

the neck.⁸² The young officers did not seem to know how to put in their places the female apple polishers and classroom show-offs whose tactics were transparent to other women. The food was good and abundant but not always attractively prepared. These and similar occurrences gave the first hint of what was repeatedly demonstrated: that Waacs were often less tolerant of imperfection than men—a trait which some Army psychologists believed was due less to their sex than to the fact that all were volunteers, since male volunteers also frequently showed greater impatience than did draftees.⁸³

This first class was nevertheless still too uncertain as to correct procedure, and too eager to please, to be very critical. General morale was at unprecedented heights. Women stood retreat with real appreciation of the ceremony. They trembled lest their company officers give them a gig. They crossed streets and ran out of doorways to practice their salute on everything that glistened, until the outnumbered male officers were forced to flee the front walks. No imperfection seemed of much importance when weighed against the general desire to justify the Army's admission of women to its ranks.

Graduation

On the eve of graduation there occurred one further test of the new soldiers' soldierliness: the release of the roster of class standing. Herein, it was discovered that young women who had dated their company officers had mysteriously soared in rating to outrank the older women who had led their classes in training.⁸⁴

Since many of the company officers were ex-college boys of 19, any woman

over 30 had evidently appeared antique. Katherine R. Goodwin, who later headed some 50,000 Army Service Forces Wacs, recalled: "Captain B. called me in and told me I was so old he didn't see how I could have made the journey to Des Moines, and that he couldn't imagine what use the Army could ever make of me, and perhaps I had better go home before I got any older."

Angry members rose in class to ask an explanation of the mathematics involved in rating, and an inquiry was launched by WAAC Headquarters. In general it was found that the honest tendency of the male officer was to consider a glamorous young woman, or a mannish loud-voiced one, the best material for leadership of women, whereas the women themselves had given highest ratings to women of mature judgment, and to those with a faculty for sweeping and polishing their share of the area. It was concluded that the problem would correct itself in later classes where women company officers had replaced men. However, the same situation was later to cause some difficulty in the field where men ordinarily selected and promoted WAC officers.

Graduation day, on 29 August, saw 436 new WAAC third officers, all with shining new gold bars but no WAAC insignia,

⁸² Around waist: (1) heavy jersey panties, (2) sturdy girdle, (3) heavy jersey slip, (4) cotton shirt, (5) double 8.2 chino waistband of skirt; plus for dress uniform: (6) heavy cotton jacket, (7) double jacket belt. Around neck: (1) neckband of shirt (about four layers of cotton), (2) mohair tie; and for dress (3) jacket collar.

⁸³ Opinion of Maj Albert Preston, Jr., MC, head of Consultation Serv at Ft Des Moines. See below, Ch. XXXI.

⁸⁴ Rating was based one third each on grades, platoon rating, and company officer rating, but in the final results the last item was found to have outweighed the other two.