

new Corps to break the "traditional and undemocratic policy of the Army and Navy" of placing Negro personnel in separate units.⁴⁹ Their demand that the WAAC place Negro and white women in the same unit was rejected because the WAAC had been directed to follow the Army policy. Now the National Negro Council recommended to the Secretary of War that Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune and one other Negro leader be commissioned assistant directors, which was of course impossible under the no-direct-appointment policy. To make relations more precarious, it soon became apparent that not enough qualified Negro women had presented themselves as applicants for officer candidate school, and it was feared that WAAC failure to fill the quota of 10 percent would be interpreted by the Negro press as discrimination. Accordingly, Army officers made hurried trips to Negro colleges to attempt to recruit qualified women. Mrs. Bethune assisted in the selection of these candidates, not being within the age limit to attend the school herself.⁵⁰

For the Aircraft Warning Service the Army Air Forces asked that it be allowed to put women in uniform without sending them to school, but after long consideration it was decided that AWS officers must graduate from the regular officer candidate school before donning the WAAC uniform. On the matter of selection the Director felt unable to offer opposition, since the women to be selected were already running the operations and filter boards. The Air Forces were therefore allotted eighty vacancies for the first officer candidate class, which brought that class to a total of 440. WAAC Headquarters suffered some misgivings about the absence of the usual tests. However, while

choices were later found to include some women without responsible paid experience and with test scores in the lowest aptitude category, Group V, the majority made successful officers.⁵¹

There was one applicant for attendance at the school who gave the War Department more trouble than all others combined. This was Director Hobby herself, who had made up her mind to attend the school as an ordinary student in order to understand through her own experience the problems of a woman's adjustment to military training. She stood firm in this decision for some time while the expostulations of shocked advisers raged around her.⁵² The Director carried this determination unaltered up through several strata of general officers and was stopped at last only by General Marshall himself, who told her sympathetically but with finality that the thing was impossible under the Army system of rank.

The First WAAC Training Center

Meanwhile, the situation at Fort Des Moines could scarcely have been termed tranquil. Immediately upon passage of the WAAC bill, Colonel Faith and his staff of ten Army officers shot out of Washington in the race to have the training center ready when the women arrived.⁵³ They reached Des Moines with less than two months to spare before opening date.

⁴⁹ *Chicago Defender*, May 23, 1942.

⁵⁰ (1) *Ibid.* (2) Copy of plan in Folder Recruiting, Tasker files, 1942 WAAC files. (3) Interv with Lt Col Woods, 21 Mar 46.

⁵¹ Memo, AG WAAC for Dir WAAC, 3 Jun 42. Tasker Staybacks. Also from interv.

⁵² This incident related separately by former staff members present at the time: Mrs. Herrick, Mrs. Knight, and Mrs. Woods.

⁵³ Memo, G-1 for CofS, 13 May 42. WDGAP 352.01 WAAC. Approved 15 May 42.