

# HUNTER IN O. C. D. UNIFORM

RENEE FORBES, '43

SEVERAL eons ago, in 1938 to be exact, the city fathers were struck by the need for a haven where information might be dispensed. In those days of innocence and peace, educating tourists to the intricacies of New York life was a pressing problem. The gentlemen who guide the city's destinies decided that the logical place for information-dispensing would be the dead center of the universe: i.e. Forty-second Street. To add what the French call *ton* to the enterprise, the east side instead of the more plebian west side was chosen as a site. Lower building costs and cheaper land also had something to do with the choice.

After the usual preliminaries and with considerable fanfare, the NEW YORK CITY INFORMATION CENTER was opened beneath the Park Avenue viaduct, directly opposite Grand Central Station. Out-of-towners, heading for the World's Fair, had only to walk a few short steps in order to be supplied with facts and figures on hotels, amusements, transportation, and all the myriad things a tourist must know. The first, or leisurely, period of the Information Center lasted until April, 1942. Until that time, one of its features was a large and handsome electrically-lighted relief map of the city, which covered the floor of the back of the building, surrounded by a railing. After that date, the map disappeared, and in its place are now found desks, typewriters, a switchboard, and other office paraphernalia. The sudden change from colorful geography to somber business was caused by an equally sudden change in the status quo, dating from December 7, 1942. The powers-that-be judiciously decided that the guid-

ance of tourists could be scrapped for the duration.

War had come to Pershing Square. (Pershing Square, incidentally, is a mythical island in the midst of Forty-second Street. Its boundaries are vague, but it is generally agreed that the area includes the information center.) The desks and typewriters belong to a group whose interest in amusements and hotels is very small. This group is known as the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office. During its ante bellum era, the center's atmosphere was soothing, calm, and largely masculine. Today there is little to soothe or calm the harried civilian, and the masculine element has all but disappeared. Except for Mr. Arthur Harlowe, Jr., assistant director in charge of group activities, and an occasional fireman or policeman come to instruct the public about stirrup pumps or fingerprints, the Office is run almost entirely by feminine talent. Feminine talent *in uniform*, please note.

The ladies keep alive the information-giving tradition of the center by letting the public know what it can do in the war effort. They sign up potential blood donors, nurse's aides, and other volunteers. In addition to this, the large display window which faces the street is utilized as a show-place. Demonstrations in first aid, nutrition, air raid precaution and other wartime topics are put on in the window. Bonds are sold, soldiers' voices recorded, and fingerprints taken. These activities, of course, are only the superficial ones with which the outsider comes in contact, but in the back of the building where the map of Manhattan once lay, are workers who coordinate all the activities of the Civilian Defense groups of

the city. Here, correspondence is carried on with all other war agencies and the local Civilian Defense groups, and leaflets and bulletins are prepared for distribution all over the city.

There is an air of svelte and sophisticated competence about the ladies, young and old, who wear the blue of Civilian Defense, which might indicate that they are debutantes and society matrons who have impulsively broken their ties with Mayfair to aid the defense effort. In some cases this is true, but there is an ever-growing group of volunteers which divides its time between the Defense Office and Hunter College. These young women have been working at the Office since its establishment at Pershing Square in April, many of them remaining on the job all through the summer. It is no mere coincidence that twenty-nine Hunter girls have worked from four to fourteen hours a week during the last six months. Most of the young ladies have been lured there by Mrs. Molinoff of the English faculty of Hunter College and the O.C.D., who has been quietly and efficiently leading girls away from late afternoon Coca-Cola sessions to the Civilian Defense Office. To date, twenty-nine undergrads, three staff members, and five alumnae have thus been lured.

Of the twenty-nine home front heroines, eight may wear the emblem and uniform of the C.D.V.O. because they have served a minimum of forty hours. The others, nothing daunted, struggle along in mufti, until they too earn the right to wear uniforms. The Hunter girls have been allowed to take over most of the C.D.V.O. activities on Saturdays, because of their splendid work during the summer months. The regular workers had planned to keep the office closed over the week-ends, but the Hunter girls, with true ivy-and-lavender zeal, volunteered to take over while the others took the day off. Their work was so good in this emergency that they have been doing it ever since. Of course, in addition to their Satur-

day work, many of the girls work there after school every day. As a group and as individuals they have become an indispensable part of the Civilian Defense Office.

Hunter's rise to eminence in Civilian Defense circles started quietly. Mrs. Molinoff was asked by the C.D.V.O. to edit a publication called "The Youth Communique", which was to be distributed to leaders of junior defense groups. Journalism students assisted in putting out three issues of the mimeographed bulletin, but when it was discontinued, the girls lingered on at the center, doing all kinds of non-journalistic work. Soon girls in other majors heard of the work and became absorbed in it. Any one in any major who is willing to work and has the time to, is welcome at the C.D.V.O.

The latest to join the happy band that daily journeys to Pershing Square are the art students. It was they who captured the limelight for Hunter. With the help of Professor Joseph Cummings Chase, chairman of the Art department, they attracted one thousand persons to the oval display window on Forty-second Street one day a little more than a month ago. The week of September thirtieth had been designated, "City Colleges at War Week", at the C.D.V.O., and Hunter, along with the three other city colleges, had been invited to prepare a display window. The other colleges did nicely with demonstrations of cryptography, fire-fighting, and musical programs, but Hunter literally stopped the show with a "sketches-while-you-wait" performance. Art students sketched soldiers and sailors in full view of the Forty-second Street passersby with as little self-consciousness as if they were working in their sixteenth floor studios. The girls produced approximately three sketches an hour, some of which were given to the men themselves, while others were sent to their parents. While they were being sketched, the girls say, the servicemen were reticent and patient, but their gratitude reached such heights that they some-

times returned later with gifts of cigarettes and sodas for the tired artists.

Although the major part of their work is done within the confines of the chromium and glass-brick walls of the C.D.V.O., the girls participate in many activities in the outside world. Capable, efficient, and cheerful young women are an asset to any rally or meeting. Since Hunter girls are all this and more, they are to be found guiding civilians and selling bonds at rallies almost every week. The record for bond selling, incidentally, is held by Ruth Tatt, who sold one hundred eighteen dollars worth on one Saturday afternoon. When Ambassador Grew addressed a Nurse's Aide graduation, one zealous Hunter girl worked all the ushering, guiding, and hostessing by herself, and remarked later that it would have been less painful to become a Nurse's Aide.

Three uniformed Hunter girls rode on a fire truck recently when the city did some anti-fire campaigning. They found it exciting, but a little damaging to their appearances. They claim, however, that as a means of swift transportation, the fire truck has it all over the I.R.T.

Much of the work inside the office, both clerical and informational, is routine though necessary, but now and then exciting events add flavor to life on Pershing Square. For a time the Hunter girls had charge of a voice-recording booth where servicemen made records to be sent to relatives and friends. One of the young men proposed over the recorder in an unexpectedly eloquent and unabashed manner, while the embarrassed girls and grinning soldiers stood by. A British sailor came in several times and made almost the same speech on each occasion, requesting that it be addressed to the same person. When asked for the reason for this duplication, he replied that he did not want to take any chances. If one of the records did not reach his mother, at least the other two might. A Chilean airman made a record in Spanish and then asked one of the

girls to "say something in English slowly so that his younger brother who was studying English might hear the language as is spoken in New York.

Publication of the "Youth Communique" which was dropped late in the Spring, will probably be resumed, with Hunter girls or again getting the news, typing it, and turning it out on the mimeograph machine. The art students' performance during "Citizens' Colleges at War Week" has now become a permanent feature of the Saturday display window. Hunter girls have been invited to take part in a series of demonstrations on war-time family nutrition under the direction of Dr. Persia Campbell of Queens College. The work is diversified enough to interest girls in any major, and the C.D.V.O. people are eager to have more Hunter women join them.

It is to be hoped that someday the building at Pershing Square will once more be a place where visitors may learn of the delights of New York, where the map of the city will lie like a sparkling rug in place of desks and dictaphones. It is to be hoped that the uniformed volunteers will be replaced by experts on where-to-go in the biggest town in the world. But until that day comes when phrases like "civilian-volunteer" and "war-effort" seem as strange to the tongue as "New-York-World's-Fair-1939" now seems, the work of the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office must be carried on. It must be carried on with efficiency, intelligence, and above all, with enthusiasm. Hunter girls have proved themselves to have all the qualities plus a certain dogged determination that makes them admired by their co-workers. If there are any girls, possessing these attributes, who have not yet found their place in the war effort, they would do well to investigate the possibilities of the Pershing Square Civilian Defense Volunteer Office.