeline.

Tagged along with RC Clubmobilers taking coffee, doughnuts to troops in outlying areas. They'll get closest to fighting when we move on.

Tried to get movies started so troops had something to do while in town. Coast Artillery Engineers agreed to run them if RC, that's me, booked seats. With only 500 seats available, keeping Officers, Men, British, Blacks happy, impossible. Army stopped supplying films after third one.

Fracas at local bordello stirred things up a bit. Our southern "White Boys" raised Cain about sharing favors of girls with Blacks.





Am overwhelmed by all of things I'm responsible for here. Bookkeeping, emergencies are just a few. How did Mimi do it all, alone? Chummier tries, but isn't much help.

An irate Italian couple came in to club this morning. Their daughter hadn't come home after last night's dance. Where was she? I must find her.

Her parents spoke only Italian. I speak English, a little French. Club secretary-interpreter, Maria, speaks Italian and French. Parents and I finally, through Maria, understood each other. Sort of.

In French I asked Maria, "Do you think their daughter really wants to come home?" Maria cautioned, "You don't want to say THAT do you?" Am in a quandary. Don't know what to do. Need help! I'll try MPs.

To my relief, missing girl finally returned home all by herself.

Rain! More rain! Beats me how soldiers coming into town from muddy bivouacs manage to look so clean and well groomed. They get boots shined the minute they hit town. .





Finally! RC sent help! Radish Spaulding, Mormon from Utah. If I can get her nose out of huge bunch of red roses sent her by unidentified admirer, maybe I can get some work out of her.

She brought news of big scandal at Palermo Club. Gigantic Black Market discovered thriving in RC auditorium basement!



Met up with a couple of CIC men. Stationed here on some kind of secret mission. When we ask, "What do you DO?"

They answer in hushed voices, "We'll tell you AFTER the war!"

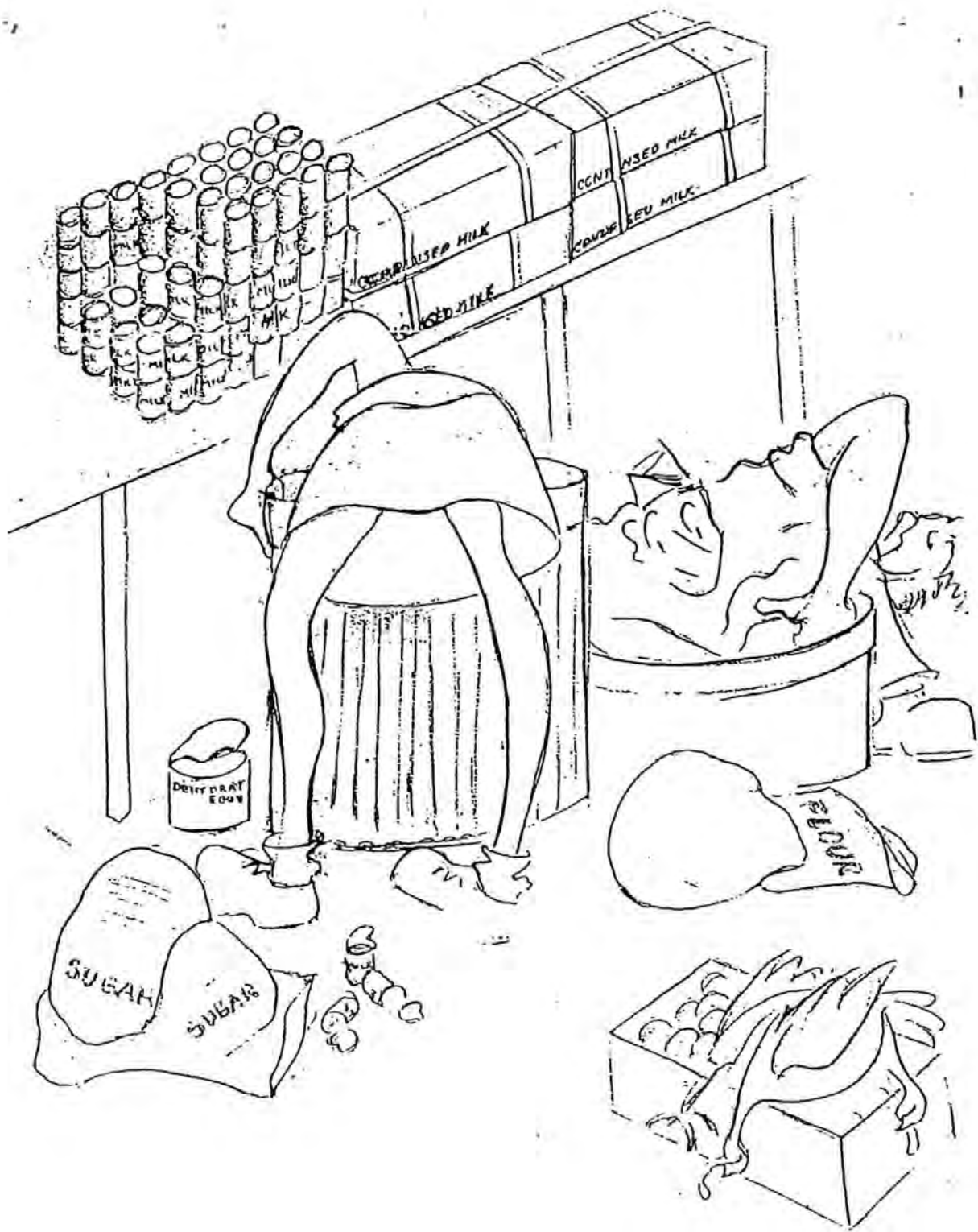
There's nothing covert about riding with them to Marcela to get REAL Marcela wine. They drive an ancient Lincoln sedan with orange Worlds Fair 1933 license plates

Rain, constant rain. Now on Standard time. It's getting cold.

Mim back with orders to prepare club for closing. Radish left. Still had to get ready for Thanksgiving. Up to our elbows in chicken salad mix. Made sandwiches to serve troops. With pickles, ice cream, cookies, candy, nuts, coffee, Coke, hundreds of hungry men had something beside Spam to mark the day.

Day after Thanksgiving, Mimi and I left. Air force took over Club temporarily. Chummier had to stay. Couldn't take her. One of CIC men will take her home when he goes on leave.

Mim went by jeep. I flew back to Palermo in nose of attack plane. In bombardier's seat. Secured in a transparent bubble hanging precariously just below Pilot's seat. Alone. Vulnerable. Nothing between me and earth except a few wispy clouds. Pilot buzzed Erica and everything else along the way. Wanted to give me a thrill. He did. Heart in my mouth whole trip. Airmen do that constantly while under fire! Terrifying. How do they do it?



Palermo, Nov. 27 to Dec. 5

Bedroll is soft place to sit while waiting for space on plane going to Naples. Have letters from folks, Tom for company. Charlie is silent.

Luggage gains weight, size with every move. This time have added linens. Pure linen sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, napkins. All confiscated from a luxury Italian liner commissioned before War but never sailed.

When Army took ship over, turned it into a troop ship, some of contents were made available to RC. RC sold it to us at ten to twenty-five cents a piece. We stocked up. Couldn't go wrong. All the stuff has ship's name, Terrain, woven into it.

RC workers have rank of Captain but can't send packages. Army officers can. Some of my linen loot went to almost everyone at home I know who can use it. Howie Smith sent it for me with his name and return APO address on it.

Two sheets Howie sent for me went to a friend married to a man also named Howie Smith. That Howie is supposed to be in South Pacific, not Sicily. Hope my sheets don't get him into trouble. Couldn't include message to explain.

Sent off a lot but still had more to pack.



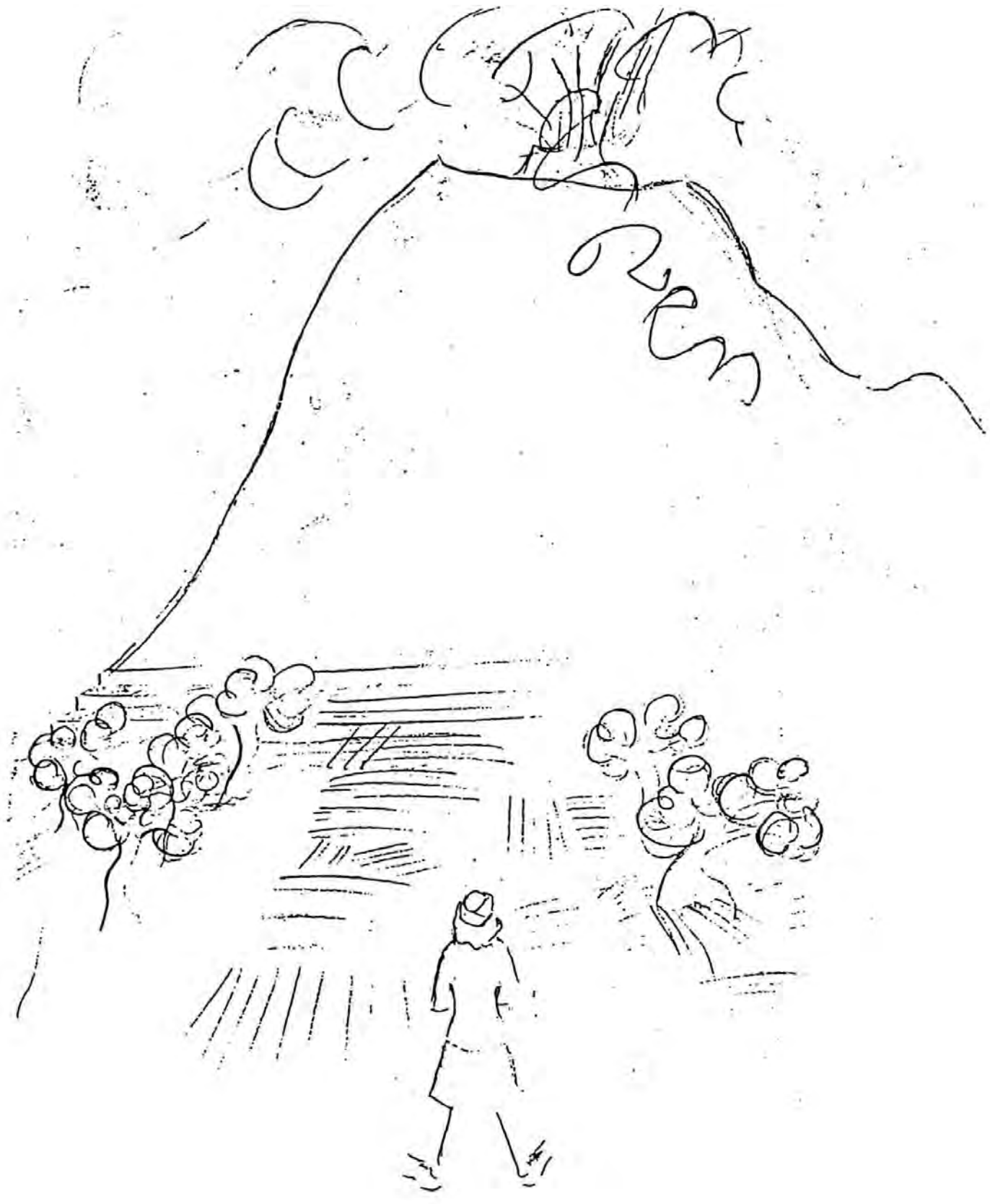


ITALY

DEC. 5, 1943 TO JUNE 6, 1944

Naples, Dec.. 5 to 12

Flying into Naples, saw Vesuvius looking just as it should. A steaming cone, rising unchallenged from the surrounding plain.





Everything that travels on foot, hoof or wheel is on the move. MP directing traffic, keeps it moving, slowly, until he spots a pretty Italian girl passing by. His eyes wander. Then traffic snarls.

Have time to kill while waiting for new assignment. Pompeii well worth battling traffic to get there. Ruins well preserved. Looks like people still living there.

More bawdy rooms, with their suggestive murals, reserved for "men only". Guides guard them so zealously, women can't even sneak a peek.

En Route Via Bari, Brindisi, Dec. 13, 14

Alarm set to wake me in time for flight expected to leave at 6 a.m. for Bari startled me. Dazed, sleepy-eyed, reached for clock. Missed. Fell out of bed. Hit head on edge of table. Ended up with nasty bump size of golf ball. It hurts. Looks awful. Great way to start off for new job.



Bari. Margie starting new RC club here. She met me wearing Tyrolean officer's hat. A hat so big, it dwarfed the "slip of a girl" she calls herself.

Bari, a resort town on Adriatic, suffered worst air raid of war on Dec. 5. Gerry planes hit ammunition ship moored in Bari harbor. Blew it up. Triggered series of explosions. Ignited, leveled surrounding buildings. In midst of rubble, signs of activity already begin to stir.





Destination Lecce. About as far down in heel of Italy as one can get. Speed-demon driver, Darwin, assigned to drive me there. Despite my pleas, he stops at nothing. Olive groves on one side of road. Sun bleached block houses on other. All a blur as we raced by.

. Has to stop in Brindisi. Darwin couldn't ignore need for gas and a pit stop. Then reluctantly waited barely long enough for me to say "Hello" to Tilly and Jack, now stationed there. Zoomed on again.

Lecce. Dec. 15, 1943 to June 5, 1944

Entered Lecce through one of five gates in wall surrounding city. A town out of ancient history. Narrow cobblestone streets bordered by gray stone-block buildings. Passed the usual pissoires. Into sudden sunlight of an open piazza. Dominating it, huge Roman amphitheater. So well preserved, could have been built yesterday.



Eileen here. Found her in bed. Miserable. In seedy albergo just off main square. RC sent her to open Club here two weeks ago.

She's had nothing but trouble ever since. Spent first night here in common bathroom at albergo. Only space available. Hasn't been able to locate building for club. Three Yugoslav refugees hired to help set up club, moved in with her. She thought they spoke English. They spoke almost none. They devoured her precious rations scrounged from Army. Disappeared. Left her a box of Social Tea Biscuits. That's all she'd had to eat for past four days.





Everything has come together, fast. We have a club! Dick Smith came, found and requisitioned town's elegant gambling casino, the Circolo Citadina. Like a palace! Crystal chandeliers. Huge, carved throne-like chairs. Ceilings festooned with bas relief plaster flora.

Dick left. Darwin ordered back to Bali. There went our transportation.

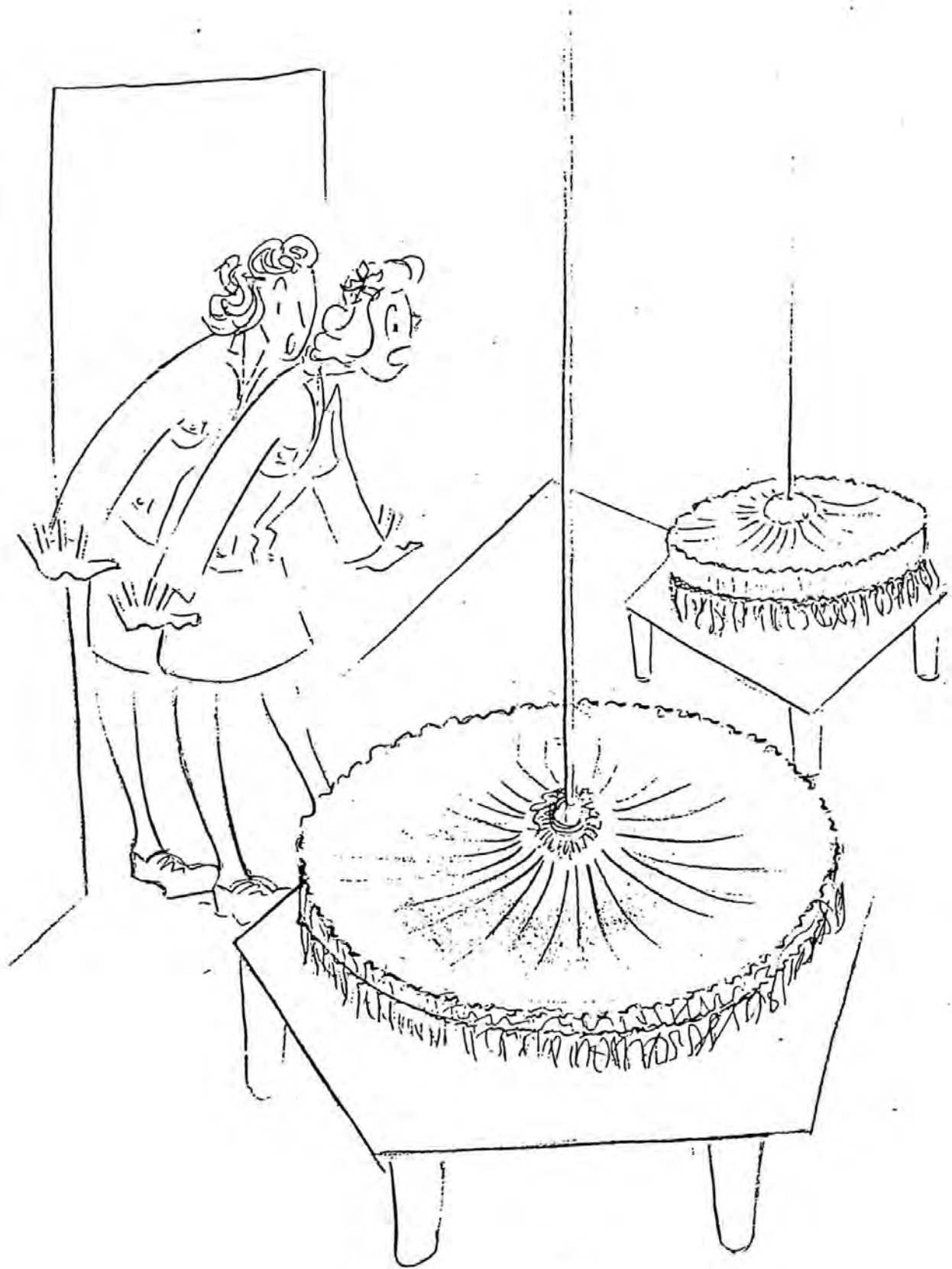
But this is Airforce country. Bases are scattered from two to twenty miles away. Wing commander sent us five men and a two-and-a-half-ton truck to help us get started.

Town off limits to troops. Only ones here officially are fourteen MPs. Six Americans, eight British. All are fifty mission survivors waiting to go home on rotation while they keep an eye out for AWOLs.

Quartermasters now send us rations along with MP's, every three days. All are carefully counted.

Signal Corps set up a phone for us. Works as long as "Federal Exchange" operator, ensconced in a house down the street, doesn't wander.

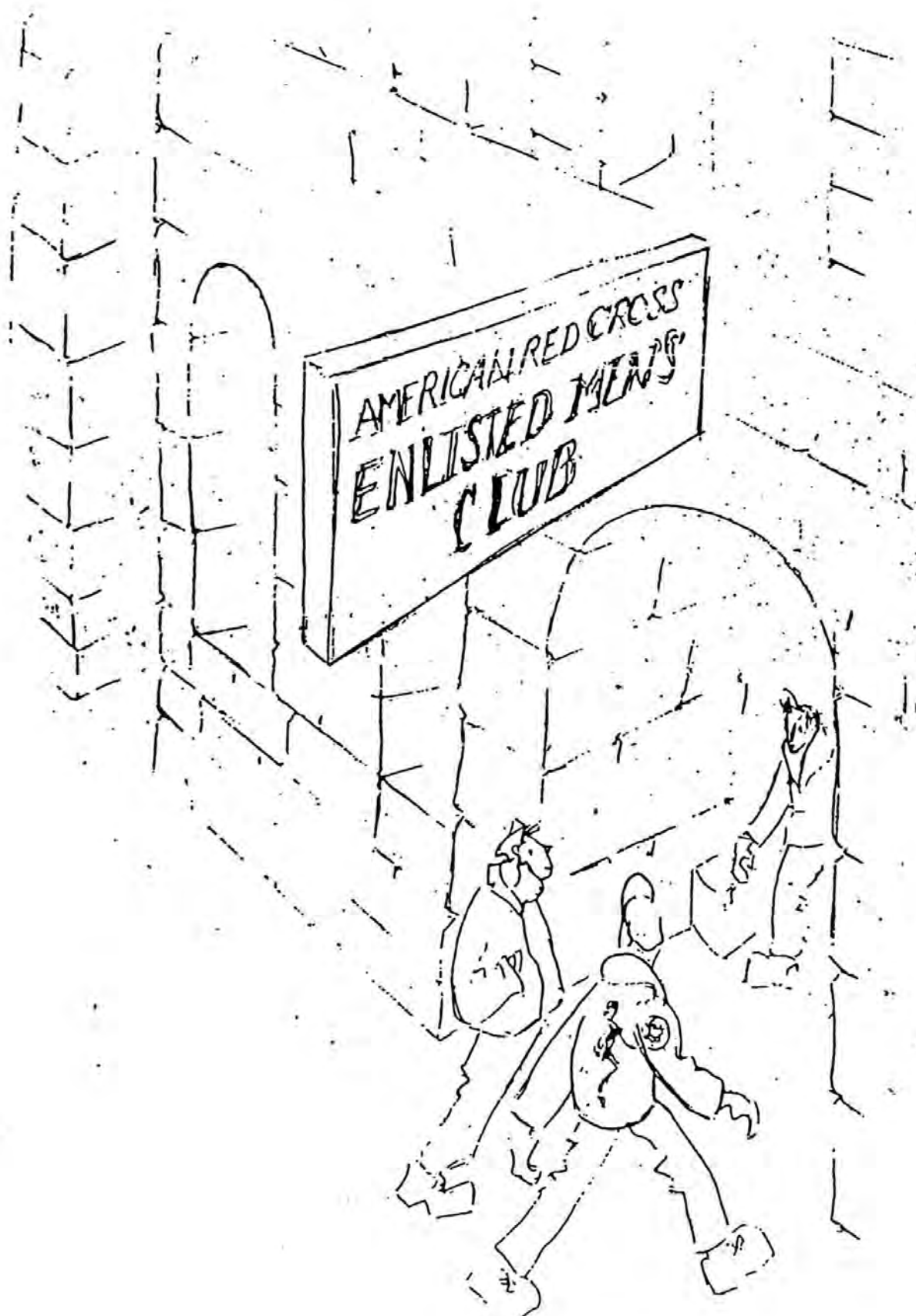




It's going to be harder than ever to enforce RC "No Gambling" rule here in a former casino. We always know games go on but can never catch one in progress. Dice from Uncle Wiggly games are always missing.

This club is elegant, but needs a thorough cleaning and lots of repairs. Through cracks in floor boards, can see bare earth.

Little green-tiled back room only space ready for use. At breakfast time we're serving coffee, fruit, nuts for the few in town on official business. Prophylactic station is right next door.



Big RC club sign finally installed on front of building. We're cleaned up and open for business. Town no longer off limits. Troops flocking in to Club. Have to think about Christmas. Less than a week away.

We've moved from albergo into Club. Now sleeping on scrounged army cots on unheated second floor of Club. Better here than being attacked by every bug that bites, crawls, hops, jumps at albergo. But we need a decent home. An apartment if we can ever find one.

Seems Mom and Dad are bragging about their overseas daughter. When I complain, "I won't be able to face anyone when I get home," Eileen chastises me saying, "You're being selfish! Let them brag. You're their connection to this war. They want to be a part of it, too."

Thought we'd never get a Christmas tree. Vendors kept bringing bigger and bigger branches for us to put together somehow.

In desperation we even went in search of one ourselves. At cemetery, Tex, our on-loan-airman-helper, and I found one. We hitched it up to truck. Tried to pull it out by the roots. Caretaker with blunderbuss chased us off! Finally one vendor produced a beauty. We didn't ask the origin.

In midst of Christmas frenzy, Eileen went shopping. Knowing nothing about Italian measures, said, "Yes", to a quintal of potatoes. We'll be eating them for a month! Noticing Eileen's embarrassment, two people tried to help. Alfredo Lopez Y Rojo, a REAL duke, and Ciu Valone a leading Lecce lady. Eileen charmed them both. Both came back to club with her. Instant friends.





My best Christmas present ever!.. A little toy monkey tucked into branches of the Christmas tree. Around its neck a bright red ribbon and tag with my name on it. Suspect shy, funny, eighteen year old gunner, Murphy, was the anonymous donor.

Christmas itself, all food. Made turkey, chicken salad sandwiches till I thought I'd cackle. Fed 300 after mass Christmas Eve. Hundreds more Christmas day and several days after.



Wanted to close club for night. Couldn't.
A couple of airmen, feeling no pain, hovered
over their officer asleep in a vino stupor.
Refuse to go back to camp without him.
Finally carried him off. Christmas over.

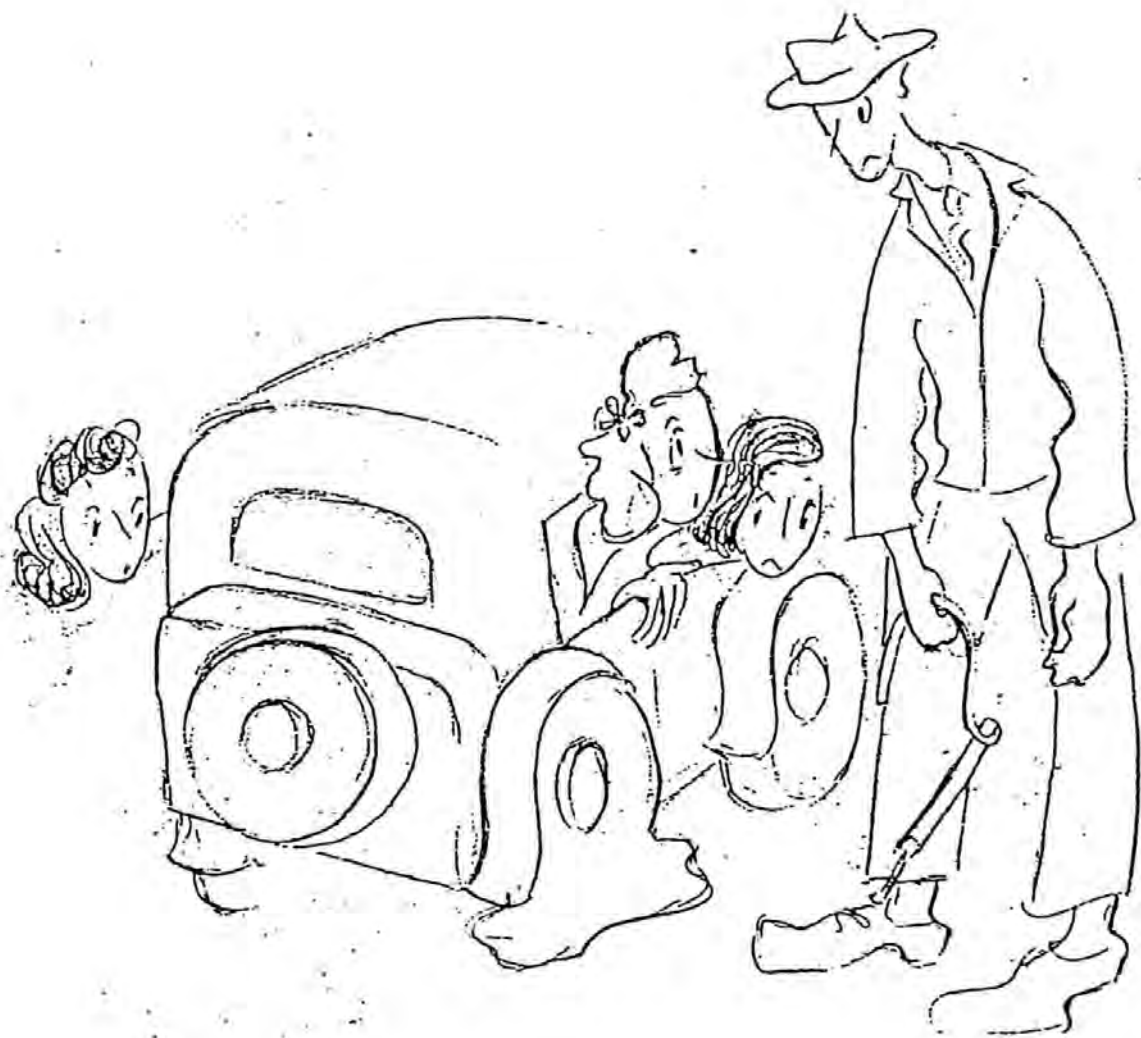
New Year's Eve and New Year's Day
quiet. Town put off limits. Troops confined to
base. Airforce wasn't taking any chances.
Wanted no rowdy, drunken conflicts between
celebrating troops and townspeople.

New Year's Eve Eileen went to party with
Duke at Cui's. I wasn't invited. Alone at club.
Felt like Cinderella. Thought about Charlie.

Jan. 31. Italian elections. Their first in years. Day off for us. Club closed. Town off limits to troops.

The three of us and driver, Guise, squeezed into just-acquired Topolino. Smallest car ever made. Barely waist high. An arm-span long. Set out for Gallipolis, of WW I fame. Got a fat five miles out of town. Patched it with spit and chewing gum. Tire lasted long enough to get us there AND back!

Gallipolis looked as deserted as a Trill painting. When we got back, learned Gallipolis we were after is in Greece.



Jack has come to run our club freeing Eileen to do what she does best. Entertain. Just as Jack arrived we had a visitor. The Duke, with typical Italian flourish, rode in on a pony cart filled with red roses for us.

Must start organizing activities for troops. First, dances. Ciu offers to help get them started. But many obstacles in the way. Townspeople don't trust us. Women follow the Army for only one reason, they whisper.

They think this is no time for revelry. Whole country in Luto, mourning, for death of their nation and their own personal dead.

And why do we ask Lecce's daughters to dance with Enlisted Men? Aren't they good enough to dance with Officers?

Murphy came in today. One more mission and he goes home on leave.



Murphy won't be back. His entire squadron shot down over Ploesti. Ninety men. Can't stop the tears.

Jack tells me I have to stop being so emotional, sentimental, about these men. How can I? They're like family. If I don't, he says, I'll burn out. Won't be any good at my job any more.

Official reception at City Hall put on by town fathers in honor of Allied Forces. Didn't want to go. Had to. Wonder if this reception means some of taboos are fading. Are the townspeople beginning to trust us? Will they now allow their daughters to dance with our Servicemen?



Success finding an apartment at last! Duke led us through winding narrow alleyways to get there. In building not far from Club. Three rooms on second floor.

Needed coal to stoke sleepy Club furnace and antique heater in our apartment. Went with airforce helper, Tex, to Brindisi to get it. British control area. Wouldn't allow us to use crane. Had to load it on truck by hand. All two tons of it!! Saturated with coal dust. Hair, eyes, clothes, noses filled with it. Could hardly breathe by time we got back. Won't do that again soon..





Have a new recruit. Betty La Branche (call me La B). Never saw anything like her. A walking arsenal! She wore campaign boots, RC cap under GI helmet, under pith sun helmet. Flight jacket covered her uniform. Slung over her shoulder, a musette bag and carbine with most of parts missing. She carried inoperative 7.5 mm. Italian officer's automatic, obsolete kerosene stove.

Eileen took off for few days in Sicily. Charmed Wing Commander out of private plane and pilot to take her there and back. Went to pick up ping pong tables, games, athletic equipment and musical instruments she thought were going begging since troop exodus to Italy.

She was right. Came back with planeload of stuff for Club. While there, saw soldier friend. Real reason for her trip.

La B had unusual welcome. Eileen caught two airmen, burly Butch and slightly built Sam, stealing our precious light bulbs. As penance, she made them haul a pile of boxes filled with coal to our apartment. Job done, they sat. Chatted with Eileen. Left.

Writer, Ollie Aitkin's, and photographer sidekick here to do RC publicity. After work all of us went back to apartment expecting to spend nice quiet evening. Butch, Sam were waiting for us. Thought they'd go after glass of wine and brief chitchat. They didn't. Wouldn't.

Hints for them to go became commands. Tempers flared. Erupted into full fledged brawl. Jack's glasses sailed across the room. Broke. Sam kept screaming, "He's a fighter! He'll kill you!" Finally pushed airmen out the door.

After RC men left, Butch and Sam came back. Pounded on our door shouting, "Let us in! Let us in!" We spent rest of scary night with La B's artillery aimed at the door, everything moveable jammed against it. Airmen didn't leave till dawn.

Eileen insisted we report incident to Wing Headquarters. Could mean Court Martial for the men. Feel better after weekend of R and R at the Adriatic. Now back at work, but still a bit shaky.





It's my birthday. My world just stopped! Had a letter from Charlie's father. Charlie's married. Has a son. At least HE had the guts to tell me. Why didn't Charlie?

I feel numb. Glad I have this hunk of clay to vent my anger on. I'm going to model an effigy. Hex Charlie with it.

With court martial for Butch, Sam pending, Eileen left. Went home to States.

Her replacement came before we had time to miss her. Mosey Richardson. What a nickname for a forty-something! She was a mess! Uniform mud-splattered. Shoes caked with mud. She and driver had to traipse over countryside when their vehicle broke down.

Natal, our electrician, always the perfect gentleman, bowed low to greet her. Said in Italian, "I kiss your feet, Madam." A pretty messy kiss if you ask me.

Jack made her assistant manager. Put her in charge of kitchen. She doesn't know beans about cooking. But she's nice. "Mosey" suits her.

Dances slow getting started.

Read palms again today. It's getting to be a habit. Find out a lot about the men. What they like. Their families. Home life. Some harrowing. I'm really a sounding board.





Opera came to Lecce. Played to a full house. Servicemen crowded wooden benches on main floor. Officers and Italians filled boxes.

Male singers scarce these days. This tenor, so short he barely reached to soprano's ample bosom. Intermission came. Dragged on. Soldiers drifted between vine bar and seats.

A white balloon floated up. Another. Then another. Soon hall was filled with them. Servicemen began batting balloons around. Laughing. Shouting. Like a party. Italian kids came down from boxes. Joined the fun. I was having fun, too, until La B snarled, "Quit it! Don't you know what those balloons are? Every GI has a pocketful of them!"

Theater manager appeared on stage. Said, in Italian, "The tenor is upset. If you do not treat him better he will not continue. Do you want him to or not? I will come back in five minutes for your answer." Troops were beyond caring. Italians erupted into explosion of Mama Mias. Manager returned twice. No answer. Third time he got a loud "NO!" from Italians. Everyone went home.



With his usual flare for the dramatic, Jack hosted luncheon for editors of all three Luce newspapers. Had a moment of panic just before guests were to arrive, Esther, our American born Italian secretary, warned us, "Two of the editors had a duel several years ago. Haven't spoken to each other since".

Seated on either side of him, Jack charmed the two duelers. La B charmed the third with her halting Italian learned, she said, "Nel Frieze in trente-cinque." Everyone shook hands, smiled at each other when party boke up. All three papers ran nice articles about us.

Just after they left, Ciu brought us a list of girls we can invite to dances.

Wish I could get Charlie off my mind. Glad Tom still writes.

Court Martial over. Awful. Butch and Sam came in. Shaved. Starched, Pressed. Polished. Perfect gentlemen. I wondered why we ever started this in the first place. Airmen are much more important to war effort than we.

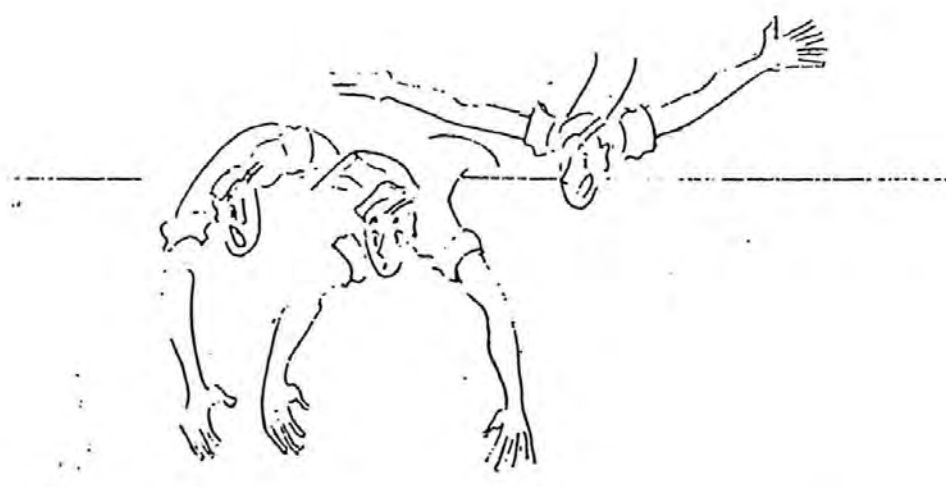
Lawyer pointed menacing finger at me, "Were these men drunk?" "Yes." "How do you know? Did you give a breath test?" "Of course not. How could I?"

La B smarter. Answered, "I thought so," to same question. Her testimony stood. Mine didn't.

Verdict. Restricted to base for a week. Never want to tangle with law again. Ever.

Some good news. Ciu had tea party for town ladies to meet La B and me. She wanted to "sell" us and our dances to them. Think she did.





First dance two weeks away. 398th squadron will be first group to come. Frenzy of activity to get ready.

Band needed lumber to construct a stage. Taranto the place to get it. Jack sent me. When sailors, on cargo ship tied up there, saw me, a real live American girl, on dock below them, unloading almost stopped. I picked up truck load of lumber from discarded packing crates.

398th hard at work. Band members have bandstand almost finished. Crewmen, ground crews are getting invitations printed to send to girls, making favors for them, finding flowers to make corsages for them, folding crepe paper rosettes to decorate hall.

SERVE YOUR COUNTRY IN
THE ARMY



It couldn't have been better. Every airman a prince charming. Every girl a princess.

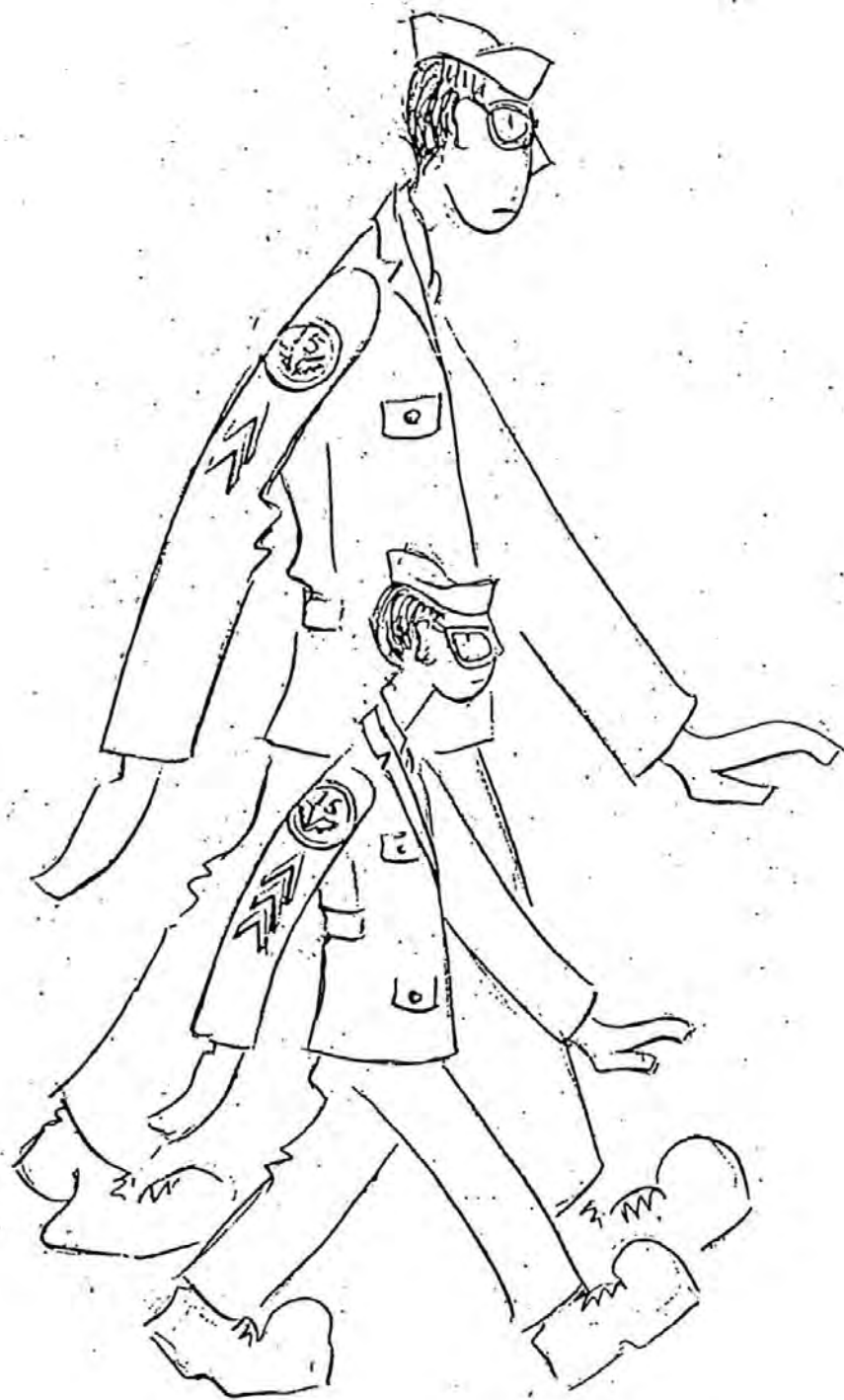
Band took off with "Chatanooga Choochoo". Went to town. So did Kolinsky and I. Dancers crowded in. Circled us. Clapping. Shouting. Stamping their feet. Wouldn't let us stop.

Then everyone got in the swing. Now girls all want to know how to do the "jeetairbug"!



KPs run the gamut getting refreshments from kitchen to dancers. Hungry chaperones would empty trays if they could. Staff makes as many cookies as they can, but can't feed the world.





Martelli has taken an Italian kid under his wing.. Wants to take him to States with him after the War.

Finished Charlie's effigy. Bashed it to bits. Hope he's really hexxed by now.

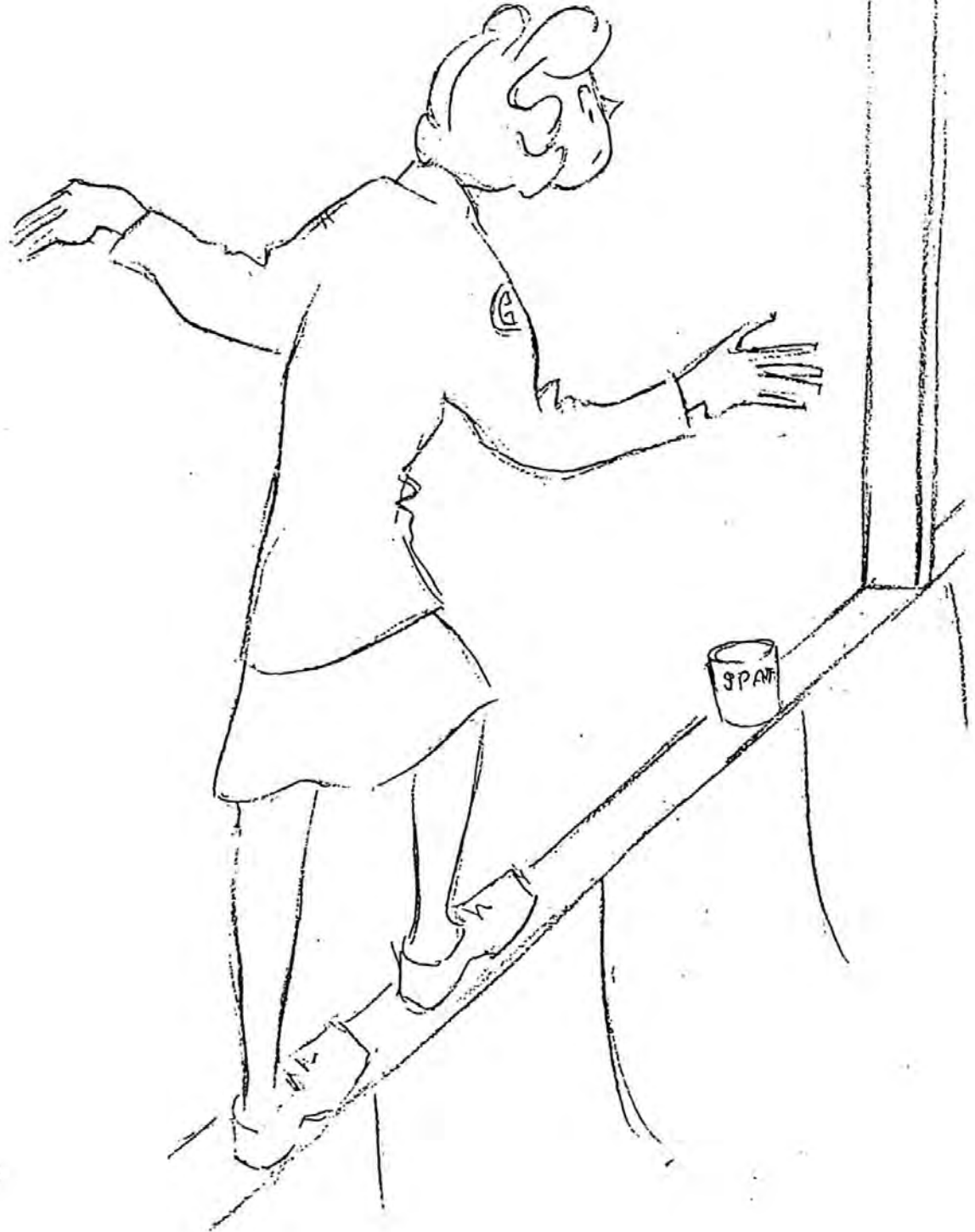
No matter what, one good thing resulted from making it. Rubbed some clay slip on ingrown warts on my leg as I worked. Warts disappeared when effigy done. Guess I should mix up some more of the stuff. Market it at home as "Wart Away". Maybe I could get rich.

Lecce girls must have escorts to go anywhere, not only to dances. Chaperones come in all sizes, sexes.

Had to go to Naples to pick up fresh supply of films for movie theater we run. Only transport available, a red x-ed, unfit to fly, plane taking airmen to Naples for R and R. In order to take off, all passengers had to crowd into cockpit with pilot. Plane carried enough parachutes for everyone aboard but me.

Pilot lost his way. Put down in vacant field nowhere near anywhere. Another chancy takeoff. Pilot finally found Naples. Film and I made it safely back to Lecce in same plane with same pilot. Enough parachutes this time. I was only passenger.





What a vacation! Started with trip to Rabat for visit with friends. Flew off from Bari in B17 with a dozen GIs going only as far as Algiers for R and R. On way, , one considerate soldier, red with embarrassment, whispered to me, " If you need to "go", there's a can on the catwalk in the Bombay you can use."

Men are lucky. There's a funnel-ended tube there for them. But for me, using that can balanced on thin strip of catwalk, looking down into vast empty craters, on missions full of bombs, was no fun. Scary.

On way back from Rabat, had time to kill in Algiers. Caught convoy driving to Boo Saudi, a resort on edge of Sahara. While there, joined a bunch of officers, nurses celebrating Wally Sundell's promotion to chicken colonel. Was served breakfast in bed. Rode a camel. Tried sunbathing on desert. Didn't stay long. Steady wind blew up such a shower of animated sandpaper.

LaB, with her raucous laugh, lively chit chat has captivated soldiers as well as the young of Lecce, both male and female.

Our dance committee girls came to club whispering, giggling, looking for her. They want her help forming a social service club sort of like American Junor League. The name for their club? LaB suggested, "Estrella Azura". "NO!" the girls chorused. "It is to be The Betty LaBranche Club!"

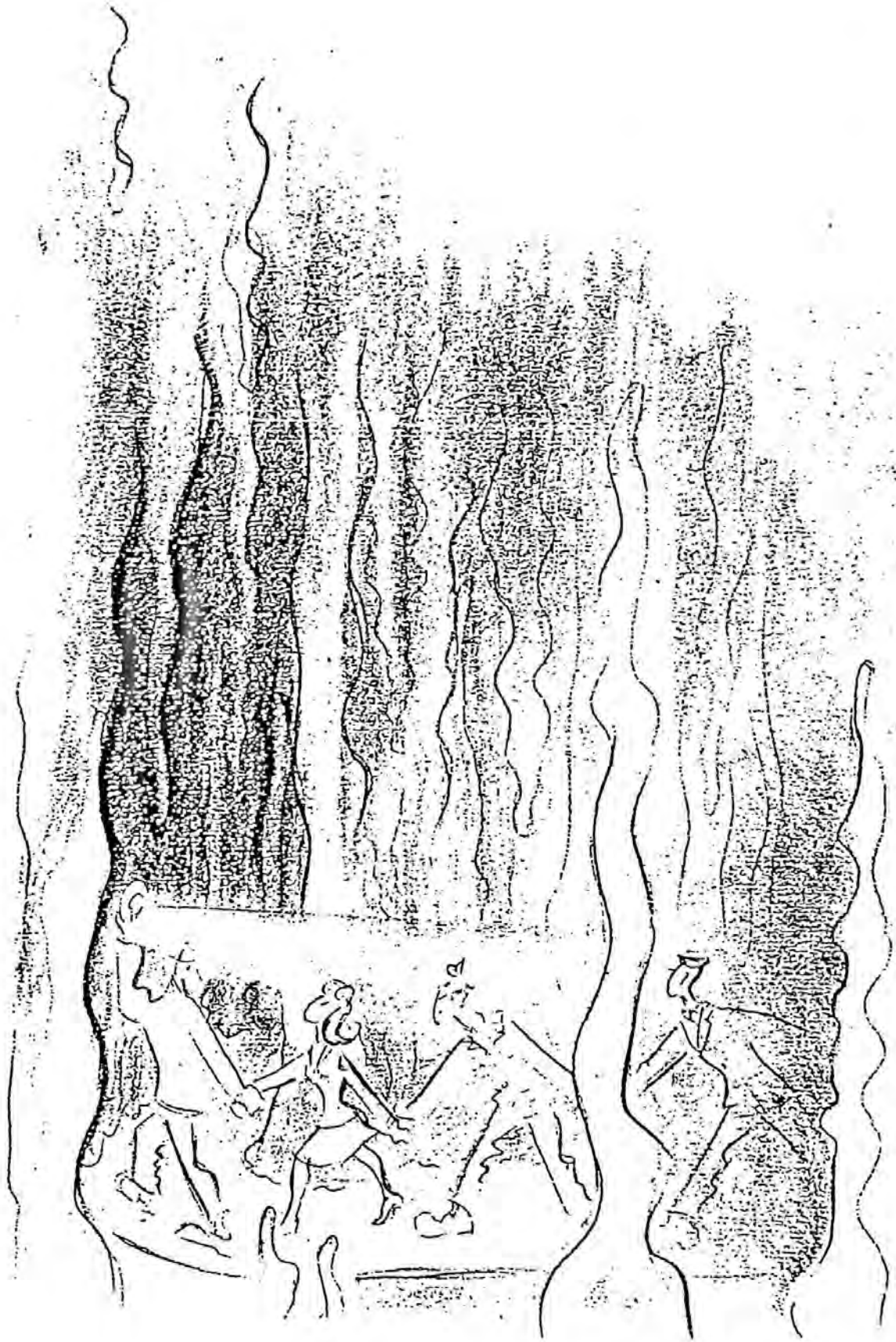
During celebration at all-male Lecce university graduation, she was honored. Each undergraduate wears a beanie. Color of cap indicates his course of study, engineering, fine arts, music, etc.

For first time in years, spurred on by, and a bit jealous of, success of RC dances to lure their girlfriends, university men have begun putting on their own dances. This year they borrowed our Airforce Band. Celebrated their graduation at a dance.. Traditionally, beanies are given to girlfriends at graduation. At this one, a young graduate "capped" LaB.



Tilly arrived to swell our ranks. She's already livened things up. Arranged fishing trips to Brindisi. Found caves in Adriatic seacoast cliffs that rival Carlsbad. It's said a tunnel runs from Lecce to caves. When invasion threatened, townspeople could escape through tunnel to caves, sea and safety.

And if she can pull it off, Tilly wants to have gala Fourth of July celebration in Roman amphitheater in middle of town.



Time for LaB, Mopsey and me to move on. Whole Italian staff gathered to bid us good-by. Each of us was presented with large penholder. A shiny silver airplane fashioned from scrap metal. Mounted on massive stone slab.

Surprised, touched by these gifts of love. Sadly so big, heavy can't possibly keep them with us or even send them home. But we'll definitely carry them away with us to our next posts. A precious memory of Lecce, the place, its people, friends both military and civilian.



Arrived in Naples and almost immediately Bill Stevenson, our RC top dog, stationed there, sent me off. By jeep up the main road only recently cleared of fighting to just beyond Rome. From the road, Monte Casino looked too peaceful to have been the scene of so many fierce, long, bloody battles.

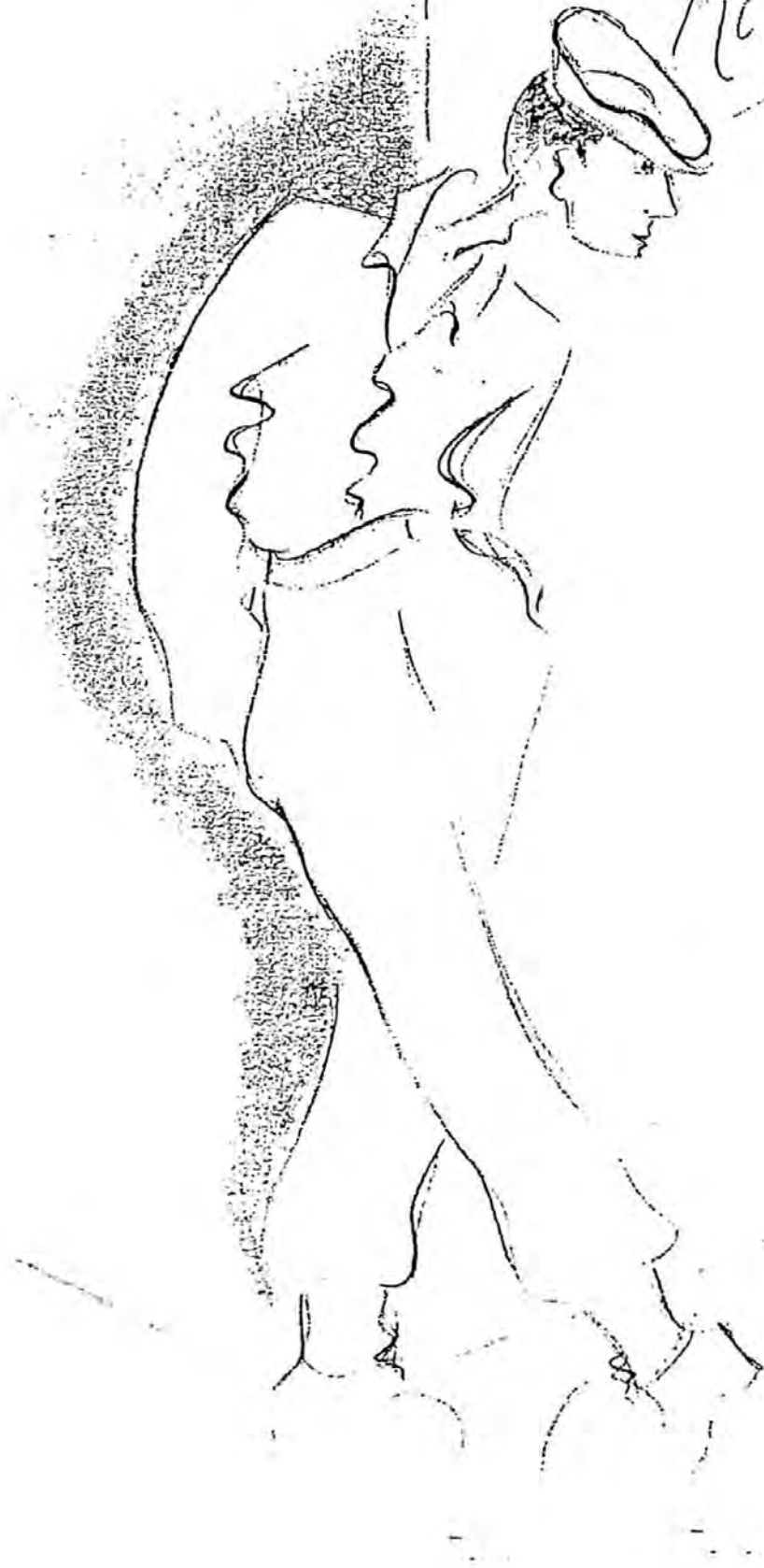
Left LaB, Mopsey in Naples waiting for their next assignments. Will we meet again?

ITALY

CONTINUED...

JUNE 6 TO DEC. 12

10/16
1956



Pontinia, June 6 to Aug. 10

Lots of leisure, hang-around time here. Pontenia is a Repo Depo (replacement depot) set up in swamplands south of Rome. New recruits come fresh from training in States. Wait for assignment to combat units. Boys barely out of high school. Made into men over night. a short buggy ride up the coast,

Found Margie here trying to stir up a little excitement. Talent shows. Movies. Mural of the States on snack bar wall for troops to sign their names on.



Chow with troops. I need practice balancing cup, utensils with same dexterity soldiers do.

Trip to Rome. Saw Pope. St. Peters. Michelangelo's "David". The Coliseum. Bought a red hat to boost my morale. I'll probably never wear it.

Have constant supply of palms to read. I'm running out of variations of things to say.



A major activity. Admiring photographs every soldier carries in his wallet. Moms. Dads. Bratty brothers. Sisters. Wives. Kids. Sweethearts. Favorite horses. Dogs. Cats. Monkeys.

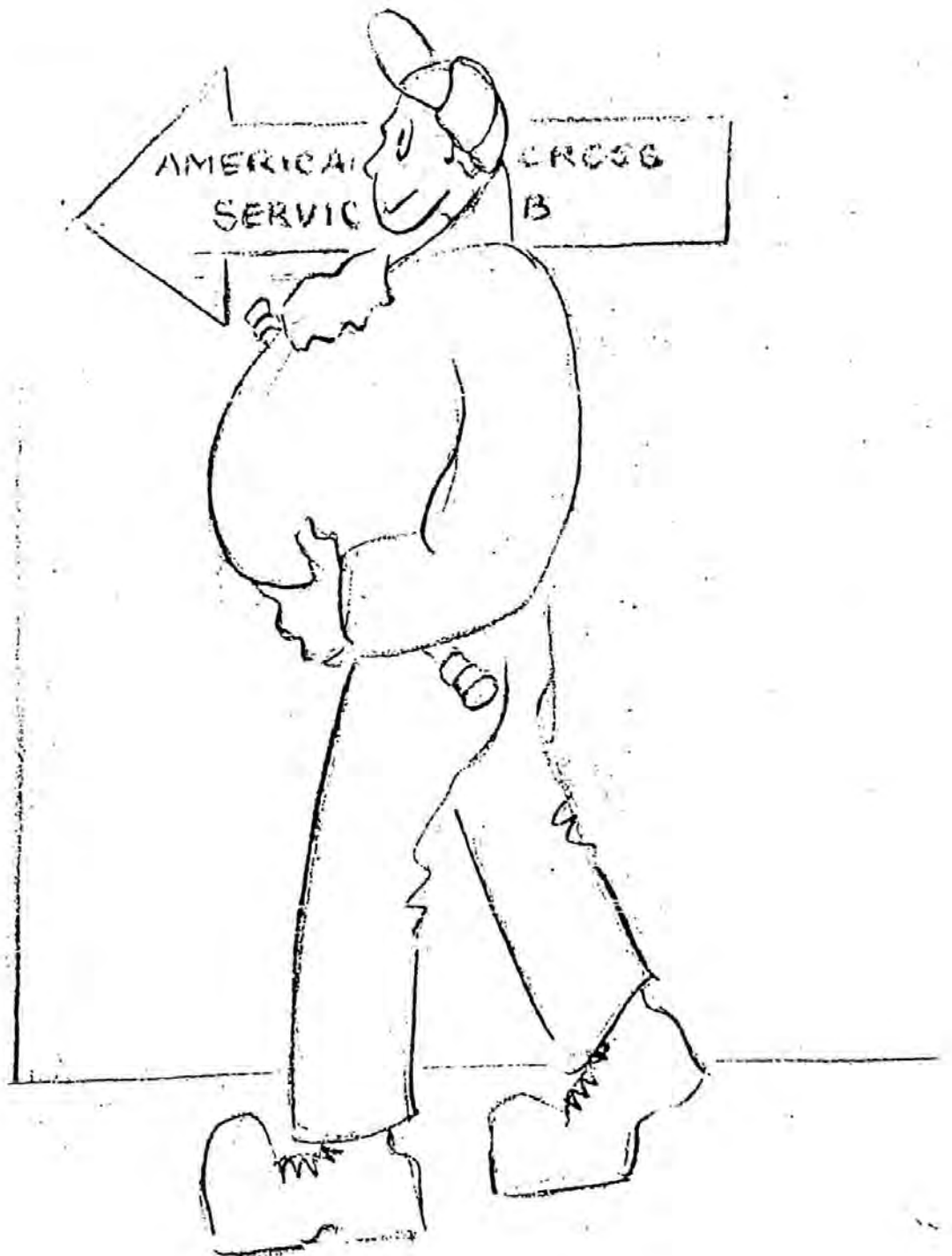
Now the camera turns on me. I smile. Pose with a soldier's arm around my waist. Guess that's to prove to his home folks there's more to War than fighting.

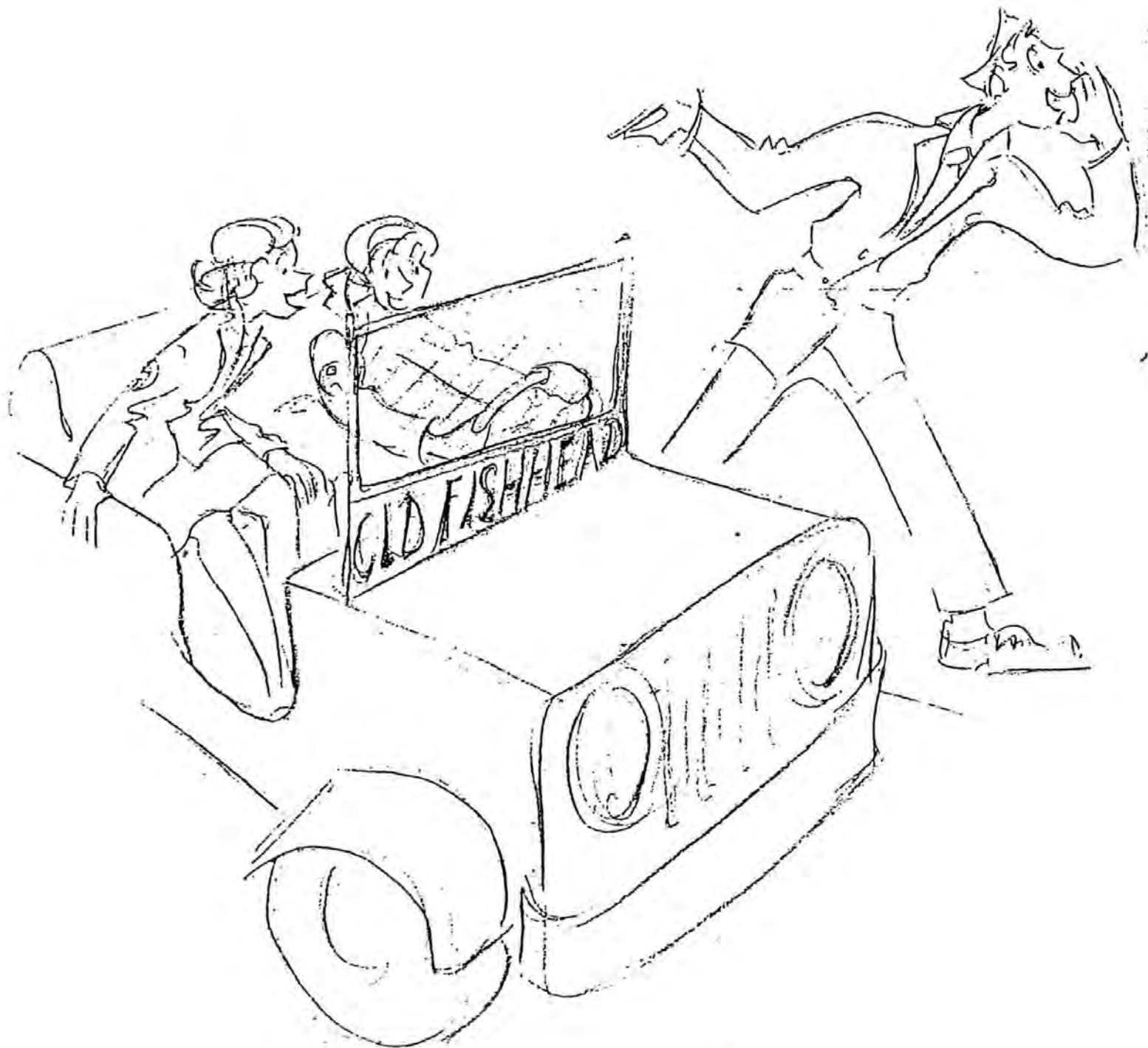
Caserta, Aug. 11 to Dec. 12

I no sooner arrived here, than LaB and Mopsey did, too. Cornfeld, Quetnick and Wally Sundell are all here, too. And Johnnie flew in again.

LaB, Mopsey run club. I run movie theater. Soldiers know vino not allowed in RC clubs. Do they really think we're so stupid we don't know what they're trying to hide in those bulging flight jackets?

General Mark Clark in command here. Caserta, Mussolini's summer retreat between Pontinia and Naples. Town dominated by huge stone palace now housing Allied Headquarters, offices, officers' mess.

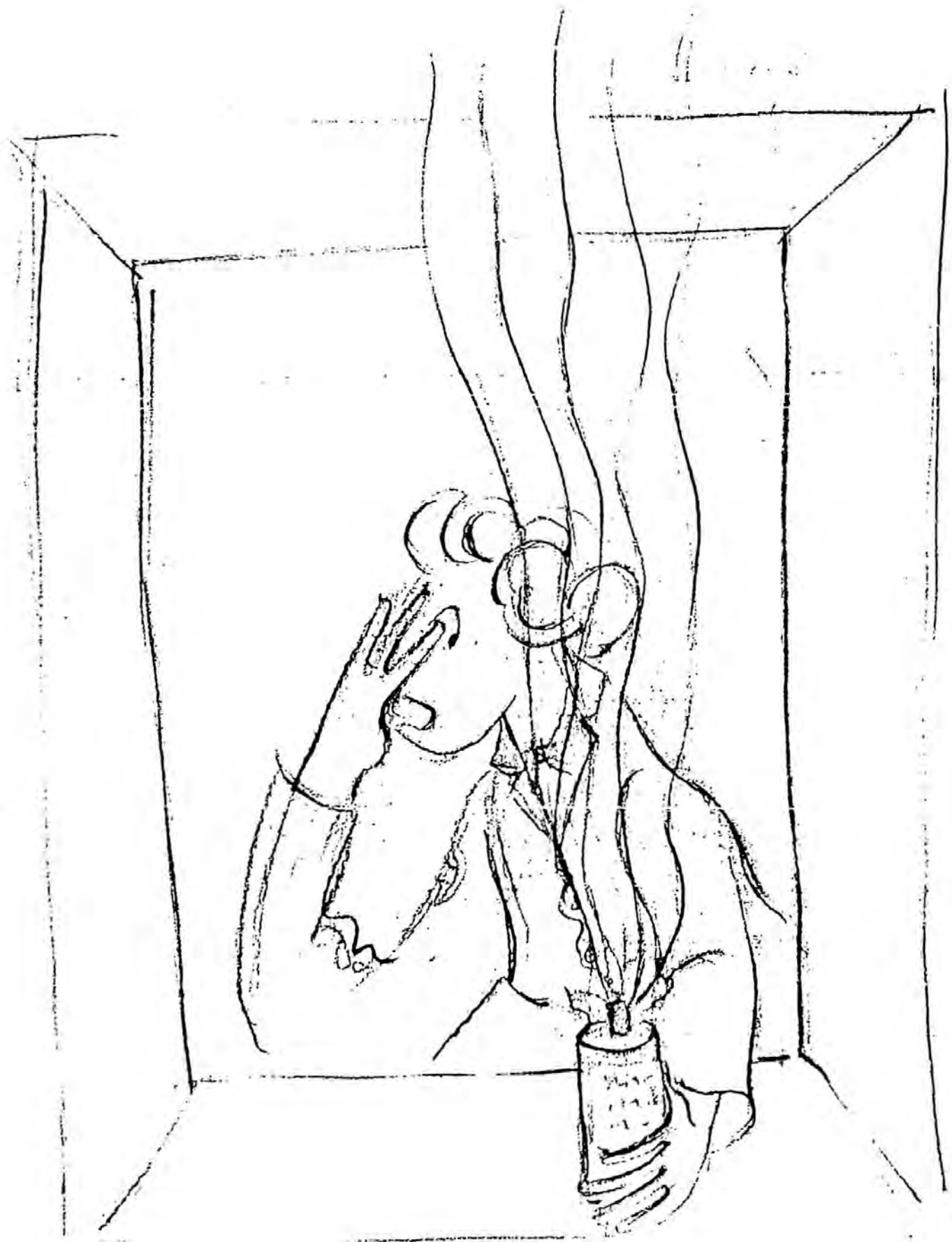




We have a jeep! Cornfeld and Quetnick put it together from discarded ordnance scraps. With its orange signal corps flag seat covers and "Old Fishhead" emblazoned on the front, it's a sensation.

It's named in honor of Cornfeld. Coming overseas in convoy, he got so fed up with his men's bitching about the chow, he told them, "You'll be lucky to get old fishheads!" The name stuck. He's been Old Fishhead ever since.

Cornfeld and I talk a lot, mostly about Tilly. He says, "I'm just an ordinary guy from Brooklyn. She's a blueblood gal from Pittsburgh." He's gone on her. But could she ever love him? Seems ironic it's me, not Tilly, who shows up where he is. Sure hope they can get together.



Here we are living in luxury. High plaster-festooned ceilings. Spacious rooms. But we're overrun by cockroaches! Wally brought us a can of something called DDT. It went off like Vesuvius. Eliminated bugs, Almost eliminated us when it wouldn't stop erupting. Had to hold it out the window until it was empty.

Am looking for live entertainment to put on between film showings. When expected stand-up comic was late, I made mistake of announcing to audience that he would appear after a brief treatment. Soldiers hooted. They all knew what I didn't. "Treatment" was new drug, Penicillin, that's begun working wonders on at least one male ailment.

Took Wally with me to check out a possible show Medics put together. He thought it much too suggestive. I did. too.

Eat in same mess hall with Wally. Spend most of free time with him. Don't know much about him or his marital status. Think he's a good bit older than I am. Don't know. Haven't asked.. Just know I like him a lot. Am beginning to forget Charlie.

Have gone with him, his best buddy, Jack Detweiler and their friends on several glorious trips to Capri.

Katherine Cornell is bringing "Barretts of Whimpole Street" with Brian Ahern and entire original Broadway cast, to Caserta. It will be staged in little gem of an Opera House hidden in back corner of Palace. An exact miniature of Milan's big one.

I'm in charge of tickets. Troops anxious to attend show. More interested in seeing American females on stage, than in play itself .

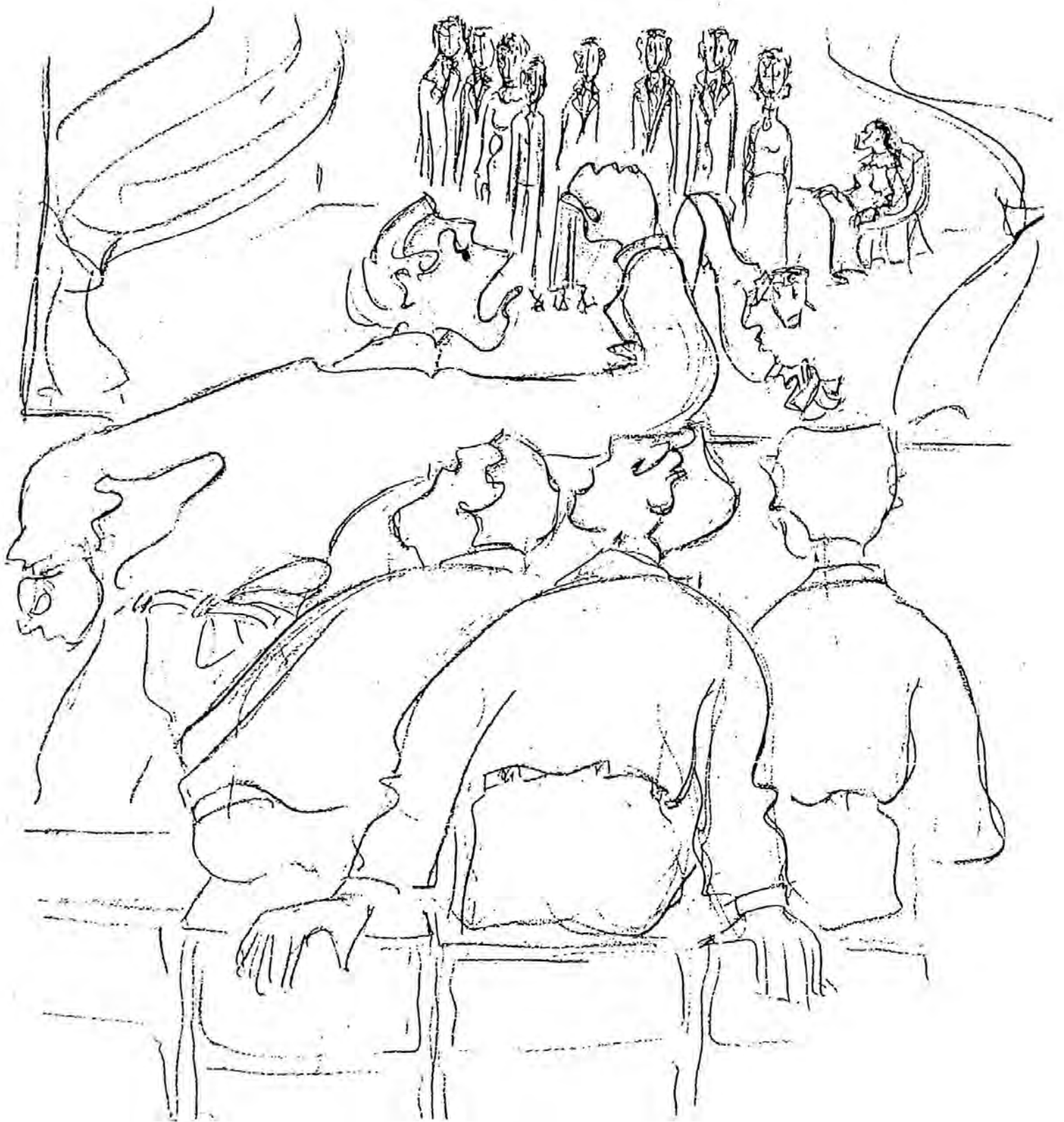


CCINAGE
KATHERINE
CORNELL
WITH
BRIANNE J. BRYAN
AND
JANIE STRO. 1987

Cornell and troupe wowed the troops. They loved "Barretts". It's the love story of poets Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Elizabeth's father is a cruel despot. Rules his six grown sons and daughters with an unrelenting iron hand.

In middle of first act, while he has gone away, the siblings, reveling in their few rare days of freedom, are dancing. Laughing. Joking. Joyously making merry. The father returns. The young people freeze. Form a line all across front of stage. The father strides in. Stops in front of one of his sons. Leans over to pick up a dropped handkerchief. A soldier in front row, carried away with emotion, leapt to his feet. Shouted at top of his lungs, "Kick 'm in the ASS!" It brought down the house. Even the cast exploded in laughter.





I'm a showgirl again. This time RC "volunteered" me to fill in for a USO girl who took sick. Went home. So I've become the ingenue, Hilda Manning, in comedy, "Room Service".

USO sends female cast members and a director with shows. Picks up male cast members from troops.

Weekend off. To Rome with Wally. He left for Front to spend time with Detweiler. I saw Florence, Siena. Alone.



We've been on road a couple of weeks. Every time, as I wait to knock on set door before going on stage, I panic. Cast members say that's normal. They all have lots of theatrical experience behind them.

Leading lady, USO gal, Brooke Fleming, offered to read lines with me. I refused. Didn't know till now that's how actors memorize their parts.

Brooke has a husband back home. Says she doesn't like him much. Shares room with an officer when she's in Naples. Offered to let me and Wally use it when she's not there. What is she suggesting?

If things go as hoped, we'll take "Room Service" to Germany!

What now? "Room Service" won't be going to Germany. Neither will I. Show closed. GI cast members sent back to units. I'm back in Caserta. Jobless.

While I was on tour, Johnnie kept dropping in. Made a nuisance of himself. Mopsey, LaB and our two new, fresh-from-the-States housemates, Kay, Henrietta are tired of his unexpected visits and finding him sprawled out in our already cramped quarters.

Sorry about Germany. But I've been overseas almost two years now. I'm tired.

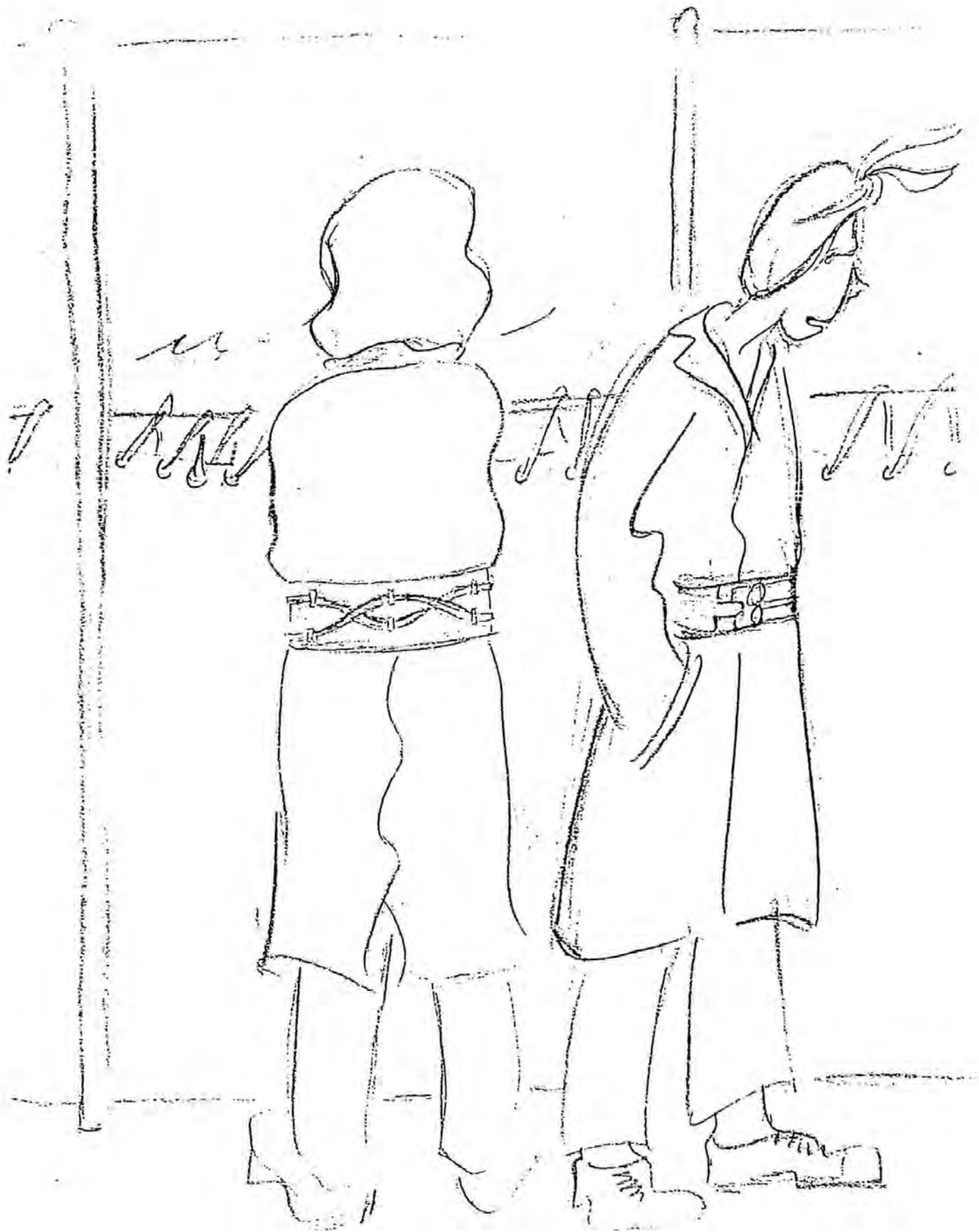
GOING

HOME

Dec. 13 to 22

Am on my way home! Sad saying good-bye to Wally.

Elinor Baily on ship. We came over together. We look so beat up, we could be aliens from Mars.



North Atlantic a whole lot safer now than when we came over in March last year. We sail alone. Not in convoy. And life preservers aren't Mae Wests any more. They've shrunk to belt size. Sister Bernadette, nun who shares our cabin, has no faith in "these useless-looking things".

Should be home for Christmas. What's it like at home? Have things changed? Will I see Tom? Will I see Wally again? Will Tilly and Cornfeld ever get together? Will I go back? Don't know. I'm tired but hate to quit before it's all over.





POST SCRIPTS...

At the

RAINBOW' S
END...



AFTER ALL

No, I didn't go back overseas.

Yes, I saw Wally once in New York, the night of the day Roosevelt died.

A hurry-up call from Wally. He was in the States. Just arrived. "Meet me in the City?" he wanted to know. I dressed in a frenzy of excitement. Put on my red dress. Red pillbox with feather trim. Only wrap I had, a sliver of fur scarf, around my neck. I raced to the beauty parlor. Hair still wet, already starting to droop, I rushed to catch the train. Shivered all evening in my scant scarf. City in mourning. Everything shut down. Spent whole time looking for place to eat.

Yes, I saw Tom. Briefly.

"Peace can't last. War more exciting," I said in an interview with Vanadium Corporation of America. They hired me. Sent me to Niagara Falls to edit their plant magazine, train for Labor Relations. Wasn't much good at either. Stayed for a year. Took flying lessons. I soloed in a Piper Cub for half an hour. Did the

unforgivable. Painted the dark woodwork trim in the room pink. I rented from a sweet old couple.

Went back to New York as Margie, home by then, had been urging me to do.

I was a mess. How did my folks put up with me? I smoked non-stop. Smelled up the house. Only thing I wanted to do was put this story together.

Wrote, drew, the first of countless versions with the help of a writer named Buckingham. He was recommended by a friend of Margie's, Lenore Hershey, managing editor of "Ladies' Home Journal". Buckingham and I tried. No spark.

Tilly married Alan in Nantes, France. Lab Mopsey were at the wedding. Tilly came home pregnant. While she gave birth to Nancy and waited for Alan to come home, she lived in a military settlement of Quonset huts in Brooklyn.

Margie's Jackson went back to California and his wife.

After Alan's return, he and I hoped to make it big with ceramic buttons. We didn't.

Alan used the GI bill. Got his law degree. Ended up Legal Eagle for New York City's Health Plan. He and Tilly moved to Levitt Town, now Westbury. Brought up their two children there.

I took a job with Kresge Newark as a copywriter. A set of drawings with jingles about a girl just back from War, got me the job. It took me two years to get fired.

An art job was what I was trained for and thought I wanted. But I wasn't going to lug a big, black artist's portfolio around. I wrote a story. Put it in a loose-leaf notebook. Illustrated it with samples of greeting cards, window displays I'd done and children's mannequins I'd helped carve. While picking up items to put into a package I designed for Macy's, the store security guards almost arrested me for shop lifting.

There was no escape. "Why don't you write?" was the querie whenever I showed my portfolio. So I did. Went to work writing fashion copy for Franklin Simon, a Fifth Avenue specialty shop. Asteroff, Koski and Cohen, two females, and Cohen, male, were the three buyers for misses' dresses. The trio always came in unison to deliver copy requests. They belonged in a comedy routine for a musical about life in a New York department store. I stayed at Franklin Simon for four years.

Neither Mosey nor Lab married. Mopsey went back to her up-scale gift shop in

Providence, Rhode Island. Lab took a hush-hush job in D.C.

Every soldier fell in love with Ann as she sang her way across Germany. Then, after a brief national radio show of her own, and equally brief marriage, she went to work for the government.

Lorraine married Ray Towne, the Captain he met in Rabat. They had a daughter, Christine. They divorced. Looking for ways to support herself and Christine, Lorraine came to New York. She hoped to launch Christine on a child modeling career. I wasn't able to help though I was in the City writing copy. She went to Korea with Red Cross.

Eilene married her 4F almost the minute she set foot on American soil. Had four kids.

Johnnie stayed in the Airforce. Married a German girl, in Germany.

The man I married took me back overseas. This time to Asia and Africa. That's another story. This one, after more than fifty years, and so many different versions I've lost count, can now be put to rest in moth balls.

SURPRISE ENCOUNTER

Our little museum was not always the West Valley Art.Museum. It began as the Sun Cities Art Museum. Surrounded by three Sun Cities, it is located in Surprise, Arizona. It was and still probably is, the only Museum in the Country and perhaps the World, ever to be conceived, planned, designed, financed, built, maintained and largely staffed by a retirement community.

When in its infancy with no building of its own, galleries were in banks and other public places with plenty of wall space and a management willing to exhibit.

In the early 1980s cars around town began appearing with bumper stickers reading :
"AN ART MUSEUM FOR SUN CITY NOW!" All kind of gatherings were held to acquaint the public with the plans, progress, goals for a museum and to raise funds for a building. .

I was invited to a fund raiser at Kathy Linderman's large Tucor house. It was one of the Sun City West model homes. It held lots of people. Among them, I spotted, as I walked in, my friends, Earl and Lynn Hanson. I joined

them. They were talking with a woman I didn't think I knew. They introduced me to her.

"Nice to meet you," I said, nodding to her as I continued the conversation.

"Were you in the Red Cross?" I heard a faint voice say. It came from the woman I had just met.

"Yes," I said not pausing to think about it.

"Were you my roommate?" the same faint voice said.

Sure enough. There she was, Lorraine Wilson, now Loraine Towne. In Rabat, Morocco, we roomed together for six months!

Now she was the woman who wrote "Towne Talk", the gossip column for our local paper, the Sun City "News Sun". She was the woman who became the third president of the Sun Cities Art Museum when it had a building of its own.

In other words...

JANUARY of '43

first steps
in my journey
THROUGH THE RAINBOW



JANUARY of '43

January of '43

Our dear country 'twas for thee
Ladies paraded in stamp boutonnieres.
Bought war bonds as souvenirs.
Rolled bandages. Knit sweaters and scarves.
Worked in the fields, made Sherman tank parts.
A draft caught the banker, farmer, the barber.
Bulletins screamed, "Remember Pearl Harbor!"
The flag was waving at 1-A girls.
They saw no harbor, only the pearls.
I was one of the young women who
Knew what they really wanted to do
Was get a job with troops overseas.
Red Cross was offering some of these.
And so I applied. I waited. And then,
Interview D.C., the third, at ten.
Minutes to hours. Hours a day.
Countless meetings. Questions of pay.
"The earliest date you can get away?
What is your personal theory of PLAY?
What would you plan for a hundred-man outing?
List your experience in sports and in scouting.
Allergic to men? Know how to listen?
Start in a week as a Staff Assistant.!"
When I told my conservative Dad
About the wonderful new job I had.

He said, "That's not for a young girl like you!
Do you know what you're getting yourself into?"
My adventurous Mom said, "I'd go
If I was your age." I said, "I know."
After parties, gifts, a cry or two
I hugged friends, family, said last adieus.
With two orchids, an ensign beau,
Two big valises, one was de trops,
I was on my way to the marble town
Where wars are made and laws are drawn.
I wondered, bouncing along on the train,
How soon I'd see friends, family again.
Should I leave Charlie? I just didn't know.
I still had the option to stay or to go.

Rain.

Insane

Busy

D.C.

People in queues

Reading the news.

Upside down time

To avoid a line.

Roommate Phys Ed.

Robust. Red.

Determined to make

Me re-form my shape.

To the Print Craft building for training each day.

White Castle coffee gulped down on the way.

Days of sitting.
Sitting. Knitting.
Bored and weary
From all the theory.
Mae West drill.
Made out my will.
My sister, Mary visited me.
Biked the town on a non-stop "sight-see".
Following instructions down to the letter
Checked every item. Woolies. Gray sweater.
Planned for coping with all kinds of weather.
For air raids. Rooming twelve girls together.
They said white rain boots were much too bright.
Mine went home though I put up a fight.
I packed by the book. Soap. Kotex. Towels.
A cathartic designed for irregular bowels.
Cotton panties. Bras. Slips. Nothing too sexy.
Vitamin pills, seven hundred and fifty.
Couldn't ask. Didn't know or dare mention
What to take for conception prevention.
Charlie promised to wait and I knew
I'd never consider being untrue.
Packing. Repacking.
Always found something lacking.
So back to the shop
For more lemon drops.
Forms pink and blue,
A rainbow of hues.

Forms pink and blue,
A rainbow of hues.
Uniforms came. All
Too big or too small.
Musette bag, handbag, canteen, a hat.
Ready for combat. No turning back.
Sitting
Listening.
Sitting.
Knitting...
"Alert! Embarkation!
Meet at the station!"
Train took us to Brooklyn, port for New York.
Fed up on ice cream, steak, milk and pork.
Learned a lot about Army routine.
Had to be sharp. Be on the beam.
"Remember
December.
Ration
Information.
Hint of destination
Out of the question!:"
Sloshed through snow every morning at nine.
Forty-six girls in two crooked lines.
Where are we going? What will we do?
Everything exciting. Unknown. New.

Bedroll. Helmet. Water flask.
"Your classification, TASK."
Dogtags stamped last name first.
"Baker Elizabeth. That's reversed.
Where were you born? Town? County? State?
Have any problems to relate?
Blood type and next of kin.
"What's that place your kin lives in?"
"Gas mask fit?
Adjust it!"
Through the chamber filled with gas.
"By the numbers. Make it fast!"
"Put this thermometer under your tongue."
Forty-six girls for five minutes mum.
The Army believed the thermometer will
Tell your fortune, cure every ill.
Last trip home
Like a catacomb.
"Oh, no! This can't be so!"
Footlockers, cameras both had to go!
How could one bedroll have room enough
To hold all or even half of my stuff?
It took huffing and puffing
But had to leave nothing.
Strapped into issue, complete fifty pounds.
Ordered to leave by the path underground.
Letters I had forgotten to mail
Had to be posted or I couldn't sail.

Back to get them I went PDQ.
Though blinded by helmet, I really flew.
Security ruled out formal good-bys.
Phone calls home, little white lies.
Bus.
Fuss.
Joking.
Smoking.
None of us knowing
Where we were going.
Over a bridge. On to a ferry.
"Unload that bus! Hurry! Hurry!"
Marched up the gangplank
Boat nearly sank.
Forty-six miniature Sherman tanks.
No one would guess we had Captain's rank.
Through fog, like a ghost
Next ship loomed up so close
All trembled with fear
Collision so near
On the decks, down below,
All supplies safely stowed
From rifles to C ration cans.
Officers and GIs to a man.
Assigned hammocks as they trooped in.
Close as Siamese twins, packed skin to skin.
Stacked one, two, three by the number
Down in the hold, alerted for slumber.

Convoy gathered during the night.
Escort vessels came with the light.
Sea abounding.
Ships surrounding.
Zigging and zagging.
No stops for those lagging.
Rainbow arched for us to sail through.
A ray of hope for all to cling to.
Like torpedoes, dolphins trouble our wake.
Couldn't breathe till it proved a mistake.
Day after day
Sailing further away
From hearth and from home.
Destination unknown.



FINIS...

FINALE...

THE END!

