

Mixed Batteries

by "J.W.N."

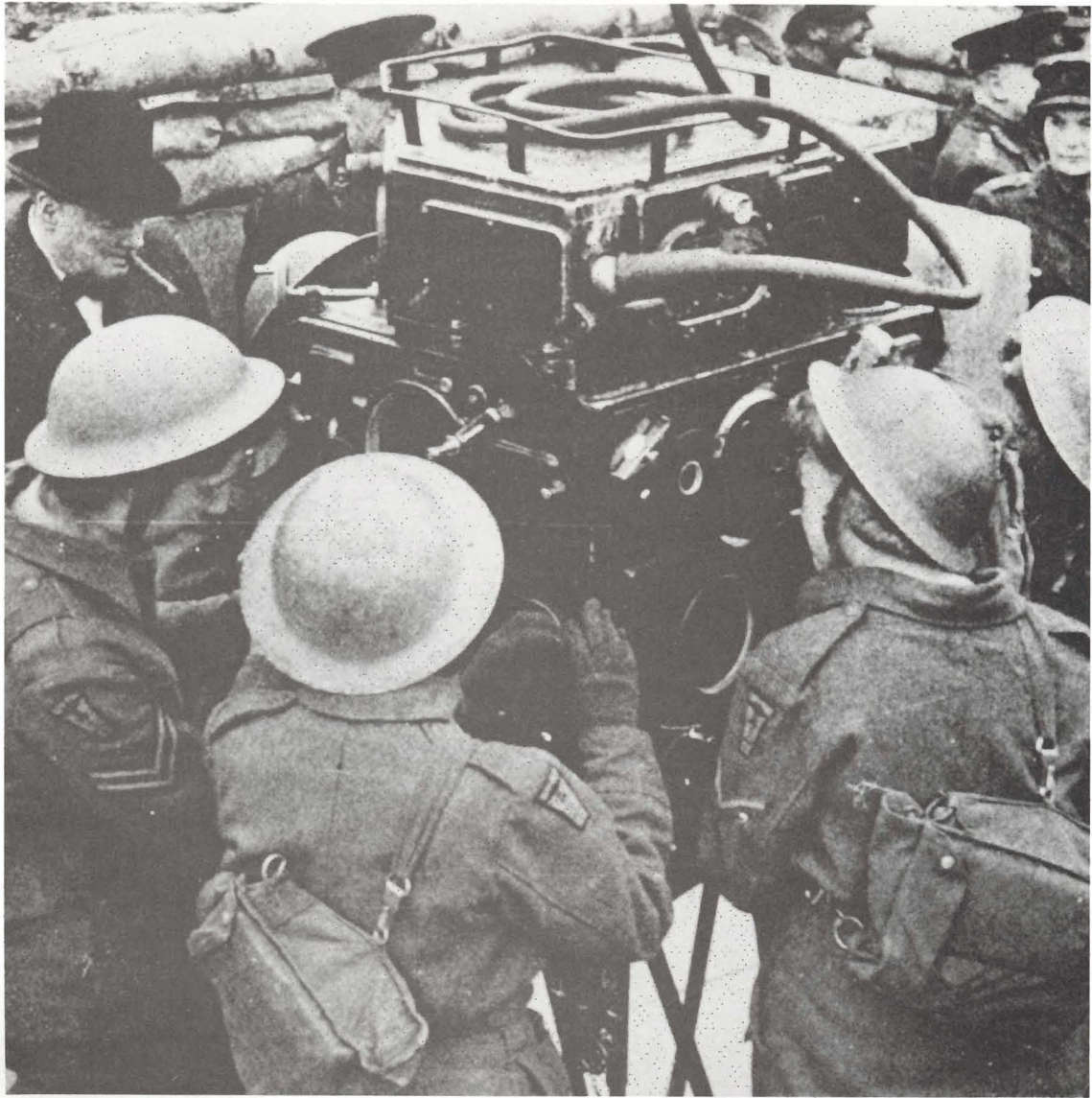
The Auxiliary Territorial Services (A.T.S.) was formed in September 1938, to provide personnel to do noncombatant duties in replacement of men. Later on General Sir Frederick Pile, the G.O.C. in C., A.A. Command, investigated the idea of using girls for certain technical jobs. The first job they took on was the Kine-Theodolite. They have done this ever since they started on it which is in itself sufficient confirmation of their capabilities. They had also been doing instrumental observation work of a special kind at an artillery range somewhere in South of England. They were also used in units as cooks, orderlies, telephonists, M.T. drivers, etc., but to have the fullest use of the nation's manpower, the girls were tried out on various operational jobs.

All the women serving in A.A. are volunteers so far as the operational numbers are concerned. These women join one of several A.T.S. Training Centers all over the country. The first thing that happens to them is to be given selection tests. These tests take various forms and are designed to determine the recruit's suitability for certain jobs. The tests are generally reliable and only a very small percentage fail to make the grade selected for them. From the tests the height-takers, spotters, predictor and radio-location numbers are obtained. The non-operational numbers such as

cooks, orderlies, telephone orderlies, drivers and clerks are selected from intakes, usually because they had previous experience in one of these categories, or because they are keen to make this their army career, and more often than not, with a view to learning something that is going to be of use to them after the war — a very healthy sign. Nowadays, of course, the majority of recruits are conscripts, but they still have to volunteer for A.A. operational service. Tests are made and recruits who in civilian life did a job which they can continue to do in the army are encouraged and allowed to continue it.

Technical Training

I think the outstanding thing about their technical training in its early stages is the amount of "chatteration" that goes on, in say a predictor or height-taker team! It takes quite a long time to stop it. However, it is all due to enthusiasm rather than vice. Generally speaking they are slow starters, but once they get the main idea the progress is quite rapid. Height-takers are always good, and in my own opinion are better than men. Predictor numbers after steady progress become really very efficient. The "spotters" are fair. They are rather slow in picking up targets and seem to find difficulty in the recognition of aircraft. This is quite understandable as women have never shown



"Mixed Batteries," originally published in the *Antiaircraft Journal*, was ahead of its time, but will seem unbearably patronizing to today's military women. However, the article, written during the London Blitz, does illustrate that female air defenders perform perfectly well in combat. It also demonstrates that attitudes toward women soldiers have improved. What battery commander today would send the women inside to make lace curtains during severe weather or, as a matter of course, assign only female soldiers to mess and dining hall duty?

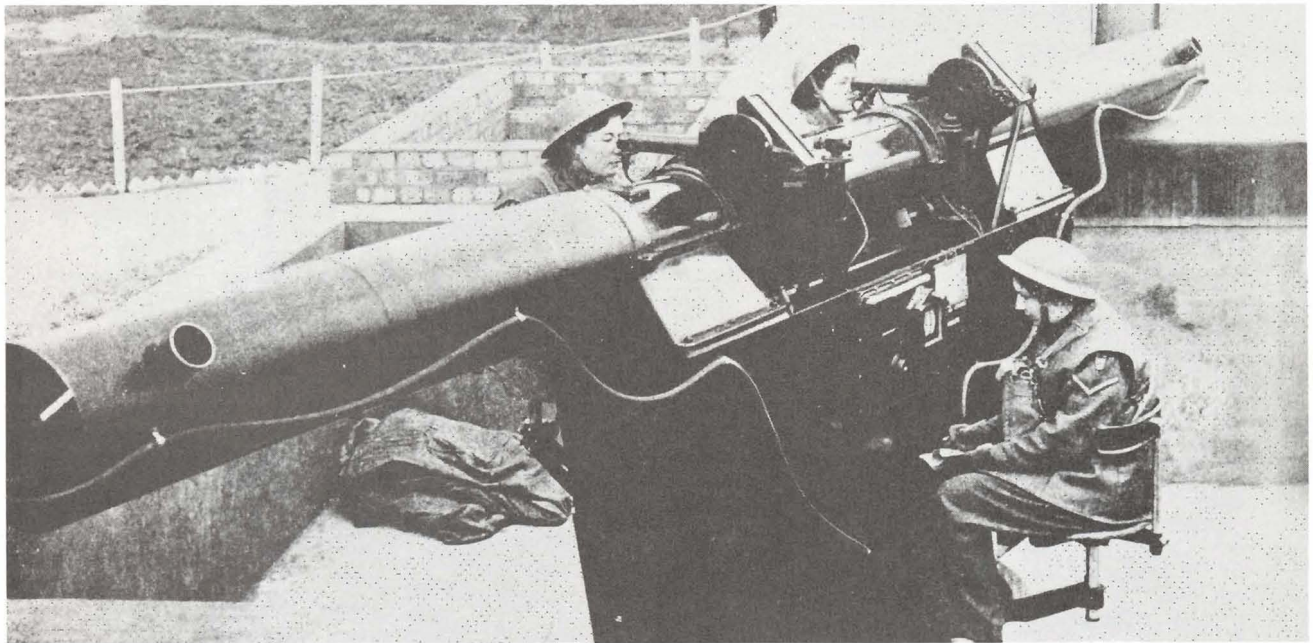
anything like the same amount of interest as men have in types of aircraft. They are picking it up very well though and, womanlike, once they have mastered anything of this sort, the thing sticks. Good spotters are very good, and their progress, if slow, is sure.

How It Works

The foregoing sets out briefly the beginning of a mixed battery. Let us now see how it is formed, and how it becomes an active unit. My cadre of officers and N.C.Ss. came from Scotland. As soon as they arrived they got down to their technical training, which goes on and finishes up with a concentrated period given over to battery training. This ended, the

Then the end of camp. The whole battery, now complete with the various specialists sent to us to make us up to establishment, was given leave before taking over our action stations.

We were on our two sites by nine o'clock of our first day of duty. At ten o'clock the outgoing battery marched out! That night we had a raid, but neither we nor any other batteries in the area were called upon to fire. We have had a grounding that no other battery has had. All the battery commander's prophecies came true. Deep snow all over the sites, no hot or cold water for several days on end, bitterly cold weather lasting several days, odd alarms in the night necessitating waiting up at the gun park until "stand easy." All these things happened, but never a let-up



great day comes when the battery leaves the training regiment and goes off to practice camp. The battery commander has the whole battery on parade, tells them that they have done well at their training, and worked hard; that there will be other batteries at camp and we just keep ourselves smart and clean, march about properly, etc., etc. We arrive at practice camp at about midday in time for dinner. We have our own cookhouse and dining hall, so for the first time we find ourselves standing on our own feet. It is noticed that the girls and men still sit entirely apart, but this does not worry us and we do not intend to force the fraternizing. The remainder of the afternoon is devoted to getting the battery settled down and accustomed to their new surroundings.

The weather at camp was just as appalling as it could possibly have been. Day after day a section would stand by waiting to fire. Both men and girls were grand and stuck to it magnificently. They began to look healthier every day and ate enormous meals. So we went on; firing whenever we could, and drilling when we couldn't fire.

on the part of the girls. They carried on picquet duties throughout the day, and the only difference we made to ordinary routine was to put reliefs on for half hour on and one hour off, instead of the usual one hour on and two hours off. During the bitterest weather we put them on to painting their hut interiors and making window curtains. The sickness during this very hard and trying weather was almost negligible.

Routine

There is practically no difference at all between the running of a mixed or any other battery. Hours of reveille, meals and lights out, are all the same. The battery "falls in" in sections, girls on the right, men on the left. Male officers or NCOs usually take a parade of mixed personnel and always take a parade of men only, but it sometimes happens that an A.T.S. NCO has charge of a mixed party. The girl in charge of a mixed parade is taken quite as a matter of course, no signs of embarrassment are shown by either the girls or the men, and the men never try to take a rise out of the A.T.S.

All ranks have their meals together in the common dining hall, and now instead of seeing girls on one side of the hut and men on the other, one invariably sees tables being shared by mixed personnel.

In addition to the mixed canteen we have two huts set aside as Rest Rooms. One of these is for the girls only, and the other for men only. They are very nicely furnished, have open fireplaces and curtained windows. The girls use their room a lot, but the men don't use theirs a great deal.

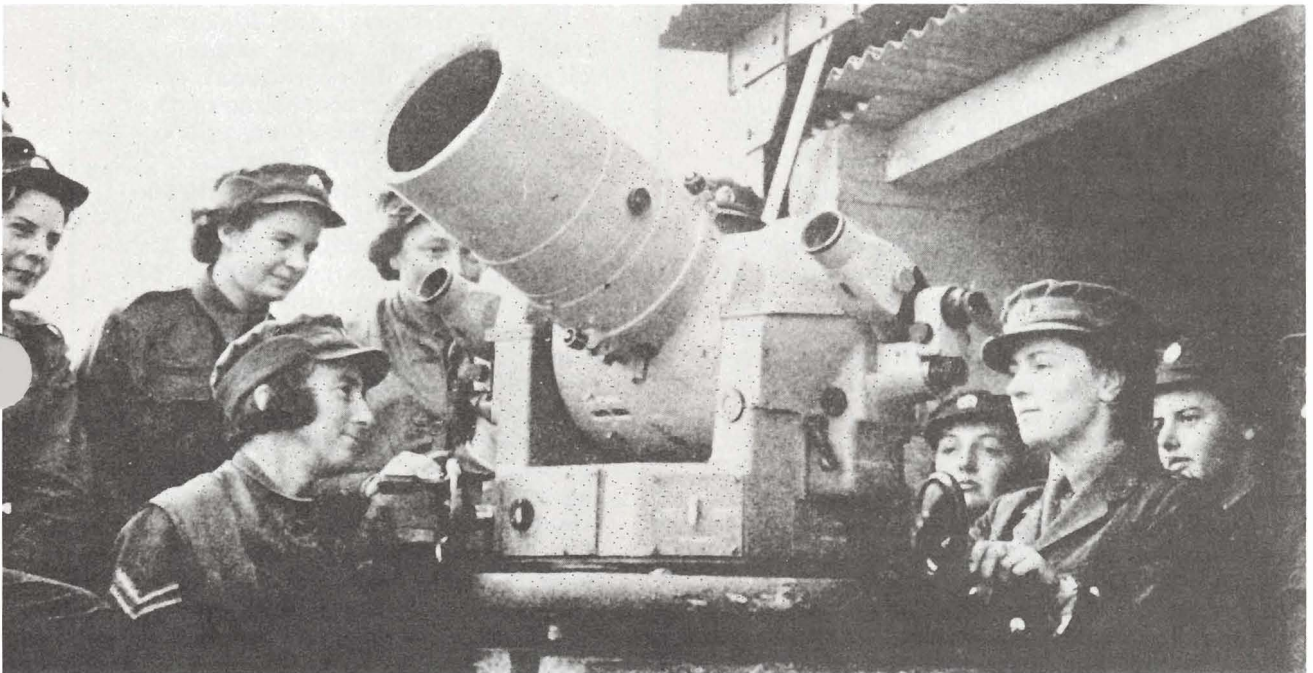
Officers' and Sergeant's Messes are of course mixed. Here again the A.T.S. sergeants have their own sleeping quarters, which they also use as a sitting room when they want to be on their own; similarly the officers have a private quarter, but share a

guard which comes on for the night. The changing of the guard with the picquet is carried out exactly as done by two guards. When the men's guard "Present Arms" the girls give a "Front Salute." This is taken very seriously and is still watched by a number of spectators.

The picquet's duties are operational as well as ceremonial. The sentry checks arrivals at the gate, is responsible for sounding the gas, fire and general alarms, and turns out the picquet for ceremonial purposes.

Miscellaneous

The presence of opposite sexes certainly makes for a pride in turn-out condition of huts, and manners in



common mess. Messes and dining halls do undoubtedly benefit from "the touch of a woman's hand."

There are three A.T.S. officers in a battery. One senior commander (captain) and two subalterns. The senior commander is the battery messing officer and the two subalterns include in their jobs that of site messing officer. This works very well. Cooks, and mess and dining hall orderlies are, of course, all girls.

Training

Training goes on daily, according to the battery's training programme. Marching and saluting drill are done separately. Gun drill for men, and command post drill for girls. Gas lectures and drill are mixed. Physical training is done separately. All lectures are mixed except when on a domestic or medical subject.

Guards and Picquets

There is picquet of girls on duty throughout daylight hours, which is the equivalent to the men's

general. Bad language is extremely rare.

There is a really very fine spirit of mutual help between the sexes. The girls do odd jobs for the men, and vice versa.

There is a very definite policy to be suggested for entertainments in a mixed battery, and the answer is — make your own as much as you possibly can. This gives an added interest to the performances and brings the battery together in a way where other methods may fail.

The battery has been in one action which lasted for about three and one-half hours. Everybody stood up to the ordeal extremely well, and I am quite sure they always will. We have several times "stood to" for varying lengths of time, at all hours of the day and night, and in all weathers. This always produces one grouse — "Oh, I wish we could fire!"

Recently a girl in another battery was killed in action while serving her predictor. Her place was immediately taken by a girl spotter, and the whole command post continued to do their job. Grand girls.