

"from the top."⁵⁰ Mrs. Roosevelt in her press conference on 8 June stated that rumors about misconduct among Waacs in North Africa were Nazi propaganda, and that "Americans fall for Axis-inspired propaganda like children."⁵¹ Naturally, she said, the Germans were interested in discrediting an organization that released so many men for the fighting front.⁵²

Secretary Stimson's denial was the most publicized, and did in fact reach many people, especially on the west coast, who had never heard of the columnist or the rumors:

Sinister rumors aimed at destroying the reputation of the Waacs are absolutely and completely false. Anything which would interfere with their recruiting or destroy the reputation of the Corps, and by so doing interfere with increase in the combat strength of our Army, would be of value to the enemy. The repetition of any unfounded rumor . . . is actually an aid to the enemy.

He pointed out that reflection on the WAAC was reflection on the whole of American womanhood, and that to malign the nation's women could easily destroy the morale of men at the front.⁵³

In addition, General Somervell told a Congressional committee that the rumors were spread by a person sympathetic to the Axis and that the Waacs were "your and my daughters and sisters" and entitled to respect.⁵⁴ Representative Edith Rogers told Congress that "nothing would please Hitler more" than to discredit Waacs and American women. Representative Mary Norton said, "Loose talk concerning our women in the Armed Services cannot be less than Nazi-inspired."⁵⁵ Director Hobby told reporters that there was "absolutely no foundation of truth in the statement."

Under the barrage, the columnist was

forced to retract his statement, which he did, although protesting that his information came from an "intelligent and trustworthy" official who swore that "his eyes had passed over" the alleged secret paper.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, three years later, religious publications were still to be found reprinting the story, and actually attributing the columnist's lines to Director Hobby. Director Hobby's picture was labeled "Astounding Degeneracy," and one article continued, "Mrs. William Petrus Hobby, chieftain of the WAC, says, 'Contraceptives and prophylactics will be furnished to members of the WAC according to a super-secret agreement reached by high-ranking officers of the War Department. . . .'"⁵⁷

Investigation by Intelligence Service

In June, a full-scale investigation of possible Axis influence in the rumors was launched by the Army's Military Intelli-

⁵⁰ *Washington Post*, June 30, 1943.

⁵¹ *Washington Daily News*, June 9, 1943.

⁵² *PM* (New York), June 10, 1943.

⁵³ *Washington Post*, June 11, 1943.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, June 16, 1943.

⁵⁵ Both in the *Washington Evening Star*, June 10, 1943.

⁵⁶ "Capitol Stuff," June 10, 1943. The columnist later insisted he was vindicated when, in 1945, *Time* alleged the Army had declared surplus the remains of a stock of contraceptive jelly. He did not check far enough to discover that such jelly, if it existed, would have been sold in any Army PX, where Waacs formed an almost microscopic fraction of female customers, who included soldiers' wives and other authorized purchasers. In fact, upon investigation, Army officers were unable to locate any such stock of contraceptive jelly as reported by *Time*. Transcript of Tp Conv, Maj Chance and Mr. Marples, WDBPR. WDWAC 331.1 (1945-46).

⁵⁷ (1) *The Evangelical Beacon*, Vol. XIV, No. 22, February 27, 1945, incl to Ltr, AAF PDC to Air WAC Div, 20 Sep 45. WDWAC 330.14. (2) Ltr, Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt to Dir WAC, 25 Oct 44, incl Ltr from voter re religious magazine of alleged 1,500,000 weekly circulation, *The Missionary Worker*. WDWAC 330.4.