

On the fourth day, with processing completed and the women at last neatly uniformed in khaki skirts and shirts, Director Hobby addressed the group for the first time. She had been at the Fort since the first day, observing somewhat wistfully. Now she spoke words calculated to remove the military trees and reveal the forest, to give the women perspective on history and where they now stood in it:

May fourteenth is a date already written into the history books of tomorrow. . . . Long-established precedents of military tradition have given way to pressing need. Total war is, by definition, endlessly expansive. . . . You are the first women to serve. . . . Never forget it. . . .

You have just made the change from peacetime pursuits to wartime tasks—from the individualism of civilian life to the anonymity of mass military life. You have given up comfortable homes, highly paid positions, leisure. You have taken off silk and put on khaki. And all for essentially the same reason—you have a debt and a date. A debt to democracy, a date with destiny. . . .

You do not come into a Corps that has an established tradition. You must make your own. But in making your own, you do have one tradition—the integrity of all the brave American women of all time who have loved their country. You, as you gather here, are living history. On your shoulders will rest the military reputation and the civilian recognition of this Corps. I have no fear that any woman here will fail the standards of the Corps.

From now on you are soldiers, defending a free way of life. Your performance will set the standards of the Corps. You will live in the spotlight. Even though the lamps of experience are dim, few if any mistakes will be permitted you.

You are no longer individuals. You wear the uniform of the Army of the United States. Respect that uniform. Respect all that it stands for. Then the world will respect all that the Corps stands for. . . . Make the adjustment from civilian to military life without faltering and without complaint. . . .

In the final analysis, the only testament free people can give to the quality of freedom is the way in which they resist the forces that peril freedom.⁷⁵

As one of the women later said, "It was only then that I really knew what I had done in enlisting. I looked around the roomful of women and suddenly had no more doubts that it was right. My feet stopped hurting, and the war and my place in it became very real."

The Training Course

From this time on the work began in earnest. The women were up at five-thirty or before in order to be neatly dressed for six o'clock reveille, a process that took most women somewhat longer than men. After making beds, cleaning, and picking up cigarette butts and photographers' flash bulbs in the area, the women marched to breakfast and then began classes, which lasted until five in the afternoon, with an intermission for lunch. After supper there was a required study hour and then a session devoted to the washing and pressing of uniforms and the shining of shoes.

The WAAC basic and officer candidate courses were identical with corresponding courses for men, except for the omission of combat subjects. Women studied military sanitation and first aid, military customs and courtesy, map reading, defense against chemical attack, defense against air attack, interior guard, company administration, supply, mess management, and other familiar subjects. A few courses were more or less adapted to women. The hygiene course was designed by the local hospital

⁷⁵ WDBPR Press Release, 23 Jul 42, revised copy, Remarks by Mrs. Hobby, Dir WAAC, to Students at WAAC Tng Cen.