

tribution came from General Marshall, who met the women at the Casablanca Conference and took home a list of lost equipment. Finding that there was no legal means of free replacement, he personally paid for and forwarded new clothing, refusing to accept repayment.³

Arrival of First Unit

The first enlisted women arrived in the theater a month later. The 149th WAAC Post Headquarters Company, called by newspapers "the first American women's expeditionary force in history," was one of the most highly qualified WAAC groups ever to reach the field. Hand-picked and all-volunteer, almost all members were linguists as well as qualified specialists, and almost all eligible for officer candidate school. The company was shipped from the United States on a regular military transport, which encountered no enemy action. The only difficulty was the loss of unit equipment, which never arrived in Algiers. The unit's vehicles were later found to have been issued to a male unit at the port, while cooking equipment, medical supplies, folding cots, recreational equipment, typewriters, and clothing maintenance supplies vanished, a serious loss in view of shipping conditions and the absence of women's supplies in theater warehouses. Such occurrences in later shipments were to be prevented by the prior appointment of a theater WAAC staff director to make advance preparations.⁴

The unit reported on 27 January 1943 to General Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers, a location now considered safe, except for air attack, from the conflict still raging to the east. The women were housed in the dormitory of a convent

school some distance from the headquarters. The unfamiliar climate and the unheated quarters caused almost every member to succumb immediately to colds and other respiratory disorders—a tendency noted also in newly arrived men. Waacs washed in an outdoor trough, carried water in helmets, and worried in their usual manner concerning the impossibility of careful laundry or neat appearance. Working hours were long; women were carried in trucks to the headquarters at an early hour, and home again for an early curfew. The nightly bombings, with brilliant displays of antiaircraft fire, made sleep difficult for the first weeks.

Nevertheless, most women managed a satisfactory adjustment, and most of the sick required no hospitalization.⁵ Morale was high, and women called themselves the luckiest in the Corps, commenting variously, "Life has been one thrill after another"; "All my life I wanted to travel and see strange sights and now I am doing just that"; and, of the ack-ack fire and burning barrage balloons, "No Fourth of July celebration could be more spectacular."⁶ Ecclesiastical authorities protested when Wacs were housed in church quarters, but soon admitted that they had "never imagined that a unit of American women could be so well-disciplined and so considerate as well."⁷

³ Intervs cited n. 1(3); also two WDBPR Press Releases. (1) "Torpedoed," in *Env, Africa—Interesting Backgrounds*. (2) 27 Jan 43, in *Env, Stories—1943*.

⁴ (1) Memo, CO 149th WAAC Post Hq Co, APO 514, for Dir WAAC, 8 Feb 43. WDBPR file of NATO correspondence, DRB AGO. (2) For theater strength figures, see Table 7, Appendix A.

⁵ *Ibid.*; also Memo, CO 149th WAAC Post Hq Co for Dir WAAC, 23 Feb 43. Same file.

⁶ WDBPR *Env, Africa—Ltrs Written by Waacs*.

⁷ Ltr, Col Donald B. Adams to Dir WAC, 23 Mar 44. WDWAC 000.7.