

Little is known of the significance of the contribution to the Manhattan Project by hundreds of members of the Women's Army Corps. . . . Since you received no headline acclaim, no one outside the project will ever know how much depended upon you.⁵⁹

Manhattan District

The term *Manhattan District* was deliberately deceptive, for Engineer offices employing Wacs were located not only in New York, Washington, and Chicago, but also at Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Pasco, Washington. Here, the volume of classified material had recently become such that maintenance of security was a problem, and it was held essential that certain key secretaries and file clerks be under military control. A first cautious request was made for only 74 Waacs, who reported in June of 1943; others followed shortly.

The WAC staff director, who commanded the Oak Ridge company for most of its history, reported that she was sent to WAC training centers to select many members personally. The women interviewed were told frankly that, while the work was secret and vital, they would do a hard job, would never be allowed to go overseas or to officer candidate school, could never receive any publicity, and would live at isolated stations with few recreational facilities. A surprising number of highly qualified women responded. Women were rejected if they did not actively desire the work, or did not appear to possess "experience, judgment, earnestness, and sincerity of purpose." The staff director highly recommended this system of selection, to which she attributed her detachment's good fortune in avoiding many of the problems experienced by Wacs in secret installations of other technical services. As a matter of fact, it later

proved possible to send a few women to OCS and overseas without violation of security.

There was likewise no pretense that women would do glamorous scientific jobs; the Corps of Engineers did not desire to use Wacs as engineers or technicians, but rather in general administration and paper work. Those assigned were therefore chiefly skilled stenographers, typists, telephone operators, clerks, and teletype and cryptographic technicians.

Exact job descriptions were never recorded, for reasons of security, but it could be stated that the women handled detailed records and technical reports. These included the classified files, communications, the production section, and all offices that handled scientific reports. The District Engineer, Brig. Gen. Kenneth D. Nichols, stated: "Members of the WAC were charged with a major portion of the responsibility for preserving project security."⁶⁰

A minority of the women were assigned as chemists and other scientific technicians. A few, by the end of the war, had worked into various technical duties for which they proved apt and in which they received on-the-job training. WAC metallurgy technicians became qualified through work in ceramics, plastics, and powdered metals. Electronics technicians worked chiefly on the construction of needed electronics equipment. WAC photographers became specialists in photo-

⁵⁹ All references, unless otherwise stated, are to the following sources: (1) Ltr, Asst to Dist Engr, U.S. Engr Office, Manhattan Dist, Oak Ridge, Tenn, to Hist Div WDSS, 19 Apr 46. EIDMP-44, now in WAC files, OCMH. (2) Unit History, WAC Det, 9812th TSU-CE, Manhattan Dist. Copy in WAC files, OCMH. (3) Interv with WAC Stf Dir CE, Capt Arlene G. Scheidenhelm, 14 Feb 46. (4) STM 30, Strength of the Army, 5 Jul 45; WAC strength is from ASF WAC Summary.

⁶⁰ Commendations cited n. 59(1).