

CHAPTER X

Stresses of Rapid Build-up: Recruiting

The Army Recruiting Service, to which had been delegated the recruitment of women, inherited a discouraging tradition: from Revolutionary days onward the Army had never been able to recruit the number of men needed to fill its ranks in a major war. The Continental Congress had been unable to persuade each colony to contribute its fair share of men, and General George Washington had lamented, "We should not have found ourselves this spring so weak as to be insulted by 5,000 men . . . ; we should not have been for the greatest part of the war inferior to the enemy . . . for want of force which the country was completely able to afford."¹ In the War of 1812 and during the Indian wars, even the meager forces authorized by Congress could not be obtained by recruiting. Both the North and the South, during the Civil War, had to resort to conscription before the war ended.

With the first World War, it became an established tradition that the nation would draft soldiers if they were needed. Both the public and the Army accepted the fact that a volunteer system would never persuade the needed number of men to enlist in a national emergency. In the interval of peace between the two World Wars, Congress whittled the enlisted strength of the Regular Army down to

118,750 men—less than the total number of women who were eventually to be recruited for the WAC.² The Army Recruiting Service therefore was geared to bring in only a modest number of men, and this during the depression years when surplus manpower was abundant. Even before the nation entered World War II Congress again provided for conscription, so that the Army had never been obliged to perfect a high-grade sales organization. After enactment of Selective Service legislation, only limited personnel and facilities remained available to the Recruiting Service, which was devoted chiefly to Aviation Cadet recruiting and other special projects.

It was thus a severely handicapped organization that undertook WAAC recruiting upon the Corps' formation. In the opinion of the Army officers later assigned to salvage the program, the Army Recruiting Service was placed at a great disadvantage in being forced to attempt a feat entirely outside its experience: to bring in larger numbers of women than it had ever

¹ *Military Policy of the United States* (U. S. Military Academy, West Point, 1944), with foreword by Col. Herman Beukema, Prof., USMA, p. 8.

² *Ibid.* The top WAC strength at any one time was just below 100,000; total number recruited was 143,435. See Tables 1 and 2, Appendix A. See also Ch. XXXIV, below.