

To a headquarters wrestling with the problem of throwing thousands of fighting men and aircraft around the world, the entire WAAC program must have seemed at that moment a troublesome gnat buzzing around the head of a giant.

Promptly snaring the gnat on its return trip through A-4, the Air WAC Officer worked out a series of directives and accounting procedures which allowed the program to continue without interruption and which eventually led to full integration.

Acceptance of Wacs on Airfields

Wacs arriving on air bases ordinarily reported an enthusiastic reception. One company commander noted:

The friendly atmosphere and co-operative spirit prevalent throughout this post have made the Wacs feel that they are a definite part of the military life here. Everything is being done to further the comfort of the group.²

By mid-1944, Wacs became even more popular when, the supply of infantry replacements having proved insufficient, the War Department required the transfer of thousands of combat-fit men from the Air Forces to the Ground Forces. Airfields thus lost many of the specialized medical and technical personnel upon whom they had depended for normal operations, and Wacs became increasingly sought after as replacements.

Receptivity was also greatly increased by the official action of General Arnold and his staff, whose policy from the beginning was to neglect no measure that might impress upon the public the AAF's real need for Wacs and its cordiality toward them. When the Air-WAC recruiting campaign was launched in October of

1943, General Arnold issued a public statement that "members of the WAC have made an enviable record through their work at Air Force installations."³ In November the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, Brig. Gen. William E. Hall, journeyed to Philadelphia to see the first all-Air-WAC company sworn in. In December Maj. Gen. Barney McK. Giles, the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, wrote to all Air Wacs that "it is the record you have made which has convinced the AAF of the great value of Wacs."⁴ In the same month the AAF declared a national "Air WAC Week" in which airfields everywhere honored their Wacs at retreat parades and other ceremonies. Upon receipt of evidence that military personnel were involved in the slander campaign, General Arnold denounced such undercutting of his policy in an angry letter to the field.⁵ With such constant and public declaration of policy, the Army Air Forces came to have the reputation in the eyes of the public and of the Wacs themselves of being friendly toward the employment of Wacs, and appreciative of their services.

The Air WAC Division

This attitude showed itself in AAF headquarters by a willingness to consider favorably the recommendations of the Air WAC Officer. A working WAC staff organization was set up which, in Lt. Col. Betty Bandel's opinion, was near-perfect under existing conditions. The Air WAC Division was granted a strength of six officers plus clerical help, and was eventually placed in the office of the Assistant

² WAC CO, Mather Field, Calif. AAF WAC Hist, p. 20.

³ WDBPR Press Release, 20 Oct 43.

⁴ AAF WAC Hist, pp. 62-64.

⁵ Ltr, CG AAF to all Air Forces and Comds, 22 Feb 44. WDWAC 341 (3-16-44).