

Wheeler WAC Helped Drive Jeep to Wyoming

Fourteen Women Drove Convoy from Fort Meade, South Dakota to Fort Warren, Wyoming 1944

Omaha, Nebraska, March 1.—Army jeeps, admittedly, are not pleasant riding even in fair weather. But in a minimum of twenty-two degrees below zero, over northern roads of snow and ice for 350 miles from Fort Meade, South Dakota, to Fort Warren, Wyoming, and with a woman driver—well, the driver just didn't have a passenger. Anyhow, Army regulations forbade it.

There were a dozen jeeps, instead of one, strung out in a convoy and also driven by women, and all but the lieutenant's car towed a quarter-ton trailer. Bringing up the rear were two two and one-half ton 6x6 Army trucks each loaded with jeeps and each pulling a one-ton trailer loaded with motorcycles.

The Two Men Were Useless

At the very end of the convoy were two enlisted men, one driving another 6x6 truck like that driven by the women, and the other, a one and one-half ton maintenance truck. But the Wac drivers declared the men were as useless as wisdom teeth. Among these was Private First Class Ruby A. Whitehurst of Wheeler.

The Wacs and the jeeps proved they could take it and thereby fourteen enlisted men were made available for more arduous tasks. Though the little jeeps stood out in the cold two nights enroute, each morning they started without a push or pull and though the convoy route was over sharp curves and steep grades, all coated with ice and snow, their drivers held to the course and were checked in at Fort Warren without as much as a frost-bite or a disabled vehicle.

Dressed Warmly

Probably never had the natives along the way seen women outwardly attired as these. Lieutenant Jean McCofferty, in official command of the convoy, said the drivers wore "teddy bear fur inner trousers" and over these, GI pants and blouses of that new light weight fabric, wind and weather proof. Their heads and faces were protected with fur-trimmed hoods; their hands with heavy driving mittens; and their feet, in addition to heavy woolen hose, with GI shoes and storm galoshes.

"After snow had crusted the exposed portions of their faces, they might easily have been mistaken for Eskimos right out of the Arctic, had it not been for the unmistakable identity of the vehicles they were driving, Lieutenant McCafferty said.

Upon delivery of the convoy at Fort Warren, the Wacs returned to their base at Fort Meade by bus.