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Article Summary: The author, a worker at the North Platte Canteen, gives a brief description of the Canteen, who comes, and some of the logistics.

Cataloging Information:

Names: F J Uhl, Colonel McGary, W M Jeffers, Ira L Bare, Elks Building (North Platte)

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Photographs / Images: On page 118, preceding the section Nebraska Women in the War is a photo of the busy canteen



Courtesy Union Pacific Railroad

"THE WAY TO A MAN'S HEART . . ."

Any Hour in the North Platte Canteen

IN THE SERVICE CLUBS

The North Platte Canteen

DAISY C. HINMAN *

The people of Western Nebraska have demonstrated their patriotism and their loyalty to those in the service of their country by their eager support of the North Platte Canteen. As a result it has grown beyond their wildest imagination. Tales of the hospitality shown here have been carried to every camp and base by those who have known its friendliness, partaken of its cheer.

Each day, from one to five thousand men in uniform hurry through the big doors for a ten-minute pause on their journey into the unknown. They see long tables laden with good things to eat: great platters of sandwiches, pickles, hard-boiled eggs, cookies, doughnuts, cake and coffee; milk too, and on hot days, iced tea, pop, sometimes ice cream cones. From the farm homes come fried chicken and hundreds of pies. The mothers, wives and sweethearts of men already fighting, and who serve them so gladly, urge them to take all they want. Always there are birthday cakes, beautifully decorated, and enough so that every boy with a birthday that week can have his own cake. Then everybody sings with a will, "Happy birthday to you!" He leaves, not only with his cake but often with tears in his eyes, feeling that this world is a wonderful place after all. One of our workers has baked an angel-food birthday cake every Saturday for the past two years, and considers it a privilege.

The magazine racks are kept well filled, and the long table is piled high with reading material of every description. Popular magazines and other light reading find ready acceptance, but the great demand is for Bibles and New Testaments, prayer books, church papers. Wall desks supplied with post-cards and other writing material provide opportunity for hurried messages home. And every day groups gather at the piano, singing the old songs and new. There are frequent requests for song sheets

* "Just One of the Workers."

(words without music) to be used en route and in camps. Our service men love to sing. A splendid radio given by the listeners of KODY affords much pleasure. A loud speaker is used to call the trains.

There is a framed citation on one of the great central columns that has been a daily inspiration since last Armistice Day, when the Canteen celebrated its re-opening and the hook-up with NBC. It bears the signature of Maj. Gen. F. J. Uhl and was presented in person by Colonel McGary in recognition of "meritorious wartime service . . . for voluntary efforts and outstanding achievements within this [the Seventh Service] Command."

The Honor Roll of the Canteen hangs above the big doors. It bears the names of all the nearby towns (sixty of them) that serve regularly on certain days of the month. Then there is a day for each of the civic organizations and groups: church circles, lodges, clubs, employees of stores and shops. Two or three of these sometimes unite on a day. Their representatives come by car, train or truck, bringing great quantities of food. In the month of June 361 such organizations shared in the work. Cash contributions were \$3,766, and other donations equalled the cash.

This year Cozad spoke for Father's Day. They brought hundreds of pounds of sandwich-meat, buns, and other foods in proportion; also postals bearing the admonition: "Write to Dad today."

Our two radio stations, WOW and KODY, have a Sunday when they serve with the Air Wardens. Twice they have provided also a huge cake. The last one weighed 250 pounds: nine layers, three feet by four, iced to look like a woven basket filled with flowers—even the handle was twined with iced blossoms. Everyone had been asked to write a letter to a service man, and these, with a "pin-up girl," were given with every piece of cake. The answers to these two thousand letters prove the value of the Canteen and its place in the hearts of our men.

Each Christmas week finds the Canteen full of the holiday spirit, with wreaths of holly in the windows, a big lighted tree, and gaily wrapped gifts for everyone in uniform. The work has grown steadily since that stormy Christmas of 1941 when a few women gave out apples and oranges to a comparatively small number of soldiers. Then we operated from the car-men's small

shanty; now, though the splendid cooperation of the Union Pacific and its president, W. M. Jeffers, we have the west half of Union Station, formerly used as kitchens, lunch and dining rooms. They have provided all modern conveniences, including built-in features, light, heat, and janitor service, and an electric machine that washes and scalds *dry* twenty-four cups in ten seconds. And they have furnished post-card views of the Canteen in three different lots of eighty thousand each for use of the boys. The kitchen equipment was completed by a North Platte business man who gave a refrigerator that would hold twenty-five people easily.

When this great room was redecorated, the opening was celebrated with a program that was broadcast over the full network of NBC. Speakers came from Omaha and all the western towns in the state. When it was over, one eager lad slipped up to a man in charge and offered his shirt for auction. It was a bright cowboy plaid and it set the crowd wild. Finally Ira L. Bare bid \$95, Will Jeffers raised it \$5 and won the shirt, which he quietly returned to the boy. It was not the first time this young patriot had raised money for the Canteen in such fashion.

Interviews with the workers are broadcast by KODY each morning, and they are transcribed for the evening broadcast around nine-thirty.

The Canteen receives funds from every conceivable source: dances, concerts, scrap-drives, cattle sales, movie benefits, donations, regular monthly subscriptions. Whenever a need arose, there was always a check from some unexpected source. One for two hundred dollars came from a mother in New York City out of gratitude for kindness shown to her boy. Children come with the pennies they save by not buying candy. One car-wiper gives a dollar a week. An old lady of very scant resources bakes five dozen cookies every Saturday and brings them down. It all means sacrifice, but the sacrifice is blessed and multiplied because made so gladly, needed so greatly. There are many, many cases of sickness — wretched, homesick boys who are taken off trains to a hospital and looked after (as well as their families), freeing their minds of worry. I could tell you stories enough to fill a book, and you can guess that we love the Canteen!

You may wonder where all the money goes, when so much is

given. Last month's audit shows an actual expense of \$125 a day, besides the donations of food. From 35 to 40 pounds of coffee are used daily; 100 pounds of meat for sandwiches, 20 pounds of butter, 45 quarts of coffee cream, 30 pounds of sugar, 175 loaves of bread, six quarts of salad dressing, and eight large sheet cakes that cut 98 pieces each. There are oranges, apples, boxes of cookies, cigarettes, candy bars, matches, magazines and chewing gum for the bushel baskets that are loaded onto the cars when the men are not allowed to get off. Everything is free to all who wear the uniform; not one of the workers is paid. No one can realize the hugeness of the undertaking who has not seen it in action, when perhaps a thousand service men fill the big room. Sometimes several trains are on the track at one time. The doors open at five-thirty each morning and swing wide until the last train is gone at night.

The Canteen is run on a business basis with elected officers, chairmen for all departments, a board of management, a grievance committee, and an accredited accountant.

Besides the Canteen, for almost a year many of the organizations in North Platte have maintained recreation rooms for service men in the Elks Building especially for Navy Air Cadets stationed here at the training school. The rooms were well equipped with games, music, writing material, and a good floor for dancing. Hostesses were appointed for each week-end — the only time the cadets were at liberty, and refreshments were always served. But a fire in the building, in June, closed this center temporarily.

True, faith grows dim at times when the funds are low, but the treasury has never been empty. It is the Lord's work, and He is using the great-hearted people of Western Nebraska to carry it on. Time, money, labor and loyalty they give freely, forgetful of self. The friendliness, hospitality and dependability of all the Canteen workers is known around the world. Heart-warming memory of even a few minutes spent here has helped brighten dreary places and cheer lonely hours for homesick men. This we know because they write and tell us so.

Who can say that the last words they hear over the loud speaker as they rush back to their trains — "God bless you and keep you! Goodbye, and hurry back!" — do not linger with them as they face the dark days ahead? Not all of them will come back

within the range of mortal vision, but those that do will find warm welcome on their way home if they stop at the North Platte Canteen.

"The day had been exceptionally hot and heavy, and supplies at the Canteen had run low two or three times. The man from Lodgepole had made several hurried trips to the dairy, the grocery, the bakery; had worked on the floor cleaning tables and helping with the dishwasher, hardly having time to draw a full breath.

"Late in the evening a twelve-car hospital train pulled into the station. This man was the first to start out with the baskets that are placed in each car for those who cannot come to the Canteen, then carried extra supplies to some cars. Just before the train pulled out, one of the ladies rushed in saying she wanted a sprinter to take a large jar of hot coffee to the last car, as the boys there were needing it badly.

"Once again the man from Lodgepole started back down the platform. Another who was standing near volunteered to take the coffee. 'Let me—you've been through a big day.' The faithful one stopped in amazement. 'Hell! What do you think those boys have been through?' And ran on.

"Such incidents happen every day in the Canteen, and they are responsible for the many kind words received from the thousands of men and women in service who pass through there every day."—*North Platte Telegraph*, June 26, 1944.

Service Clubs of the Omaha Tribe

An informal letter from Eunice W. Stabler, whose sons' names are listed among the heroes in this issue, tells us that the members of the Omaha Tribe now living in Decatur have organized two service clubs. One is the "War Mothers and Fathers" of sons in the armed forces, whether at home or abroad. Several of these sons have been wounded; Private Stabler is the only one killed. They meet twice a month, exchange news from the boys, and unite in prayer.

The other club, the "Minute Women," arranges social gatherings for every soldier home on furlough. Both organizations are very active, and give all possible aid to the boys and their families as occasion arises.

The Omaha Indians have a service flag of their own and have composed a World War Song, dedicated to their men. At all these gatherings the American flag is raised and the sundown service observed.