

Even though exact statistics thus were never gathered, it was known that the Army Service Forces, as its name implied, offered large numbers of noncombat jobs intrinsically suitable for women, and that Wacs at the height of the war had worked their way into a wide variety of them. Especially from the individual administrative and technical services, some conclusions could be obtained as to the relative success and suitability of the duties.

The Signal Corps

The first of the Army Service Forces' agencies to request Wacs was, according to its own undisputed claims, the Signal Corps.⁴ Even in World War I the Chief Signal Officer reported:

Our experience in Paris with the untrained and undisciplined English-speaking French women operators and experience elsewhere with the willing but untrained men operators was almost disastrous. The remarkable change in the character of the service at General Headquarters and other points when the American women operators took over was one of the features of the Signal Corps work of the times.⁵

In spite of this early enthusiasm, the Signal Corps experienced numerous delays and difficulties in launching a successful program to employ Waacs in World War II. In part this early delay resulted from a strong distrust of the Auxiliary status. In the earliest conferences the chief exponent of this view was Col. Henry L. P. King, Military Personnel Branch, Office of the Chief Signal Officer, who feared loss of trained personnel if the WAAC Director had command powers. In addition to seeking assignment and transfer control, the Signal Corps asked that the women wear Signal Corps insignia, that their units be designated Signal Corps and not

WAAC, and that communications training be given by the Signal Corps and not by WAAC training centers.

Such proposals for integration were deemed by the War Department illegal under the Auxiliary status, with the exception of the matter of technical training. WAAC Headquarters proved agreeable to abandoning its plans for a communications specialists school at WAAC training centers in order that the Signal Corps might send qualified personnel to whatever Signal Corps schools were indicated. The Director also gave reassurance that—as was later to be demonstrated—she would never move any such unit, once assigned. At this, the Chief Signal Officer expressed in writing his appreciation of the concession and added:

It is felt that as a result of the co-operation given . . . by the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, the way has been opened for the release of needed enlisted men to field units and for a more extensive use of WAAC personnel.⁶

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, statements through 1943 are from (1) Narrative OCSigO, Activities in Connection with WAAC or WAC Pers for Signal Corps Duty, October 1943, DRB AGO. Hereafter cited as SigC WAC Narrative. (See Bibliographical Note.) (2) Bound folder, WAAC Pers on Signal Corps Duty, Tab 1, Policy of CSigO Regarding WAAC Pers; loaned historian by Capt Jane Reeves, SigC WAC Stf Dir, 3 May 46, present location unknown. Hereafter cited as SigC Stf Dir file. (3) Interviews with: Maj Walter F. McDonald, SigC, OCSigO; Col Donald H. Nelson, OCSigO, Maj James L. Clark, OCSigO; Mr. Bruce W. Quisenberry, PRO, OCSigO; Lt Norma J. Fisher, OCSigO; Maj Charlotte E. Rhodes, former CO 334 1st Sig Serv Co, Germany, and 17th Sig Co, Ft Myer, Va.; all on 19 Sep 49; Capt Barbara Rodes, WAC Stf Dir, G-2, 22 Mar 46.

⁵ Rpt, CSigO to SW, 1919, extract in Memo, Chief MPD SigC for Adm Div SigC, 29 Sep 42. SigC 320.2 WAC.

⁶ Memo, Brig Gen Charles M. Milliken, OCSigO, for Dir WAAC, 26 Oct 42. SPWA 320.2 (10-26-42), unnumbered folder, Signal Corps, G-1 WD WAC files.