

them. This, just published on 27 May 1943, could have been the "agreement" mentioned in the 8 June column, although it was not "supersecret" or even secret or confidential but merely restricted to military personnel. Save for this, G-2 found that no directives on the subject had ever been issued by WAAC Headquarters except one letter in May, in answer to an inquiry, which said definitely that Waacs would not be given even so much as instruction in the use of prophylactics, much less the prophylactics themselves.⁴⁷

War Department Denial

The War Department thus was in an excellent position to force the columnist to retract his statement. The question was whether it would be wise to lend the affair the dignity of a formal War Department denial. Many of the Director's advisers counseled against it, pointing out that persons would read the denial who had never read the attack, and that the present distress, anger, and humiliation experienced by the Director and all other Waacs would in time be forgotten. On the other hand, the shock which the column had caused the Waacs and their families was so great that an immediate denial seemed necessary to preserve the faith and self-respect of the Corps. An Army officer described a typical reaction in the WAAC company on his post:

It raised hell with that company. Long distance calls from parents began to come in, telling the girls to come home. The younger girls all came in crying, asking if this disgrace was what they had been asked to join the Army for. The older ones were just bitter that such lies could be printed. It took all the pride and enthusiasm for the Army right out of them.⁴⁸

An enlisted woman described the same reaction; she said:

I went home on leave to tell my family it wasn't true. When I went through the streets, I held up my head because I imagined everybody was talking about me, but when I was at last safe inside our front door, I couldn't say a word to them, I was so humiliated—I just burst out crying, and my people ran and put their arms around me and cried with me. I couldn't understand how my eagerness to serve our country could have brought such shame on us all.⁴⁹

Director Hobby herself, when she gathered her staff to tell them what had happened, broke down and was unable to continue speaking. The severity of the reaction of all Waacs, in whatever ranks, could be explained only by the fact that all, at this date, were the early pioneers whose enlistment had been motivated by a perhaps impractical idealism, intense enough to sustain them through the supply and training problems of the first winter, but too intense to receive such a gross attack with the indifference its inaccuracy merited.

Director Hobby therefore made the decision to reassure the women and their parents by public denials, whatever the effect on newspaper readers. Such denials were thereupon immediately made by the President and Mrs. Roosevelt, by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, by General Somervell of the Army Service Forces, by members of Congress, and by Director Hobby and other WAAC officers. The President told his press conference that it was a "deliberate newspaper job" and that the reporter had merely taken orders

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, with incl Ltr, WAAC Hq to CG 2d SvC, 14 May 43. SPWA 726 (5-6-43).

⁴⁸ Interv with Joseph A. Bourdow, 9 Aug 48, then of Ft Washington AGO Sch.

⁴⁹ Sgt Amelia Madrak, Hist Div SSUSA, secy of author, 1947.