

Quartermaster General's specified shipment schedules were not being met. The supply of summer uniforms became erratic, while almost no winter clothing of any sort—underwear, coats, or uniforms—had been received. The Iowa weather proved un-co-operative, and an unseasonable cold spell struck in September, blanketing Fort Des Moines in snow. Temperatures stood near the freezing mark inside the newly constructed barracks and classrooms, known informally as Boomtown, where heating equipment had not yet been installed.

Within a few days the training center was plunged into a crisis of health—and, it was feared, of public relations—as respiratory disorders swept the student body. Hospitals filled suddenly, while continued instruction was made difficult by coughing and sneezing in the unheated classrooms.

At this point Director Hobby herself hastened to the training center. Putting on the summer raincoat the women were wearing, she immediately caught a bad cold, and, more practically, telephoned to higher headquarters in Washington in a manner that evoked a promise to expedite clothing shipments without delay. She also took the precaution of demanding several thousand enlisted men's overcoats from a neighboring station's surplus stock, and these were on their way before nightfall. They were to be worn all winter while action was being expedited in Washington.⁴

The men's overcoats proved excellent substitutes not only for WAAC coats but also for mittens and leggings, since they covered hands and feet and trailed on the ground. Unfortunately, Waacs found them so amusing in appearance that they could not forbear taking pictures, which they sent indiscriminately to friends and relatives, to the dismay of recruiters.

Close behind the Director came the Deputy Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Joseph T. McNarney, who verified her comments and immediately wrote to the Services of Supply: "Although the weather was cold, the Waacs were still wearing summer uniforms. They had been issued enlisted men's coats as an expedient. Please look into the matter of expediting winter uniforms."⁵ Meanwhile, a brief Indian summer intervened to make summer uniforms again adequate.

In spite of supply difficulties, officers who inspected the training center in late September and early October reported that an excellent state of training had been attained. The WAAC graduates, both officer and enrolled, won unanimous praise. What seemed most remarkable to reviewing officers was the somewhat unremarkable fact that women could march and drill, a sight which melted the sternest critics. WAAC Headquarters' superior, General Grunert, Chief of Administrative Services, reported upon his return from Des Moines in early October:

I was received at the entrance to the post by the band and an escort of honor which I complimented on its smart appearance, correct procedure, and excellent marching. . . . I was particularly impressed by the uniform smart appearance of all personnel, with the instructional setup, with the orderliness and arrangement of quarters, and with the punctilious saluting. . . . A late afternoon review was a gratifying sight to behold. The formations, evolutions, marching, and saluting compared favorably with the best I have seen anywhere. . . .

I feel assured that the WAAC is off to an excellent start and that the commands re-

⁴ From: (1) Persons at Des Moines at the time, including the author; (2) the Waac aide to the Director, 3d O Betty Bandel.

⁵ Memo, DCofS for Somervell, 11 Oct 42. WDCA 291.9 (9-11-42).