

numbers, many trained in the theater. Some one third of all Wacs in the Mediterranean theater, or about 700 women, were estimated to be employed on communications duties—a percentage notably higher than that achieved in the United States.³⁷ In Europe, the 3341st Signal Service Battalion eventually reached a peak strength of about 28 officers and 738 enlisted women, and in Paris its women were employed in every department of what claimed to be “the largest message center in the world . . . with the exception of Washington, D. C.”³⁸ Other units also contained some Signal Corps personnel, which brought the number in Europe to an estimated one fourth of the theater's WAC strength, or some 1,700 women. The Pacific theater reported that only about 3 percent of its Wacs, or 150 women, were in communications work, including secret duties with the Signal Intelligence Section. Lesser numbers were also used in smaller theaters.³⁹

Peak of Employment

In September of 1944, some months before the WAC reached its peak strength, the Chief Signal Officer estimated that there were about 1,500 enlisted women at six installations under his own jurisdiction, or some 16 percent of the total enlisted strength. This, he believed, exceeded all other technical services in percentage of replacement with the possible exception of the Chemical Warfare Service. In addition, there were 236 enlisted women in the War Department Signal Center, and more than 700 performing Signal Corps duties in the service commands. To this could be added at least 1,700 in Europe, 700 in Italy, and 150 in the Pacific. It thus appeared likely that Wacs on Signal Corps

duties totaled at least 5,000, some 5 percent of the WAC strength.⁴⁰

The general job groupings for Wacs, at least in the United States, were estimated by the Chief Signal Officer to include:

	Percent
Signal Corps Technical Specialists	63
Administrative and Clerical	25
Mess and Motor Pool Personnel	9
Miscellaneous	3

Special Problems of Signal Corps Wacs

In spite of such wide employment and consistent success on Signal Corps duties, it was evident by the end of the war that in employing women the Signal Corps faced several problems. The women described most Signal Corps technical jobs as “nerve-wracking”; after a few months they tended to become a nightmare of beeping earphones, clicking keys, or clattering machinery. A WAC inspector reported:

Severe nervous strain was imposed by the necessity for constant attention . . . no thought was required for much of it, yet the worker did not dare to let the work become automatic, as one slip wrecked everything, and the fear of costing men's lives was always with them.⁴¹

³⁷ For details, see Ch. XX, below.

³⁸ (1) Press Release, Hq ComZ ETO, Receipt No. 92782, 10 Jul 45. (2) Interv with Capt Jane Reeves, SigC WAC Stf Dir, 3 May 46. (3) M/R, 9 Oct 44, sub: Summary of Radiograms on WAC Sig Serv Bn for ETO. MTD OCSigO 322 WAC Sig Serv Bn. (4) Ltr, CSigO to Dir WAC, 5 May 49. PRO file, OCSigO.

³⁹ See Chs. XXI, XXII, below.

⁴⁰ (1) Memo cited n. 21(4). (2) Memo cited n. 32(3).

⁴¹ Discussions of WAC staff officers' opinions are based on: (1) Interv with Capt Barbara Rodes, WAC Stf Dir G-2 WD, 22 Mar 46. (2) Intervs with Lt. Col Dorothea A. Coleman, WAC Stf Dir, NATO and MTO, 21 Jan and 8 Feb 46. (3) SigC refs in Chs. XX-XXIII, below. (4) Intervs cited n. 4(3).