

land were as yet engaged in combat. Other headquarters still had plenty of enlisted men, and were still located in areas where competent civilian help was obtainable. Therefore, while Wacs would be needed in the future, and were welcomed by higher commanders who had requisitioned them for this reason, their welcome from subordinate commanders and enlisted men was less enthusiastic. In Lt. Col. Anna W. Wilson's opinion:

Male soldiers who were firmly established in their administrative, clerical, and communications jobs and were not trained for combat naturally were fearful of the arrival of WAC personnel. Their comments on and reception of WAC personnel were derogatory and cold. The Wacs felt that they were unwelcome, which in fact they were. Months passed before this feeling of ill-will disappeared.²⁴

Censorship of letters showed that there was much bitterness in the accounts written home by enlisted men and Wacs alike, which upon investigation had "no reasonable basis" but which authorities feared would damage WAC recruiting.²⁵

Until D Day, as a result of the abundance of personnel, Wacs therefore at times did not replace men, or were assigned to only part-time work, or were fitted into existing organizations in duties less responsible than those of enlisted men and British civilians and less useful than the positions the women had occupied in the United States. The staff director listed incorrect assignment as first among causes of low morale. The WAC personnel officer noted, "The greatest gripe from Wacs has constantly been, 'not enough work to do.'"²⁶ Luckily, the serious morale problems that usually accompanied such a situation in the United States did not develop, chiefly because of the women's sense of nearness to combat and the prospect of more useful days ahead.

Office supervisors discovered no loss of efficiency during the buzz-bomb raids, and in fact, as D Day approached, there were grounds for believing that the reverse was true. One unit, which arrived in London simultaneously with the V-1, reported:

At first the Wacs were up most of every night, spending much of their time in the improvised basement shelter. Since this area was not properly equipped, there was great loss of sleep, and the nervous tension which resulted was almost as bad as the bombs.²⁷

However, the women soon became accustomed to the alarms and slept all night without going to the shelter, and they worked without interruption even when bombs fell close to their offices. Several Wacs were awarded the Purple Heart for injuries received in bombings; they were more fortunate than British servicewomen in that none died of these injuries.²⁸

The Move to the Continent

Less than a year after the first group's arrival, the invasion of Normandy began and Wacs moved out into France and later into Germany. A lively dispute had raged all spring over the propriety of taking women along. The more gloomy objectors stressed the fact that the women would probably be killed or captured and, if captured, might not, under the rules of land warfare, be recognized as "protected personnel" and would not, like nurses, be entitled to officer prisoners' privileges. Some

²⁴ ETO Bd Rpt, Vol. I, pp. 10 and 12.

²⁵ (1) ETO Bd Rpt. (2) Morale Rpt, 1-15 May 43, to Chief Info and Censorship Sec ETO. ETO Opns Rpts, Adm 365 WAC, DRB AGO.

²⁶ ETO Bd Rpt, p. 55; also Vol. II, App. 17.

²⁷ ETO ATC WAC Hist.

²⁸ Six deaths of Wacs were reported as of December 1944: 2 accidental poisonings, 2 auto accidents, 1 peritonitis, 1 meningitis. ETO Bd Rpt, Vol. III, App. 114.