

nicians in any installation, since certain duties required great physical strength and others involved services for male patients that were considered inappropriate for women to perform. The accepted ratio was about 40 percent enlisted women to 60 percent men. Where these ratios were preserved, the jobs of medical and surgical technicians appeared extremely well suited for women.

The WAC medical and surgical technicians nevertheless suffered from a particularly obvious comparison with civilian women employed as paid nurses' aides. Trained by the Red Cross, these were almost identical in qualifications and training with the WAC medical technician, and were intended for similar duties. Civilian nurses' aides had figured in Medical Department history since World War I, and were frequently women with home responsibilities who had accepted the work for patriotic reasons. Nevertheless, it was a rare enlisted woman who did not remark the fact that civilian nurses' aides could quit if not given desirable duties, got three times the Wac's salary for half the hours per week, and in addition had officers' privileges on the post, all of which the Wac herself might have had but for the wiles of an Army recruiter.

Possibly no more unhappy example had yet occurred of the unwisdom of recruiting both military and civilian personnel for identical duties and of using them on the same installation. The final indignity to many enlisted women came when all hospital civilian employees were allowed to wear the Wacs' uniform, the surplus blue cotton dress formerly worn by nurses, thus depriving enlisted women of the only visible glory of military status.

The Hospital Orderly

The only hospital job on which women were admittedly unsuccessful was the least skilled: that of hospital orderly, or corpsman. Women had never been recruited for this purpose, but in 1943, when certain low-grade workers accumulated at training centers, the WAC requested the Medical Department to train them as ward orderlies.¹⁵ The Medical Department accordingly set up an experimental training course, but within a few months was obliged to abandon it, pronouncing women unsuitable for hospital orderlies because of "the limited tasks to which this type of personnel might be assigned, and the impossibility of using them to replace enlisted men as ward orderlies."¹⁶ These women, unlike enlisted men of the same category, could not successfully work long hours lifting heavy objects, pushing loaded food and linen carts, and scrubbing wards and corridors.

Two more attempts to train Wacs as orderlies, at Mayo and Nichols General Hospitals, likewise failed, and The Surgeon General informed the Director that such personnel required so much supervision that the nurses' load was increased instead of lightened. In any case women orderlies could not replace men on a one-for-one basis because of lesser physical strength. Therefore, the position of orderly was not represented in the Female Medical Technicians Campaign, and the standards set for recruits were far above that appropriate for such personnel.¹⁷

¹⁵ Draft of Memo, WAAC Hq for SvCs, 11 Aug 43. SPWA 220.3.

¹⁶ Rpt cited n. 6(7).

¹⁷ Memo, SGO for ASF, 21 Oct 44. SPAP 319.1 WAC (10-9-43).