

warded to the War Department, which refused to authorize it on the grounds that all available material was being used to produce the new ETO battle jacket uniform for men. At this, the European theater found means of procuring in England enough of these uniforms to furnish each woman at least one. With the benefit of these additions, Colonel Wilson noted that ETO Wacs were better dressed than those in the United States, where cold-weather garments and other extra items were not issued except to a few outdoor workers.⁴⁸

Maintenance supply of uniforms was also good in comparison to that of other overseas locations. The theater engaged in a continual struggle to keep up adequate stocks of women's clothes, and had chronic shortages, particularly in small sizes, but this was no more than could be said of most stations in the United States. The theater experienced an additional difficulty in that purchase of rationed clothing in civilian shops was forbidden to American troops in England. Wacs needed many items that were no longer issued, such as warm bathrobes, bedroom slippers, brassières, and handkerchiefs. As items brought from the United States began to wear out, the theater cabled to The Quartermaster General to point out that, while in the United States it might be practicable to call these items nonessential and to require a woman to buy her own, such procedure was inappropriate in an overseas area where the items required ration cards that the Wacs did not possess. Fully 60 percent of the women, the theater estimated, were in need of girdles. The Quartermaster General refused to resume issue of these items, but eventually arranged for their purchase and resale through post exchanges to women overseas.⁴⁹

Health, Morals, and Discipline

During the entire period of employment, there was little to indicate that service in the European theater was more detrimental to women's health or behavior than service in the United States, or produced any problems that would have rendered the employment of Wacs uneconomical. For most of the war months, the WAC attrition rate remained the same as that of noncombat men—one half of one percent.⁵⁰ This was in spite of startling statistics computed in the early days, when it was reported that ETO Wacs, unlike those in the United States, appeared to be losing twice as many days from work as men. This rate seemed due chiefly to the high incidence of respiratory disorders. Upon investigation it was found that most of the Wacs at this time were newly arrived in England, and that the rate of respiratory disorders among newly arrived male troops was also twice as high as that of the theater as a whole. In addition, Wacs were chiefly office workers, and the rate of respiratory disorders among male headquarters troops was also twice that of the field forces.

An odd additional factor was the unsatisfactory model of military shoes for women, and the shortage of proper sizes, which, according to a medical report,

... loomed large in the noneffective rate for Wacs during the period when they were being admitted to the hospital for adjustment of

⁴⁸ (1) Rpt, by ETO WAC Stf Dir, 12 Jul 44. WDWAC 421. (2) ETO Bd Rpt. (3) ETO WAC Hist, p. 14.

⁴⁹ (1) Cbl W8720, USFOR London to AGWAR, 16 Nov 43, SPWA 320.2 sec 6. WAAC C1 file. (2) ETO Bd Rpt, Vol. III, App. 121.

⁵⁰ This and following from ETO Bd Rpt, Vol. I, pp. 48, 58-60, 123; Vol. II, Apps. 1 and 13; Vol. III, Apps. 114, 117.