

# Newsweek

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## The Wac Christmas

The Women's Army Corps had never before known a peacetime Christmas (see cover). The Wacs, and their predecessors the Waacs, spent the wartime holidays behind the fighting fronts as drivers, switchboard operators, stenographers, airplane mechanics, laboratory technicians, and clerks. One hundred thousand strong on V-E Day, they had earned 314 medals and commendations, including 23 Legion of Merit awards and fourteen Purple Hearts. Seventeen thousand Wacs served overseas.

This week the Wac was half demobilized. Only 50,000 women would wear khaki for the holidays, all but 3,500 of them in the United States. Those overseas, the Army said, would be home by April. The future of the corps was still undecided, and light-hearted Wacs, looking forward to civilian frills, prepared to celebrate their first peacetime Christmas as their last.

Fewer than 500 Wacs were left to celebrate the holidays in the Pacific. Those in sultry Manila decorated their tents in the barb-wired Wac camp downtown with the paper lanterns Filipinos use to light their homes. Christmas trees were shipped in from the States and from Baguio, in the mountains to the north.

Their Christmas shopping was done. They had bought many yards of native *piña* cloth, made from pineapple fiber, to send home, along with straw pocketbooks, wooden shoes, and silk pajamas and lingerie imported from China.

On Christmas Day Wac officers would throw a party for 150 Filipino war orphans. A few Wacs who couldn't go north to the Baguio officers' club or south to the enlisted women's camp at Tagaytay would spend the day with Filipino friends and eat native Christmas dinners of roast pig, *camotes* (sweet potatoes), and *rellenade* (chicken stuffed with spiced meats and vegetables).

On the other side of the world, Wacs rehearsed carols they would sing in the streets of Frankfurt on Christmas Eve. Christmas trees twinkled in the windows of the Wac center there. Girls in khaki slacks decorated the basement of a former Nazi youth hostel for a dance.

All over Europe, wherever they were stationed, Wacs made dolls and toys for the thousands of displaced children in UNRRA camps. Parties for orphans would be staged in Wac quarters, dinners served, and bulging stockings distributed.

For themselves, the 3,000 Wacs remaining in the theater would open packages from home and eat the same Christmas dinner as the GI's—roast turkey with all the fixings.