

The Corps of Engineers now also requisitioned Waacs for an important project at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, so secret that its character could not be revealed.

The Signal Corps secured adoption of a plan to place in the WAAC some 8,000 civilian women, known as WIRES (Women in Radio and Electrical Service), whom it was training in radio, telephone, and other communications work; a staff director had already been accepted.

Medical Department requests also came in for the first time on 13 March, and totaled 20,869 or from 30 to 50 percent of enlisted personnel in hospitals of 500 beds or more. The requests were for women trained in various medical skills and also for clerks, drivers, and mechanics, plus 4,000 orderlies and others for low-grade work around hospitals. No staff director was accepted.⁴⁵

Overseas Theaters

The decentralization of authority applied even to overseas theaters, since approaching legislation would give the Waacs the military status that would make further shipment morally justifiable. Requests from the North African and European theaters were by now so extensive that a War Department decision on priority was necessary. Director Hobby favored priority to the zone of the interior, but theaters argued that skilled Waacs had proved able to replace from two to three men apiece in North Africa, and that, in view of the difficulty of maintaining personnel overseas, theaters should get the most competent. Both General Somervell and General Marshall inclined to this view, and finally informed the Director that overseas theaters' requests would have priority.⁴⁶

The staff director for the European

theater, Capt. Anna W. Wilson, arrived in England on 13 April 1943 to plan for later shipments. No firm shipment priorities had yet arrived, and the several requisitions for Waacs were by this time so confused and overlapping that it was impossible to tell whether they concerned the same or separate units. Captain Wilson found that the theater had so little information about the Corps' mission and capabilities that specific requests were difficult; when this was supplied, the Eighth Air Force in the theater requested a WAAC battalion, and supplied a firm shipping priority. The first unit for England therefore began to be organized, and was to reach the theater in the summer shortly after the Corps obtained military status. Other earlier shipments to the North African theater were also authorized.⁴⁷

Readiness for Increase in Numbers

By late spring of 1943 the WAAC organization was thus fully decentralized and well prepared, as far as mere skeletal organization was concerned, for Army status and for expansion to any number. Its staff advisers were in almost every important Army command, learning its needs and peculiarities; its command powers were so delegated that shift to Army status would scarcely be noticed; its training system was fully staffed and capable of accommodating large numbers of recruits. The administrative network was ready. Had no other factor been involved, expansion to a million or more upon this frame appeared easily possible.

⁴⁵ See section on each service in Ch. XVIII, below.

⁴⁶ Office Memo, WAAC Hq Opns Br for Exec WAAC, 29 May 43. SPWA 320.2 sec 4a.

⁴⁷ See Chs. XIX and XX, below.