

tenance supplies. The WAAC's way was smoothed by the long-accepted presence of the many British women's services, as well as of the *Volontaires Françaises*, the Norwegian ATS, the Polish ATS, the Canadian WAC, and other such groups.⁵

The arrival of the American WAAC was nevertheless of considerable public interest. Captain Wilson reported:

We were interviewed by the press and on short-wave radio, and were a little surprised to find ourselves near-celebrities. We are now settled in a very comfortable flat overlooking Hyde Park . . . two bedrooms, two baths, kitchenette, and a living room.⁶

Captain Wilson noted that a disproportionate amount of her time was consumed by the social and public relations activities required of her. As in other overseas theaters, there always existed a certain tendency for the WAC staff director to be considered dedicated to official teas, press conferences, and ceremonies instead of to her military responsibilities.⁷

First WAAC Separate Battalion

Upon receipt of the Air Forces' shipping priority, WAAC Headquarters rounded up as many members of the original units as could be found, with replacements for those who had gone to North Africa. These were rapidly organized at Fort Devens to form the 1st WAAC Separate Battalion, under the command of Capt. Mary A. Hallaren. Women were equipped with full winter uniforms, as authorized for England, plus gas masks, canteens, first-aid packets, utility packs, helmets, and pistol belts without pistols. Their training included judo, hikes with full packs, and an obstacle course which, although not required for noncombatants, every woman elected to go through. The

555 enlisted women and 19 officers were so eager for the long-awaited assignment that no case of AWOL occurred prior to sailing. On 16 July 1943, almost a year after the initial request, the battalion reached England.⁸

Upon arrival the women were divided into companies and assigned to various Air Forces stations. Housing consisted of "everything from castles to huts,"⁹ generally being identical with the type used for male troops at the stations. Theater historians later noted, "It was anticipated that special housing and physical facilities would be required for the Wacs, but the problem of housing Wacs provided no particular difficulties."¹⁰

It was immediately apparent that WAC employment in England offered little more difficulty than employment in the United States, and had the advantages of new sights and experiences and the stimulus of closeness to combat. The regulation WAC uniform was obviously inadequate for work in unheated buildings during the approaching winter and for the projected movement to the Continent, but time permitted remedial action. The supply lanes to the United States were by this time open and were relatively short, and many items could be procured from British stocks. The dangers of the area were no more

⁵ (1) ETO WAC Hist, pp. 7-13; also ETO Bd Rpt. (2) Ltr, Lt Gen Frank M. Andrews, Hq ETO to Dir WAC, 1 May 43. SPWA 320.2.

⁶ Ltr, WAAC Stf Dir ETO to Dir WAAC, 30 Apr 43. SPWA 320.2 sec 4a.

⁷ ETO Bd Rpt, incl App. 112.

⁸ (1) Rpt of Tng and Staging, PRD, Camp Shanks, N. Y., undated. SPWA 320.2 sec 2. (2) Interv cited n. 1(5). (3) Series of documents, SPWA 320.2 secs 1 and 2. WAAC sources say 557 enlisted women.

⁹ Statement by Col Hallaren, Nov 51. WAC files, OCMH.

¹⁰ ETO WAC Hist, pp. 10-11; also ETO Bd Rpt.