

tories and classrooms, and even the local coliseum, so that specialist training might be given in the city, leaving more room for basic trainees at the post.⁷⁰ A tent camp was set up at Fort Des Moines for an additional 634 male cadre, who were intended to stay only four months, until Waacs could graduate and replace them. Action was not taken until 3 July to order these men in, and most arrived at Des Moines scarcely one jump ahead of the women whom they were to instruct.

It was now determined that the first officer candidate class of 440, which began on 20 July, would be followed by classes of 125 women weekly until at least 1,300 officers had been trained. Officer training time had already been cut from three months to six weeks. It had also been decided to start the first class of enrolled women soon after the first officer candidate class, without waiting for WAAC officers to graduate and assist in their training. Enrolled women would have only a brief four weeks of basic training, instead of the originally planned three months.⁷¹

Specialist schools—for cooks, clerks, and drivers—would be ready to function in August when the first enrolled women graduated from basic training. Thus it was believed that it would be possible as early as 9 November 1942 to begin sending three fully trained headquarters companies, with officers and cadre, to field stations each week, and to train and return to their station 300 Aircraft Warning Service Waacs weekly, beginning in September.⁷²

*The First WAAC Officer Candidate Class,
20 July–29 August 1942*

By 20 July 1942, with the opening of the first officer candidate class,⁷³ the mounting interest of press and public reached a

point of near-hysteria. The old post at Fort Des Moines swarmed with dignitaries, invited and uninvited, who braved the steamy midsummer Iowa weather in order to view history in the making. Every angle of the new scene was well documented by the press, while photographers invaded the barracks in search of the still-elusive WAAC underwear. Authorities were particularly alarmed to discover that a number of women reporters had resolved to participate in the first week of processing in order to reveal to the waiting public a woman's every sensation as she was converted into a soldier. Because it was not yet known whether the women's sensations would be printable, this request was refused, and the press was informed that the post was theirs for one day only. After that, a two-week news blackout was to be enforced while the Army and the women became acquainted in comparative privacy. This step seemed necessary to avoid complete disruption of training, but was later believed by some staff officers to have alienated certain writers and news agencies.⁷⁴

Before crowds of interested Des Moines citizens the arriving Waacs were whisked

⁷⁰ Memo cited n. 63. Also Folder, Lease of Real Estate, 27 Jun 42, SPWA 481 (6-7-42).

⁷¹ Memo, Preplanners for G-1, 2 Apr 42. Tasker Staybacks.

⁷² (1) Memo, Brig Gen Idwal H. Edwards, G-3, for CofS, 3 Jul 42. WDGCT 291.9 WAAC, in CofS 291.9 WAAC. (2) 1st Ind, AG WAAC for Dir Mil Pers SOS through CofAdm Serv, 29 Jun 42. WA 320.2 (6-25-42). Copy in Tasker Staybacks.

⁷³ Dir WAAC for CofS, 4 Aug 42, 1st Ind, Exec Off CofAdm Serv, for Dir WAAC, 10 Aug 42. SPAAI 320 WAAC, in Dir Adm Serv ASF Sp Coll DRB AGO.

⁷⁴ If no other source is stated, descriptions of this first class are based upon: (1) accounts given by women participants to the author, and upon her own impressions as a member of Company 1. Other accounts differ only as to whether Company 1, 2, 3, or 4 was the best company. (2) Hist of 1st WAAC Tng Cen.