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HOME TOWNS IN WARTIME

WASHINGTON, D. C.

The capital hasn't really changed much in two years. It's still over crowded, expensive and lousy with strictly inside information.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—A lot of people will tell you Washington has been changed beyond recognition by the war. They're the ones who haven't been away from it.

Seeing it for the first time after almost two years, it seemed to me almost exactly the same.

Union Station was jammed—officials say 150,000 to 170,000 people pass through it every day, coming and going—but, then, it always has been hurried and crowded. GIs stood six deep in front of all the ticket windows; there were a platoon of RAF pilots and a Russian captain washing up in the men's room, and a New Zealand brigadier was buying a Wac corporal a drink at the bar.

But the taxi stand was no more packed than I remembered it, and there were plenty of Diamond cabs. Diamond still has the monopoly.

The dispatcher jammed me into the front seat of one that was going in my general direction, alongside a Signal Corps lieutenant colonel. In the back seat were three Waves, all mildly pretty, and a young man with a limp wearing a discharge button in the coat lapel of his blue serge suit.

"See you been in the Pacific, sarge," said the driver, glancing at my Asiatic-Pacific ribbon. "Well, the war out there will be over by 1945. I know. I wouldn't want to mention any names, but I had a very high War Department official in here the other night, sitting right where that young lady is"—he indicated one of the Waves, a blonde—"and he said the war in Europe will be over Oct. 26, and it will take a little less than a year to clean up the Japs."

"Isn't that wonderful," commented the Wave who was sitting where the WD official had sat.

By the time we got to the place I wanted to get off, the driver was explaining to the lieutenant colonel exactly what Joe had said to Winnie at Teheran.

But that was nothing new. Washington taxi drivers have always known everything about everything. The price was still 20 cents—wholesale. Fares start at 30 cents if you're alone, but it's almost always necessary to adopt the share-a-cab plan.

Physically, the town looks just about the same—the Lincoln Memorial towering over the Mall, the new Jefferson Memorial, now completed, just across the way, the Capitol dome towering over everything, and lower Pennsylvania Avenue still dark and dirty, maybe a little more so than before. The White House needs a new coat of paint, but you can now stroll along the walk in front just as you could before the war. There are no more GIs on guard, only uniformed police.

Of course, getting a fair date while you're in town is no problem. A Canadian newspaperman recently discovered that, judging from ration-

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book requests, there are 82,000 single girls of what he called the "right marrying age" of 20 to 24 in town, and only 26,000 men of the same age. Therefore, he concluded, a girl has only about a 30-percent chance of getting a husband—or, for that matter, a date.

But, of course, there are always lots of GIs in town to raise the male quota—some coming home from overseas and quite a few wounded men from Walter Reed and from the Navy medical center out near Bethesda, Md.

But there are plenty of eager "government girls" just about anywhere in town—in restaurants, in bars, in the lobbies of the not-too-swank hotels. It's better to take along a pal or two; you'll usually see the girls in pairs or trios.

What to do once you get a date is no problem. The night clubs are always crowded, but head waiters—along with most other Washingtonians—can always find an extra place for a GI.

Glen Echo Park is still open; there's swimming in the Crystal Pool in the afternoon and dancing in the ballroom in the evening. Alexander Smallens is conducting the Watergate concerts; the National Theater still offers the only New York stage plays in town, but it's usually sold out ahead of time.

The Gayety burlesque house—the spot where you used to see Supreme Court Justices sitting next to cabinet makers—has been redecorated a little.

But otherwise Ninth Street, especially between F and I, has the same honky-tonk atmosphere as ever and still seems to be about the most popular section of town with GIs. Tattooing is still done for a dollar a design; you can still have your picture taken while you wait; pinball machines are everywhere, and you can get six shots for 50 cents at most of the galleries, with a chance at a cash jackpot.

A lot of GIs seem to take their dates for a stroll through the Capitol grounds in the evening, and some, as always, sit on the banks of the Potomac or stroll along the Mall.

The over-friendly young women who stand in the shadows on darkened street corners don't seem to be very numerous, possibly because of the recent Hopkins Institute scandal when it was revealed in court that the masseurs of the "massage emporium" were selling their services for the night at \$75 or \$100.

The case seemed to create quite a stir here, especially when one of the girls said that she had the names of the best known customers in a little black book. But, somehow, the book was never introduced in open court, and the U. S. senator and "well known" newspaper publisher whose names were said to be there are still unknown.

It's said that some of the Hopkins girls got jobs as waitresses, which would seem entirely possible since almost every restaurant in town—except for the more expensive places like Harvey's, O'Donnell's and the Occidental—has huge signs on its windows begging for waitresses, promising high pay, pointing out that no experience is necessary and, wherever possible, that the place is air-conditioned, apparently for the comfort of the employees.

The shortage of help is general, and, as in many places back home, women are doing work like collecting tickets on streetcars, driving busses and trucks and janitoring.

Washingtonians claim that it's impossible to get laundry done, and GIs stationed here say that it takes from 10 days to three weeks to get a

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uniform cleaned and pressed.

The town, incidentally, is still pretty GI, and occasionally the MPs start picking up EM who don't salute rank or who are wearing gabardine uniforms or have gravy spots on their ties.

THE Navy Building, which was a temporary structure in the last war, still looks as if it might be torn down any day, although its appearance is considerably brightened by the large number of Waves, mostly enlisted women, who've replaced male yeomen.

The Pentagon, just across the Potomac in Arlington County, is the most imposing new building around. It's the source of hundreds of Washington jokes, like the one about the boy who went in as a Western Union messenger and came out a lieutenant colonel. And the messenger who rides one of the Pentagon tricycles down the corridors in riding breeches, boots and spurs. And about the alleged St. Bernards with bottles of brandy tied to their necks who rescue lost colonels who don't know how to use a compass.

Actually it's quite simple to find your way around the miles of corridors if you know, before you start out, where you're going and follow the signs. An attractive civilian girl at the information desk will give you a small map, marking the corridor, hall and room you want. But you have to make an appointment in advance to see most people.

The Pentagon has eight cafeterias, two dining rooms, 10 beverage bars—soft drinks only—and a large circular luncheon bar outside in the center. Inside it's air-conditioned, and there is a book store, a small department store, a drug store, a large barber shop and a huge newsstand. And all the latrines are for both EM and officers.

Except for the Pentagon, the most impressive new building in Washington is the swank modernistic Statler Hotel at 16th and K. The Statler has thick, luxurious carpets and is expensive. Naturally you don't see many GIs around. For one thing, most of the service troops at the Pentagon have had their rations and quarters revoked and are moving into Fort Myers—to relieve the congestion in restaurants, it's said unofficially. Anyway, a drink and dinner for yourself and a date in the Statler's Embassy Room will likely set you back around \$16.

There are plenty of cheaper places to eat and drink, but Washington is still the most expensive city in the U. S. to live in or visit. For that matter, it always has been.

Just now the talk about the November election is bitter, heated and long-winded, and everybody has his own swivel-chair theory about when and how the war will end, too.

When I got in a taxi to go back to Union Station, another driver looked at my service ribbon and said, "Must be a pretty tough fight out there. That war's going to last a long time.

"I know. I had a lieutenant general in here the other night, and he told me the war in the Pacific won't be over for at least three years. Probably last another year in Europe, too.

"Long way to go yet."

You pays your fare, and you takes your choice!

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