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Article Summary: The author tells a little about why she joined the Women's Reserve of the Coast Guard and what it is really like.

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Nebraska Women in the War

WITH THE ARMED SERVICES

What it Means to be a SPAR*

JEAN HILTON, YEOMAN 3/C

I am a SPAR. At least, that is what they call me. I am a part of the Women's Reserve of the Coast Guard. I wear the traditional blue uniform, differing from that of the WAVES by the white shield on my sleeve, the gold collar insignia, and the lettering atop my hat. The SPARS form one of the least known branches of the women's service, and one of the smallest. In our own quiet way, however, we are achieving great things. This job is very new to me, for I am a veteran of just two months.

Before my enlistment I heard all the pros and cons on women in war: what effect military life would have on girls who were used to doing what they wanted and when they wanted to; how tired they would become of a uniform and the requirements of disciplinary life. I listened, then turned a deaf ear to all arguments against it and followed the inner voice.

Now acquaintances question me: Why did I join? How do I like it, honestly? Would I back out if I could? To all these queries I can only say,—There isn't time enough to enlighten you as to exactly what the SPARS are doing, for themselves, for their country, and for the general morale of the people around them. Step up to any one of us and hear the answer: "I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world!"

It is amazing to consider the number of girls, from every corner of the United States, each with her own personality, customs and ideas, who meet under the roof of the Biltmore Hotel at Palm Beach and form lasting friendships with others from the East and the West.

* This nickname is derived from the initials of the Coast Guard motto, *Semper Paratus*, and its English translation: "Always Ready."—Editor.

There are girls who have never been away from home, girls who are timid, girls who are leaders; the quick-tempered and the slow; the married and unmarried, all of whom have to learn to live with one another twenty-four hours a day, sharing bath, closet and confidences, and who have to pitch in and do their share of the work and keeping up the morale. When you can take a group of several thousand, regiment them so that they march alike and look alike; when you can harmonize all those varied personalities, restrict their natural movements, curb those hasty tempers, then I say to you, You have something that is not the glamour of the uniform; nor is it, even, just patriotism. It is the principle of Democracy at work.

The greatest and hardest lesson in life is tolerance. When you learn to check that tongue before the words are out; when you learn to accept an order without question; when you overlook the petty differences that can cause so much mischief, then you have a basis of cooperation that is solid and workable. Then you will really become a help and a credit to your country.

Never let it be said that our skies are always blue skies. I am in honor bound to confess that often during training our principal subjects of conversation are our wrongs, our indignities. You think you will never master the art of marching. Either your step is too long, and to shorten it endangers your equilibrium, or your stride has to be lengthened to keep up with the rest. Oh, the trainees look marvelous, apparently in perfect unison, but when you are one of them you know it's almost impossible to keep a straight line. It is a heartbreaking experience to find that you have no way of judging whether you are on the same level, shoulder to shoulder, with the next girl. You are too far forward, or backward; but, when you think your own part is straight, a glance ahead will demoralize you: the line is just zigzagging on its own merry way. It's simple, really, but no large group can be perfect and only to the onlooker does it appear uniform.

Then—time! There is never enough. Every minute of the day is scheduled; if the unexpected does give you a free hour it is utilized for your washing and ironing, letters, study. Relaxation? That word is not found in our vocabulary.

Work and I have never been shipmates, and such was the case with many of us. But here, work is the order of the day. Girls who had never been useful in their lives now do more than their share. To keep up a building the size of our station is a job in itself, but we do all of it: maintenance and galley duty, watch on each deck, care of the offices and auditorium. Ship's store, the soda fountain, the clothing locker — all are maintained as a part of our training. Girls running the elevators, girls behind the mess line, girls driving trucks, girls learning carpentry; surely woman's place is not wholly in the home. There are about four hundred men now on our station: teachers, drill masters, and men for the heaviest work, but even these are being replaced. With about three thousand SPARS on the station, being turned out at the rate of forty to fifty every three weeks to take the place of men on shore, the day will come when every man will be freed. That is our goal.

You cannot begin to realize what military life is like till you have lived it. Our own small experience shows us what the boys must be enduring. A letter means little in a civilian's life as compared with its effect on a service man. It is the big event of his day. Your morale, your feeling, the quality of your work, all depend on that letter from home. It is impossible for a civilian to understand just what we are going through. It is not the loss of any of the freedoms, it is the temporary relinquishment of personal desires for the safety of the world.

We are proud of our uniform. Not because it is becoming, for we tire of even the most becoming clothes, but because we have earned the right to wear it and are proud of what it stands for. It is something to remember and to pass on to the future, which will be better because of it. The eyes of America are upon us. The American girl is proving herself.