



Marlene, Hollywood

Marlene, ETO

By Sgt. AL HINE
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WITH more than 18 months overseas time in at least four different theaters—more than any other big-name woman movie star—Marlene Dietrich has enough points to get out of the Army and more. She is back in the States now, but the only reason she is back is because the USO insisted she return to have a jaw infection treated. Marlene herself was all for staying in the ETO so she could play some of the staging areas near Marseille and then maybe be redeployed to the Pacific herself. She hasn't given up this last idea either.

With a sergeant friend I went up to interview Marlene in the New York hotel where she was parking her famous gams, and necessarily, the rest of her. "I'm getting fat," she said, poking the rest of her. She wasn't, but both the sergeant and I are too well-bred to contradict a lady.

Marlene and Lin Mayberry, the girl who was with her ETO troupe as a comic and was staying with her in New York, had been in the U. S. just a little over a day when we called. We were the first GIs they had seen to talk to since they got back and they were very glad to see us. They had both been so close to the Army for so damn long that they didn't feel normal talking to civilians.

"We feel like a couple of DPs," Marlene said.

"Displaced persons," said Lin, as if we didn't know. "We don't know how to act in a city like this anymore. Tell them about the dentist, Marlene."

"Well," said Marlene, "I go to my dentist for this jaw that was bothering me. I go into the office building and look for his name on the directory. It is there and he is in Room 3102. I get in the elevator and say, 'Three.' I get off at three and I can't find any 3102. I looked everywhere.

"Finally. I went back to the elevators and asked one of the operators. 'Where is Room 3102?' I asked. He says it's on the 31st floor.

"Thirty-first floor! 'My God,' I say, 'How long have they been making buildings that high?'"

"And then when we saw a swanky car," Lin said, "A big blue one, the first thing I thought was 'Where did they liberate that?'"

Marlene and Lin (Lin's overseas time is a little over a year—she joined the Dietrich unit after it had started) were both still a little bushed from their long trip. They had come home by plane and they still hadn't been able to catch up on their sleep.

Marlene had started her USO entertaining in North Africa. She had toured that theater and then Italy when she reached the point—some 10 months' service—when most entertainers begin to think of heading home. Marlene headed home, but she popped right out again for another (eight-month) tour of duty. She took in the North Atlantic installations and wound up in England, then France and then Germany. She got so she was almost as GI as a messkit and considerably more fun.

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"We played almost everywhere," she said. "The only places we missed that made me really unhappy were those redeployment centers in Southern France. I think those guys who know they are just going to the Pacific or CBI need entertainment and I wanted to give it to them. But the medics looked at my jaw and said no."

"I went along with her in Paris when she saw the medics," Lin said. "I thought I would just hold her hand for her or something. Then the medics looked at me. They said, 'You go home, too. If you don't go home you'll blow your top.' So, here I am."

"But the medics were nice, really," Marlene said. "We saw them all up and down the front. Always there were two things, the wonderful cough syrup and the APC pills. Each medic you would see when you had a cold would tell you, 'I have just the thing. Something special.' Always it would be the wonderful cough syrup and the APC pills."

"We had colds so that sometimes I was so hoarse I couldn't talk, but I could always put on a show. And then we had the GIs."

"For over a month at a stretch once we had the GIs," said Lin, shuddering.

"We had to change the timing of the act," said Marlene, "so that it didn't look funny when we had to dash off stage in a hurry."

"And whenever we had the GIs," Lin said, "there was always sauerkraut and Vienna sausage for chow."

Marlene said she ate with the enlisted men mostly. "The officers don't mind, as long as you tell them about it in advance. When they get mad is when they have prepared a special treat at officers' mess and then you say you are eating with the GIs. But I don't think officers ever forced entertainers to eat with them when the entertainers really wanted to eat with the men."

I asked Marlene what kind of sleeping accommodations she had. Anything she could get, she said, usually a sleeping bag when she was in forward areas.

"One of those super jobs with the goose feathers and so on?" I said.

"A sleeping bag," said Marlene, "just a regular, beat-up sleeping bag. I didn't play any shows for the Air Force."

The sergeant asked Marlene whether she had any beefs "off the record" at her treatment by the Army.

"Why should I have gripes?" she said. "I don't expect the war to be like Hollywood or New York. Some actors thought the European Theater was the Paramount. Sometimes, if I didn't get transportation through channels, I had to go out and get it myself, but that was easy. Sometimes I would show up to do a show for an outfit and the outfit would have been moved out already. Should I gripe? Should I expect them to stop the war for me, the wonderful movie star?"

"Anyway, in Italy, it was easy. When somebody had moved out, we would just follow them. All you had to do there was keep on Highway 6 or 7 and eventually you always came to the Army and you could do a show."

"In Italy, we promised a lot of guys we would see them in Germany," said Lin, "and they just laughed and thought it was a line. And then we did see some of them in Germany."

"They couldn't believe it, at first," said Marlene. "And then what a hand they gave us!"

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By this time we figured we had enough dope for a story and made as if to go. Marlene and Lin weren't having any of that. We were the first GIs they had had a chance to talk to in over a day. We stayed put.

Lin brought out snapshots of the two of them overseas. Here was the house where they stayed in Aachen.

"No walls." Lin pointed out.

"Rats." said Marlene, "and bugs. We sprinkled the insect powder around to make a little wall, maybe a quarter-inch high, but those bugs came right over it."

Lin brought out more snaps. Of their jeep with "Million Dollar Legs" painted on it. Of Marlene getting kissed by a GI. "'Enough, enough,' I yelled and then he kissed me again."

And more talk.

"We got out of Bastogne, just before the Battle of the Bulge. . . ."

"Do you remember that cute soldier in Italy, the one who was so cute and drunk? . . ."

"And how our hands got so dirty and no place to wash them so we tried to hold them behind us in the show. . . ."

"And the one dress the GIs liked was the one I couldn't wear long underwear with so I always had a cold. . . ."

"And how they built showers for us or one boy would get up on top of the tent and pour water on us. They always looked the other way. . . ."

"That was at Eupen. . . ."

"That was at Maastricht. . . ."

"That was in Italy. . . ."

"That was in Holland. . . ."

We asked Marlene if she was going back to Hollywood to work.

"Not now," she said. "I'm not in the mood. I don't think I could concentrate now on keeping every eyelash right like you have to do there. I would like to go to the Pacific, if they will let me.

"I have dates with so many divisions there."

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