

in March of 1943, were units assigned to Camp Crowder, Missouri, which by the end of the WAAC totaled some 489 enrolled women and 100 officers. Another unit under Signal Corps control went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, in June, and still others were on requisition. However, most women in these units were not technical specialists, but clerical and overhead workers to aid in running the schools.¹⁴

From the first there was no doubt of these units' success in the assigned duties. In Allied Headquarters in North Africa, the assistant chief signal officer stated:

The manner in which they picked up the work was outstanding. . . . Had we had enough of them, we could have used them to operate all our fixed communications installations—telephones and telegraph—throughout the rear areas. Every one . . . released some man for Signal Corps duty up in the combat zone.

The former chief signal officer of the AAF in North Africa added:

Don't tell me a woman can't keep a secret. Why, their own company commander doesn't even know where the board is located—we've tested the girls again and again.¹⁵

The Chief Signal Officer, Maj. Gen. Dawson Olmstead, on a visit to the area, was informed by the theater commander that approximately 1,300 more Signal Corps Waacs in ten different specialties would be required if obtainable. The same good reports were received from the European theater, where, after a one-week indoctrination course, 100 WAAC telephone operators were assigned to operate multiple switchboards at five command headquarters. The officer in charge reported, "Very soon I received praise of the improved service, as the good results were noticed almost immediately."¹⁶

Another early success was the participation of twenty-nine WAC telephone operators in the Quebec Conference in August of 1943. Rushed from train to switchboard, the women were on continuous duty for eighteen hours and doubled as secretaries and stenographers when a shortage of these occurred. After seventeen days of secret duty, each member received an individual commendation. Wacs also served successfully on the switchboards at the Cairo Conference and the Potsdam Conference.¹⁷

Requests from Signal officers in the United States continued to indicate an urgent need for more Waacs, since current directives required release of their general service men. Civilian replacements were scarce, and available limited service men often were unsuitable.¹⁸ In general such requests also indicated a desire for Signal Corps technical training for the women. In England the using agencies, desiring teletypists, had been obliged to train WAAC typists in the theater, which they protested was a task more properly assumed by the Signal Corps in the United States. Studies showed that women could, with training, fill seventy-eight different Signal Corps jobs. Therefore, in May of 1943, Brig. Gen. Henry L. P. King's successor, Col. Duncan Hodges, put the long-delayed WIRES plan into effect. The women were to be trained first in Signal Corps duties in an inactive WAAC status, and then sent to basic training. Objectives were set at some 2,000

¹⁴ SigC Stf Dir file.

¹⁵ The WAC in the SigC, Speech by Col Oveta Culp Hobby. SigC file, OCMH. See Ch. XX, below, for North African Theater of Operations details.

¹⁶ Appendix to SigC WAC Narrative.

¹⁷ (1) *Ibid.* (2) Speech cited n. 15. (3) Interv with Capt Jane Reeves, SigC WAC Stf Dir, 3 May 46.

¹⁸ Ltr, Post SigO, Ft Bliss, Texas, to Chief MPB OCSigO. SigC 322 WAC 1943.