

Cherry Blossom Princesses' Fate Is in the Cards

By Winzola McLendon

THE Cherry Blossom Festival committee isn't running a matrimonial agency, BUT . . . romances have flowered right along with the Cherry Blossoms. And it isn't unusual for a Princess to find her future husband among the handsome young men serving as escorts.

So, the committee has come up with a Princess-Escort pairing off system which guarantees (well, almost guarantees) that the young couple is suitably matched for the five-day Cherry Blossom Festival whirl, OR for a life-long marriage.

Little cards, jumping out of a Univac machine, will seal the Festival fate of 53

Princesses and 53 escorts—all young (21 to 25 years) officers of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard.

Official opening of the Festival will be a 3 p. m. ceremony on April 5, at the Tidal Basin when the Japanese Ambassador's daughter, Akiko Asakai, lights the Stone Lantern. Forming an impressive background for Akiko will be a circle of Princesses (one from each state, Puerto Rico, Guam and the District of Columbia).

Before the Festival ends on Sunday, April 10, the Princesses will have attended dances, receptions, a fashion luncheon, parades and parties, and the Queen

of the Festival will be chosen from the Princesses at the Cherry Blossom Ball, April 8.

TO HELP the Univac match-making machine decide who gets whom, escorts and Princesses have already received lengthy forms to fill out, have answered the usual vital statistics about height, weight, age, sex, color of eyes, hair ("blonde, brunette, redhead, grey, bald").

They've also answered questions about their likes and dislikes—sports (as observers and as participants), smoking, drinking, pets, dancing. They have told whether they like music (classic or popular), whether they prefer to own their own home or to rent; and

have given vacation preferences—desert, mountains, seashore or travel abroad.

All this information will be transferred to index cards, they'll be tossed into the Univac machine, and presto—a compatible couple paired off for the five-day festival.

ONE of the cards, popping out of the machine, will read "Lt. (j. g.) John R. McKinney, age 25, height 6 feet 4, hair blond, eyes blue." The affable foreign liaison officer thinks that being an escort is nice duty if you can get it—and he's had it for three years in a row.

And this year, John will

be skipper of the escort ship, manned by the young military officers. One of the escorts will wind up squiring the lucky girl chosen as Queen.

HOW ARE the young men chosen for escort duty? They're picked "because they're young men, I guess," says Skipper John, "and clean-cut."

Escorts "come aboard" at a "get acquainted" party on April 4. That's the day they'll be paired off via Univac. In the past, the couples were paired off according to height—the tallest man getting the tall-

est girl, the shortest officer, the shortest Princess.

"We used to pretend it didn't matter," confesses Lt. John, "but, we sort of peeked through the door to see how the girls were lining up." Once assigned a Princess, the officer "never" tries to change his girl for another. (Officer and gentleman sort of thing, you know.)

After the pairing-off ceremonies, the cruise goes full steam ahead. There are champagne breakfasts, dances and balls, receptions, a night at the ball game, ceremonies at the Tidal Basin and at Jefferson Me-

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morial and of course THE PARADE. Each escort and his Princess have their own car with driver, are driven along the parade route while spectators cheer.

AND the escorts stand a chance of winning \$52—the Queen's Pool. Each escort puts in one dollar and when the wheel of fortune spins, stopping on the name of the Princess who is to be Queen, her escort wins the money. "We call it a consolation prize," John says. "Because, once the girl is Queen, she has to do so many extra things her escort doesn't see her much."

IS Cherry Blossom duty expensive? That depends on the boy ("and the girl"). An escort can go the whole five days without spending more than tips for coat checking. But most of them take their Princesses out dancing on evenings when no late parties are scheduled. Then, a man can spend "around \$40 for the five days."

Unlike the Princesses, the escorts have no dress problems. They just wear uniforms (with ribbons and medals "if anyone has them"). They wear service dress for daytime functions, dinner dress for the evening.

John thinks it would be nice to have his Princess become Queen. But, "it really doesn't matter"—he likes Cherry Blossom duty. Because, John likes to dance, likes to meet people, and likes parties—of all kinds, sizes and description.



By Jim McNamara, Staff Photographer

LT. (j.g.) JOHN R. MCKINNEY
... it's nice duty, if you can get it

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