

"women gradually hit a place where they have to live on the surface," and a certain temperamental change, of which they were often unaware, appeared to have made them less vulnerable to the sight of others' suffering. For this reason, even when women's health and efficiency were untouched, Colonel Coleman concluded that it would be better, if replacements and shipping were available, to limit an overseas tour to eighteen months.⁴⁸

When rotation to the United States was finally authorized by the War Department, it was clear that Wacs would not be eligible in competition with men who had much longer service, and in fact most women felt that return would be improper under the circumstances.

At Director Hobby's request, the War Department late in 1944 added a microscopic quota for Wacs and nurses, enough to assure return of emergency cases. Even when Wacs became eligible under regular rules, there was no immediate relief. The theater decided that directives on rotation did not oblige it to return Wacs until a "suitable replacement" was available, and that men even in the same skill were not suitable replacements for women. The theater's new G-1, General White, commented:

I contend emphatically that you cannot cut us off from WAC replacements on the grounds that the theater is overstrength. That is like saying you won't give us any more shoes because we have too many caps.

Eventually the theater was obliged to permit a few Wacs to be returned without replacements, since the War Department decided that these were more badly needed in more active theaters.⁴⁹

When actual demobilization began, some 80 percent of the women were found to be eligible for discharge under the point

system. In spite of some attempts to persuade them to sign up for longer service, some four fifths of eligibles indicated that they wished to be discharged. Many were retained as long as the "military necessity" clause permitted, until after the defeat of Japan, when the War Department directed return of remaining overseas Wacs. By the end of 1945, all enlisted Wacs were out of the Mediterranean theater.⁵⁰

The Wacs' eagerness to depart indicated, by all evidence, merely a desire for discharge and no condemnation of theater employment as compared to that in the United States. When rotation first began, women who had returned to the United States wrote back comparisons highly favorable to the theater. Accustomed to being treated as essential employees, they found civilians in the best jobs in the zone of the interior, and the civilian population scarcely as respectful as that of occupied areas. Army barracks, even with heating and laundry facilities, were not as comfortable as the apartments and hotels that the Mediterranean theater had provided; neither were there civilians or prisoners to relieve the troops of kitchen police and fatigue duty. Upon receipt of such reports, an overwhelming majority of 95 percent of the remaining women in the theater stated that they preferred to stay overseas until eligible for discharge, rather than return

⁴⁸ (1) Memo cited n. 31(1). (2) Quotations from M/R, Stf Dir's Opinion, Rotation. Coleman file.

⁴⁹ (1) Memo, Col Hobby for Gen Henry, 21 Aug 44. WDWAC 320.2. Quota asked was 0.5 percent per month. (2) Memo cited n. 30(1). (3) Quotation from Ltr, Gen White to Col Hobby, 3 Jan 45. WDWAC 320.2. (4) Only 120 women were ever returned (1944-45), according to Col. Coleman. About 136 received a furlough in the United States.

⁵⁰ (1) Statistical Data, Jun 43-Jun 47; (2) MTO Ltr to all subordinate comds, 23 May 45, sub: Readjustment of WAC Pers. AG 370.01/746-A-O, Coleman file.