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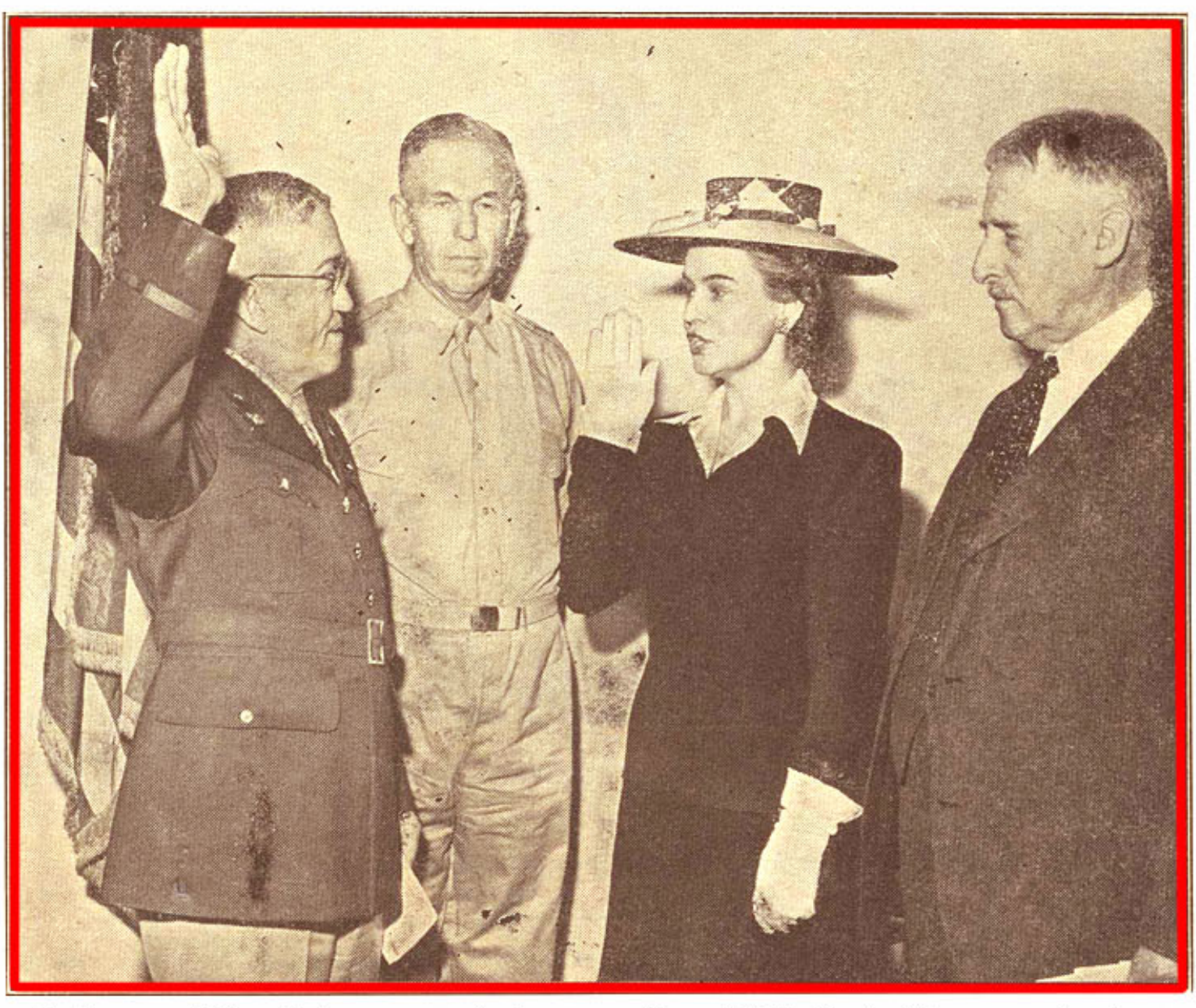
Mrs. Hobby's Wacks

New Women's Army Auxiliary Will Girdle 25,000 for War



Mrs. Hobby taking the WAAC oath in the presence of Marshall and Stimson

"In this war, women have to carry more than their own weight. So far, we've been all sail and no ballast."

When Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby said that recently, she herself had already sailed into more than one man-sized job. This brisk Texan, whose tastes run from cocktail parties and silly hats to typography and parliamentary law, began her career at 10 when she read the Congressional Record to help her lawyer-father. She steamed through the University of Texas, and at 20 was already serving as parliamentarian of the Texas legislature and assistant city attorney in Houston.

At 26, she married William P. Hobby, a former governor of Texas and publisher of The Houston Post. She took time out to have two children, but simple domesticity was too placid for her energy and her ideas —her husband once told her she had so many of them that some were bound to be good. So, beginning as a book reviewer, she gradually invaded her husband's paper, streamlining its departments and revamping its format. Sandwiched in all this were chores at codifying the state banking laws, politics, and writing a textbook and a syndicated column on parliamentary procedure. Since July 1941, Mrs. Hobby. now 36 but looking younger despite graying hair, has been selling the Army to women as head of the Women's Interest Division of the Army's Public Relations Bureau.

By last week Mrs. Hobby had helped sell the Army on women. On May 16 Secretary of War Stimson swore her in as director of the new Women's Auxiliary Army Corps with rank equivalent to a major's. Over minority objections—among them the plaint that the measure was "casting a shadow on the sanctity of the home"—Rep. Edith Nourse Rogers' bill to create the corps had passed the House March 17 (NEWSWEEK, March 30), and the Senate by a 38-27 vote May 12. President Roosevelt signed it three days later, limiting initial enrollment to 25,000.

For months Mrs. Hobby has been quietly working out a setup that can go into immediate operation. On July 15 about

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Oveta Culp Hobby

400 Wack officer candidates will start an eight-week course at a "West Point for Women" at Fort Des Moines, Iowa; they'll be ranked simply as First, Second, or Third Officers. About mid-September 12,000 auxiliaries (privates) will go into training for the noncombatant duties (as messengers, clerks, etc.) that they will perform at home and abroad. The Army expects to reach the corps' 150,000 limit before the end of 1943.

Despite enthusiastic response from prospective enlistees, Mrs. Hobby faces difficulties. The first was the accusation of racial discrimination in the appointment of a Southerner as director. She quelled it with the announcement that Negroes would be recruited in proportion to their number in the population. Pay was another: the Army feared that the rates provided by a pending bill for a Women's Auxiliary Reserve in the Navy (Warns) might lure the girls away. While the Wack bill freezes pay permanently at present Army rates (from $21 a month for auxiliaries to $3,000 a year for the director), the Warns will get corresponding Navy ratings, which Congress is contemplating raising to a base of $50 a month.

For the rest, Mrs. Hobby told her first press conference she had worked out most of the procedure for Wacks. Aged 21 to 45, enrollees will be judged for leadership, character, personality, appearance, bearing, experience, and adaptability. They'll be unarmed but will be taught to march and will be disciplined for breaking the rules. They may wear "inconspicuous make-up" and nail-polish. Mrs. Hobby said they wouldn't mind being called Wacks. Asked whether a woman officer could go out with a man private, or vice versa, she smiled: "I just knew somebody was going to ask me that. I can only say that the traditions of the Army will be adhered to as much as possible. In the Army, I believe the fraternizing of officers with enlisted men is frowned upon. We will frown, too." Pressed for more detail she said only "the traditions and policies of the Army will be maintained."

To the women themselves, the major immediate problem seemed to be the uniform, details of which will soon be made public. But part of it will be a girdle, to be supplied free by the Army.

Rube Goldberg in The N. Y. Sun

"Ladies in the Army"

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