

that the women "thrived on it; the sick call rate dropped way down."

For the rest of the Italian campaign, the units followed the Fifth Army up the peninsula, usually being located from twelve to thirty-five miles behind the front lines. From June to September the forward echelon's longest stay in any one place was five weeks, the average being two. The women lived in whatever billets were available—schools, factories, apartments, and chiefly tents. The forward section spent most of the winter of 1944-45 living in tents in the mountains above Florence.

The women usually wore enlisted men's wool shirts, trousers, and combat boots, and carried only the few necessities that could be moved forward with them.

The unit proved unusually successful. It received Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark's praise as well as being one of the few to receive both the Fifth Army Plaque with clasp, in 1944, and the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque in 1945. There were twenty-seven awards of the Bronze Star. The forward echelon included some of the most skilled telephone operators on the Continent, able in a matter of minutes to get through the complicated communications networks to the commanding officer of any unit sought by General Clark. The unit's morale and *esprit de corps* were perhaps the highest in the theater's WAC units. Its members wore the Fifth Army's green scarf. "They were," said Colonel Coleman, "Fifth Army first and Wacs second—perhaps the best-integrated unit in the theater."

The dangers of a combat area did not present any great problem in this case. During the last days in Anzio, air raids offered the nuisance of noise and falling shell fragments, but fortunately the area had just been vacated by a combat unit

that had left adequate foxholes and dug-outs. The Wacs were lucky in having no injuries, in spite of some close calls. During the advance up the peninsula, they were frequently within sound of long-range artillery, and almost always in an area of complete blackout, but required no guard except the usual one that patrolled the entire camp. Italian service troops ordinarily set up the WAC and Nurse Corps tents, and the Wacs took them down themselves, with the aid of two Italian laborers to load them on trucks.

In spite of the fatigue that developed from repeated moves, officers noted that the women "griped and complained less than soldiers in rear areas." Signal Corps units in rear areas were surprised, upon offering Wacs rotation to less exhausting conditions, to find that not one telephone operator would agree to quit the Fifth Army unit.

WAC commanders credited much of the sustaining sense of integration to the personal policies of General Clark, who saw to it that a stirring ceremony was made of any occasion, such as the swearing-in of Waacs to the Army, or the presentation of medals and awards. When visiting dignitaries came to the area, Wacs stood honor guard with men of the 34th Division. Women were left in no doubt that they were considered useful and valuable members of the group. Such measures inspired a loyalty among the women that long hours, fatigue, and discomfort could not shake.

It was undoubtedly significant that Wacs under such circumstances seemed exempt from the pattern of administrative needs that was invariable in sedentary units. The almost total absence of grades and ratings did not noticeably affect morale, although an expert switchboard op-