

sufficient experience, lack of outstanding ability, or domineering traits and a habit of "treating adult women like high school freshmen."⁴⁵

The prolonged delay could not be explained to the women, since even their destination, like all troop movements, was classified; in general, they attributed it to vacillation and bungling in WAAC Headquarters. Actually, shipment waited upon authority from the European theater, which had requested activation of the units but had not yet furnished shipment priority. At the same time, Operations Division of the General Staff informed WAAC Headquarters that shipment without a priority was impossible because of the shipping jams resulting from the invasion of North Africa in November.⁴⁶

Disbandment of the units was being considered when, a few days after the invasion, General Eisenhower cabled for a company of WAAC typists and telephone operators for North Africa, and provided a high shipment priority. However, although the units earmarked for London contained the necessary specialists, Director Hobby felt unable to assume the responsibility of ordering them into the more active North African area without the protection of military status.

The danger was graphically demonstrated a few days later when, in answer to a cabled request from the European theater setting high air priority, the first five of the Waacs were flown to England—five officers qualified to act as executive secretaries. These officers were immediately placed by the theater on a ship for North Africa; General Eisenhower had in fact cabled for them on the fifth day of invasion. Nearing the coast, the ship carrying the Waacs was sunk by enemy action, with loss of all equipment. The five Waacs

were fortunate enough to be rescued by a lifeboat and a British destroyer, but the scare was sufficient to emphasize the War Department's untenable position had the issue of hospitalization, capture, or death gratuity arisen publicly.

At this, Director Hobby herself flew to Daytona Beach and told the assembled women that their shipment must be either canceled or diverted to an unnamed but dangerous combat theater to which she would not order them against their wishes. She noted later that she reminded them of their lack of military status and its protection and "that I wanted them to appreciate the full significance of what I was saying." Then, in a speech which spectators called reminiscent of another Texan's at the Alamo, she called for volunteers to step forward to fill the unit. There were 300 women in the room, of whom 298 volunteered upon the instant. At this, Director Hobby was unable to continue speaking and hastily sought privacy in a broom closet.⁴⁷

Half of this number were chosen, processed, and ordered to the staging area in December. The remainder were held until the European theater had three times more postponed its shipping priority, when they were disbanded and sent to other duties.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Documents dated 23 Oct 42 and 27 Nov 42. SPWA 320.2 sec 1.

⁴⁶ (1) D/F, OPD to G-1, 24 Nov 42. OPD 322.999 WAAC (11-14-42); (2) Cbls, London to AGWAR, 4416, 3 Nov 42, London to WAR, 5057, 19 Nov 42, and London to AGWAR, 5445, 4 Dec 42. All in SPWA 320.2 secs 1 and 4a.

⁴⁷ The two nonvolunteers had invalid parents. (1) Senate Com on Mil Affairs, 78th Cong, 1st sess, *Hearings on S 495*, 3 Feb 43. (2) Interv with Col Bandel.

⁴⁸ (1) Hist of WAAC-WAC in ETO, 1942-44, by Hist Sec, ETO. (Hereafter cited as ETO WAC Hist.) OCMH. (2) Ltr, WAAC Hq to Col Abbott, Hq ETO, 27 Jan 43. SPWA 320.2 sec 2.