1943

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Norma Dale

Iowa State College

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Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol23/iss1/3

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Women in Service
Dress for Duty

Norma Dale explains the identifying features of military and unofficial uniforms for women

With the number of women in service mounting daily, civilians and military men find the task of identifying feminine uniforms increasingly perplexing. The new private or sailor whose duty it is to salute all superior officers often discovers that he has mistaken members of the American Women's Volunteer Services, the American Red Cross and others with no military standing for a WAAC or a WAVE.

The WAAC can always be identified by the gold insignia of Pallas Athene, the goddess of victory worn on the left side of her collar. She can be spotted, too, by the outlines of the deep, square-crowned visored hat which is part of her summer and winter garb. In summer it's made of drab cotton and in winter of covert cloth. Although the general lines of the WAAC's uniform are similar throughout the year, in winter her skirt may be a shade or two lighter than her jacket coat and she may be wearing a double-breasted, olive drab overcoat.

Since the WAVES started in the fall with winter "navies," they have not confused the public with two uniforms. In the summer they intend to adopt a rayon dress of reserve blue with whites for dress. A beret type sailor cap with a stiff band identifies the Navy officer. Like all Navy officers she wears her rank on her sleeve during the winter months and in the summer on her shoulder boards.

The symbol of the Army medical corps, a gold caduceus, appears on the lapel of the Army nurse. The "N" on her lapel stands for nurse. A jacket of navy blue and a lighter blue skirt is her uniform in the winter or in cold climates. In summer she wears buff trimmed with maroon braid and a distinctive, full-crowned cap that resembles the old time motoring bonnet.

Another official United States military uniform for women belongs to the Army WAFS, Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron. There are only about 50 such uniforms in the United States due to the limited number of qualified women flyers. Their uniform adds another color to the growing panorama. Of gray-green wool gabardine, it has interchangeable skirt and slacks and a shirt of contrasting tan broadcloth. A woman of the WAFS wears an overseas cap for ground work and a helmet for flying.

An ample variety of purely unofficial uniforms makes the puzzle still more difficult to master. Easily recognized are the gray-blue uniforms of the women in the American Women's Voluntary Services and the American Red Cross. Both the Red Cross and the AWVS women wear the name of their organization on their sleeves.

Scarcity of woolen materials and WPB regulations have caused changes in designs in many women's uniforms. Most organizations have eliminated patch pockets, pleats in skirts and cuffs on sleeves.

Hats or caps have proved a major problem to designers of women's military uniforms for World War II. To design a head-gear which is equally becoming to the heavy-set middle aged woman and to the slim young debutante is no simple accomplishment.