



Typical date: five girls, one man. (l. to r.) Dot Ault, Nancy Cunningham, William Friedman, Nannette Choate, Joyce Mrkonjc, Nancy Elsner



Clerk-stenographer Nancy Cunningham (left) is capable, hard-working—and bored. Above she observes some of the havoc of war in Belgrade

By SEYMOUR FREIDIN

Serving in the diplomatic war's front lines raises hob with a girl's social life, and the work is hard. At Belgrade, Nancy Cunningham keeps long hours, rarely has a date, and dreams of home. But she's engaged in something big and that makes it worth while

Belgrade

OUR girls crowded around Nancy Cunningham and the young man who nervously scuffed the worn carpet of the vestibule with the toes of his shoes.

"Gee, Nancy," one of the girls began, her voice tinged with envy. "They say the orchestra at the Majestic knows some new American numbers."

Nancy's blue eyes twinkled with understanding. She glanced from the young man, a State Department courier on an overnight stay in the Yugoslav capital, to her friends and co-workers in the American embassy.

"Get your coats, let's all go," said Nancy.

Before she finished the sentence, the girls had their coats and the courier had five dates instead of the one he had made earlier that day.

"They danced me howlegged," he said later. "I don't think those girls had danced in months. I must come here more often. I'm a popular guy."

Nancy couldn't agree with him more. This is a town where an American working girl thinks of dancing with a man as a deb longs for her coming-out party, and where a lonesome bachelor could—if he wished—go steady with half a dozen girls at a time.

"In Belgrade, you learn fast that there are no dates, no parties, no fancy apartments, no night clubs and no men," the pretty Foreign Service clerk-secretary told me. "When we're very, very lucky, we have a ratio of three girls to every eligible male."

That didn't add up to me. An American abroad is customarily a privileged character. That goes double for an American girl—especially one like Nancy, who is twenty-four, and blessed with a better-than-average figure and legs you see in stocking ads. Back home, even in Los Angeles, Nancy's home town, where good looks are wholesale, you'd turn around for a second appraising look at her. Besides, she's unobtrusively intelligent and could charm a confirmed misogynist with her dimpled smile. Nancy easily divined my disbelief about her barren social life.

"Brother, this is eastern Europe, not the U.S.A.," she said with a wry laugh. "Neither is it Paris or Rome. Why don't you forget political significances for a change and stick around us for a while? You'll see what I mean."

I watched for a couple of weeks, and although I've made many trips here, I never before appreciated what girls in this embassy are up against. Like anyone else who has seen Foreign Service types abroad, I figured they had well-stocked larders, plenty of entertainment and were perhaps a little too pampered, even in unglamorous Belgrade. Now I know better.

For one thing, they work hard. They may not be making foreign policy, but they help it mesh. Most of them are at their first overseas post, and

they customarily put in a long day under difficult conditions.

Nancy, for example, takes dictation and handles filing and secretarial work for the embassy's political and economic section. That normally would be a full-time job. However, like the other clerk-stenographers, she is often called on to do work for other Foreign Service officers including Ambassador George V. Allen. In addition, the girls are frequently asked to decipher and encipher coded messages between the embassy and the State Department. They also perform certain administrative functions involving the American commissary, garages, payrolls and the like. It keeps them busy.

Because the United States keeps a smaller diplomatic staff in the Yugoslav capital than in most other European countries, there is a fine air of informality among its members, whatever their rank. It's one embassy where Americans don't take protocol seriously.

"You can see the ambassador sitting down with the clerks for coffee almost any time in our canteen," Nancy says. "We all know one another well, and no one ever lacks friendship."

This close-knit atmosphere is a great help in adjusting to the peculiarities of life in Belgrade. Most of the girls, like Nancy, who graduated from UCLA in 1948, are college-educated. They understood vaguely when they came over that Yugoslavia wasn't going to be a dizzy round of fancy balls; they did expect, however, to enjoy a certain amount of social relaxation with men. But here's what they ran into:

Thirty to 35 unattached American girls work in the embassy; there is exactly one eligible bachelor. Our consulate in Zagreb has four bachelors, but Zagreb is 200 miles away.

"Bad job placement," the girls complain.

Sad Plight of the Lone Bachelor

The embassy's lone eligible bachelor, twenty-nine-year-old Bill Friedman, of St. Louis, handsome and harassed second secretary, thinks the girls have a point. He wants reinforcements, although he has become accustomed to being an escort or host to six or a dozen girls.

Friedman has been here two and a half years and has never had a real date. He will not take one girl out, because it would cause trouble and jealousy. Also, he doesn't dare be seen going out with just one. He would find himself "engaged" almost automatically.

"I don't even dare ask them to sew buttons," he said. "That might show favoritism. All the buttons are off my pajamas, so I just lace them up with shoelaces."

The British embassy's bachelors are slightly better off, but they've got their hands full being nice to their own countrywomen. Around the other

diplomatic missions representing the Western World, there's less than a handful of available men and few of them speak English. The girls generally speak nothing else.

Why, then, not go out with English-speaking Yugoslavs?

That question brings up exceedingly delicate issues. In Communist eastern Europe, the unwritten rule for American personnel is to separate private lives from such normal necessary business relationships as exist with the people of the country. Since Tito broke with the Soviet Union, the atmosphere here for Americans is much pleasanter than it was, say three years ago. By comparison with what once existed, conditions are downright cordial.

Yet Yugoslavia is a Communist state. Security is a vital factor in a key spot like this. The State Department can't take any chances on having a girl who handles codes and confidential documents fall for a local Romeo who might well be doubling in brass as an agent. As a matter of fact, such an incident did occur recently, involving a girl assigned to the code room of an embassy in eastern Europe. Embassy officials discovered to their horror that the girl was going out steadily—with a slick police agent. She was recalled, of course, but the incident always is cited as reason for the girls to be very circumspect.

"Once you get to Yugoslavia, you learn quickly what to do and what to avoid," Nancy briefed me. "We don't want trouble."

That attitude works both ways. The Yugoslavs are just as careful in their relations with the Americans, whom they find somewhat puzzling. However, the people of this nation have a long tradition of friendship with the people of the United States, and in general respect them.

"Your American girls are so attractive," university student Josip Relovic told me. "They always look alive and happy, and it's nice to watch them walk with their heads erect, as if they feared nothing."

Maria Lenic is a housewife and the mother of two young sons. She frankly envies the American girls—a trait shared by most Yugoslav women. But there's nothing vicious about this feeling. "They always look so lovely," Mrs. Lenic said. "All of us wish we had their clothes and cosmetics. But the girls seem so natural. They don't act like grand ladies because they have more than we."

This air of general admiration is reflected on the government level, too.

"American girls cause no trouble and behave themselves exceedingly well," a high Yugoslav official told me. "I cannot say that for the Soviet women who were here. They tried to treat Yugoslav servants and taxi drivers like dirt."

Despite their feeling of friendliness toward the Americans, the Yugoslav (Continued on page 71)

HERO'S HOLIDAY

Kay found herself almost sharing her father's contempt for this young man who said he loved her. If only he would fight back—if only he would face his *real* enemy

By HARRY SYLVESTER

SHE left the hotel and walked across the Plaza, which was already marked by long sharp morning shadows. She wondered how Ellis Bannon had looked here in Vera Cruz in 1944, in the gold tabs of a second lieutenant. Had he sat on the wrought-iron benches near the bandstand and passed between the high gray walls of the streets that led to the Esplanade? Had he been as concerned then over his place in the world and his occupation? She thought he had not, for the work of the Ferry Command had seemed useful to him then, the kind of work that had some meaning and importance. Since she thought about him so much, Kay supposed, it must be that she loved Bannon more than she was willing to admit.

On the Esplanade the shade of the benches marked the concrete in geometrical patterns. If today, she thought, she could somehow get them down on paper; yesterday she had failed. She sat down by a colonnade and began to work. Today the heat as well as the light was a problem; it dried her blocks of water color, it dried the washes she applied to the paper so swiftly her feeling for color became unsure. Closing the box of paints, she laid the moist, unfinished painting on the ground and pulled a sketch block from an open leather bag. She drew easily and surely, with quick strong strokes of the pencil, sketches she would use sometime when she could work them into water colors.

She did not notice Bannon approaching from the direction of the Plaza. He was a lean man, about thirty, with a quizzical smile and deep-set eyes hidden behind dark glasses. He stood silent in back of her. "Very nice," he said after a moment.

She added two or three lines, then, without turning, said, "It's all right."

"I meant you," Bannon said. His hands touched her shoulders, lightly yet possessively.

She turned and looked him up and down. He was wearing a white linen jacket. "Dressed like a citizen," she said. "My father says that nonconformism becomes less and less of a virtue."

"I never did think much of him, from what you said," Bannon told her. He almost laughed. "Has he got here yet?"

Kay shook her head. "The port office here wired Tampico and learned that his boat left two days ago, which means he could have arrived any time from last night on. I came here a while ago half expecting to see The Porpoise already moored. Instead, you arrive. Good thing, too." She put out a hand and lightly stroked the back of his narrow wrist, noticing again how big the hand was for the wrist.

"Any happier about meeting him?"

Kay shrugged. "It's a kind of duty, I suppose.

Now that you've arrived you can show me the city."

"You probably already know it better than I do. I never saw it much by day."

"Seen any of your old girls? Relaxed at all?" Some of the tension that she had noticed in him at Mexico City seemed to be gone.

"I just got here this morning."

"Were you any happier when you were stationed here?" She had turned from him and was adding fine lines to the sketch.

"I don't know. The Ferry Command seemed sedentary. I was twenty-five then and I wanted to get into combat."

"And that's why you volunteered for Korea?"

Bannon stood silent a moment, looking at her back as though she had somehow betrayed him. "I thought this was going to be a kind of holiday."

"That was your idea," she said. "I wouldn't come down to this coast heat except my father asked me to."

"Yes, that's right," he said. "I was the one who wanted to come back to Vera Cruz. Now that I'm here I'm remembering that with me, anyhow, the going was rugged here than in Korea. I cracked up once, north of here, taking a plane to Texas that had been flown in from Italy via Africa without any repairs to speak of. The sand was too soft when I tried to land on the beach near Tampico."

An unreasonable alarm touched her. It is really stronger than I think, she told herself, when something that happened to him six years ago should panic me now. "You never told me about that." She did not turn to him and spoke through barely opened lips. "Were you hurt much?"

"More shaken up. I was thrown clear."

So he was returned here, she told herself, to the place where his life possessed its greatest meaning. And after the five dissatisfying years between wars he had gone to Korea but had not found there what he once thought he had here. They had called him too old for combat flying and put him with a reconnaissance squadron. Now he had returned here seeking something, perhaps only knowledge of himself, some secret he had known in 1944 that, if he could find it again, could give his life direction and meaning. "Let's walk," she said.

"We'll go to the Plaza and get a beer."

"I don't want a beer," she said.

"This beer is very dry. Wonderful."

Kay did not speak as they walked back to the Plaza, and presently Bannon said, "I don't remember the sun being this hot. It's silenced even you."

"I'll try to be happier. You were the one who needed cheering in Mexico City. Now you're happy as a clam but not quite so silent."

"Is it the heat that troubles you?"

"No. I can't help thinking about meeting my father."

They walked on for a moment. Kay laid a hand on his arm. "Come here, Buck." They went into the shade of the last booth before the city began. She put her head against his shoulder and he held her.

"I didn't think meeting him was going to trouble you so," he said.

"But it's years since I've seen him."

"Is he really such an ogre?"

"I don't know. Mother taught us to think he was. And he is arrogant. And he has taken this Joan Canby with him all over the world."

"Look," Bannon said. "It's a meeting that can't last too long. It'll all be over in a day or two."

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