

Portrait of Morale

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THE YOUNG sailor huddled on his hospital bed at the end of the ward. There was a two-month growth of beard on his face.

Doctors had made miraculous progress restoring his badly burned hands—the flesh and some of the bone had been destroyed in combat. A steel armature replaced the bone and skin grafts were progressing very nicely.

He was almost healed—except for his own mental condition. The boy was convinced that he could never use his hands again and he would not use them.

Then something happened. He wanted to have his picture sketched by an artist visiting in the ward and he wanted to look his best. Forgetting that he “couldn’t” use his hands, he shaved the beard and combed his hair.

The artist was Mrs. Carroll Aument, the former Henrietta Sharon. The work she had started as entertainment for wounded servicemen during World War II was having more therapeutic value than anyone had anticipated.

Now Mrs. Aument is in Japan where she recently joined her husband who is in business in Tokyo and immediately took up the work she carried on so successfully in the 40s.

Although she has no formal training in art, Mrs. Aument amused herself as a child by drawing during a long period of convalescence.

“I discovered that friends enjoyed having their pictures sketched,” Mrs. Aument said, “so when I visited the veterans’ hospitals around Boston and New York, the idea struck me that maybe the fel-



lows confined to beds who couldn't get around to see the shows would enjoy being visited by artists.”

The Navy agreed to let Mrs. Aument bring three artists to the Naval Hospital at Brooklyn on a trial basis. The morale of the patients improved remarkably and all of her spare time was soon taken up with visits to St. Albans and Brooklyn Naval Hospitals.

An article in the New York Herald Tribune caught the attention of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. The then

first lady visited USO headquarters in New York where Mrs. Aument was working in the public relations department.

“Everyone thought Mrs. Roosevelt had come to see the USO president,” Mrs. Aument said. “They were so astonished when she insisted that she wanted to see Miss Sharon.”

Mrs. Aument was a new employee and it was some time before they understood who Mrs. Roosevelt was talking about.

“Finally they discovered me in a small office and hurried me out to meet her,” she said. “The great lady took my hand in hers and said, ‘Miss Sharon, this is a wonderful work you are doing.’”

Mrs. Roosevelt asked Mrs. Aument to establish the visiting artists program on a nationwide basis and by the end of the war, artists were making regular calls at all military hospitals in the U.S. and at overseas installations. The program continued until 1949.

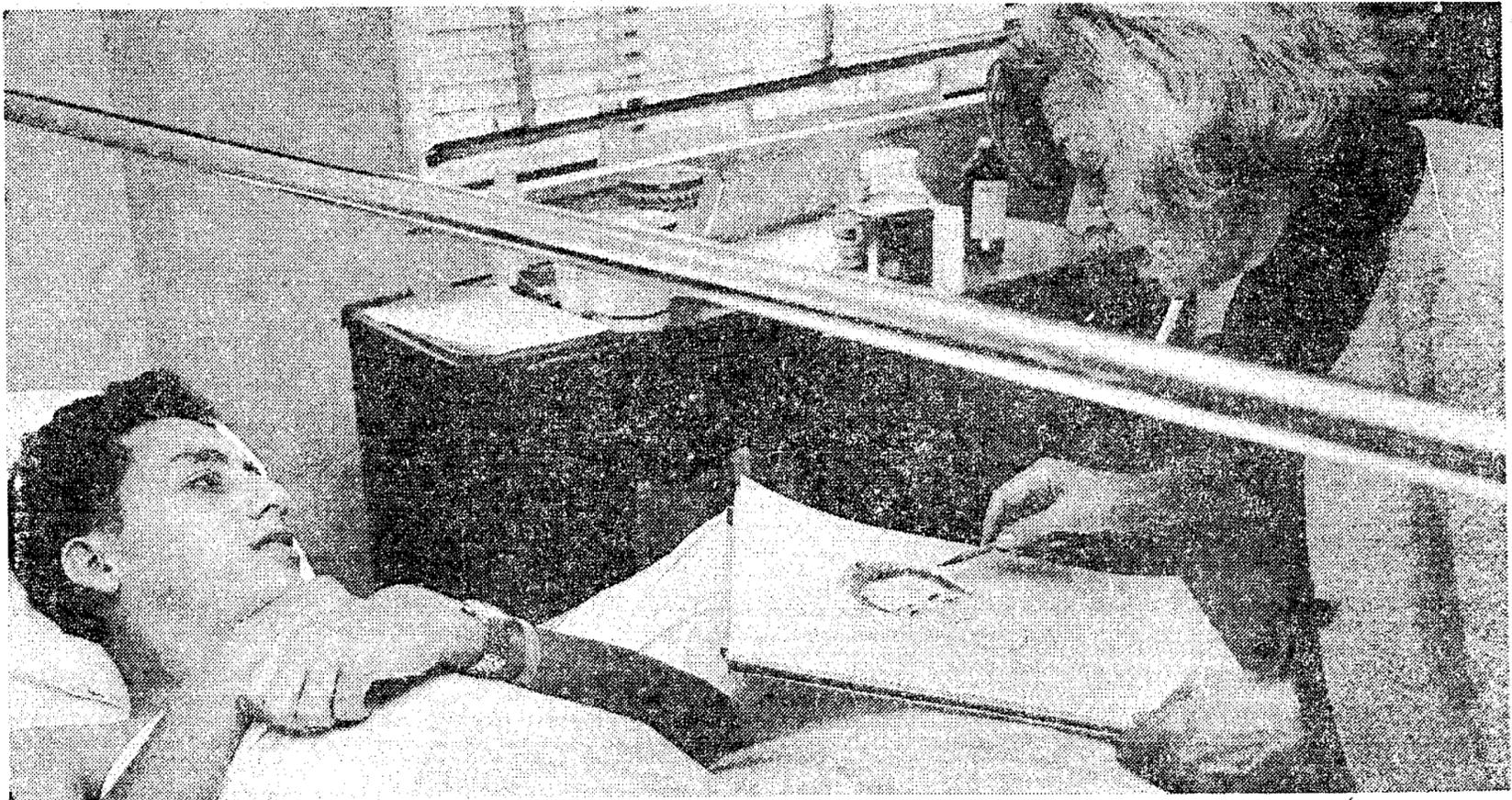
Mrs. Aument offered to go to Vietnam to entertain patients there but her offer was declined because of the rapid movement of patients out of the war zone.

When her husband established a business partnership in Tokyo, Mrs. Aument again offered her services. The Army readily accepted.

There is no effective yardstick with which to measure improvements in morale caused by her weekly visits to the 106th General Hospital in Yokohama.

A Red Cross worker in the hospital said Mrs. Aument gets the men to unload more burdens in one half-hour visit than most people can all day.

Her work is best typified by the title of a book she dedicated to patients in 1945, “It’s Good to Be Alive.”



Artist Mrs. Carroll Aument found that what she started as a simple entertainment gimmick for hospitalized servicemen turned out to be even more valuable from a therapeutic point of view. She is carrying on her work in Japan, drawing portraits of bed-ridden veterans of Vietnam war.