

First Companies in the WAC

Meanwhile, station commanders were alarmed to note that, during the two-month period of indecision and confusion, many women who had at first intended to enlist were changing their minds. The delay between passage of the bill on 1 July and the scheduled date for mass swearing-in on 1 September gave parents, friends, and former employers time to urge a return home. Moreover, Army supervisors were found to be offering certain women high civilian salaries to leave the Corps and continue in the same jobs as civilians—the advantage being, from the officers' viewpoint, that the women could then date officers and live where their quarters and hours were not supervised. This practice became so widespread that Colonel Hobby was able to collect evidence of it sufficient to secure an Army Service Forces directive forbidding such offers. Meanwhile, at stations where such transfers had already occurred, remaining Waacs were found less disposed to continue under military restrictions and enlisted wages.²⁷

In late July, as the evidence of suasion by relatives and employers mounted, it was directed that each station swear in its company as soon as it was ready, instead of waiting for the scheduled 1 September date for mass enlistment. Only WAAC officers were required to wait until 1 September. Where 95 percent or more of a company intended to enlist, it was suggested that a mass ceremony be held with appropriate publicity.²⁸

This move proved successful and field companies raced to be the first to enlist. One Army Service Forces and two Army Air Forces companies tied for first place, each with 100 percent enlistment.²⁹

Others had only a few losses, chiefly for physical disability, and throughout August these were sworn in as fast as possible.

As the WAC waited to discover what the total loss would be, it became evident that there was considerable variation from station to station—some losing none, some losing 5 or 10 percent, many about 20 percent, and others as much as 50 percent. When the loss figures from their several stations were compared, higher commanders were presented with what amounted to a chart of relative efficiency in personnel management. Air and service command headquarters at once sent inspectors and WAAC staff directors to the stations showing high losses, in the hope that conditions might be corrected while there was still time for the women to change their minds before discharge. Commanding generals of major commands became generally aware of the matter; some actually went in person to speak to the women.³⁰

Why Some Went Home

The combined discoveries of these inspectors gave WAAC Headquarters a reasonably clear picture of the reasons for which women were leaving. The most revealing discovery was that the majority was not quitting because of the hardships of Army life. On the contrary, at many

²⁷ (1) Memo, Dir WAC for Dir Pers ASF, 23 Aug 43, and Memo, Dir Pers ASF for TAG, 27 Aug 43. SPWA 314.7 sec 4. (2) WAAC Daily Journal, Vol. I. 28 Jul 43. Also M/R, 13 Aug 43. SPWA 230.14 (7-22-43).

²⁸ AGO Memo W635-14-43, 30 Jul 43.

²⁹ On 2 August 1943: Moody Field, Valdosta, Ga.; Mitchel Field, N. Y.; Edgewood Arsenal, Md. WDBPR Press Release, 3 Aug 43.

³⁰ Folder, Congratulatory Letters, SPWA 314.7 (6-29-43) 1943.