

Civilian Competition

Final theater reports indicated only one important handicap to WAC employment in an area such as this one: the competition with civilian employees. This problem, although appearing minor at first consideration, became more prominent in the period following the slackening of hostilities and was eventually rated the European theater Wacs' number one difficulty by both WAC staff directors, as well as by returning enlisted women.

It had been originally contemplated by the Chief of Staff that no civilian women would be employed overseas, but by the time of the WAAC's formation it was already clear that such employment could not be prevented in certain areas. As early as 1942, Director Hobby had therefore proposed that difficulties between the two groups be minimized by directing that "no organization or group of women employed by the American forces . . . wear a uniform or parts of a uniform which are of a color or a pattern which would cause them to be confused with members of the WAAC."⁶³

She pointed out that existing regulations provided a satisfactory uniform for American civilian employees—the blue hostess-librarian uniform—which was ordered through Special Services from commercial firms that were ready to supply them. However, the Army Service Forces refused to send this proposal to the War Department, and it was not considered. Instead, at a meeting at which the Director was not represented, it was decided to sell the WAAC officer uniform to any civilian women going overseas.⁶⁴

The problem had small immediate importance, since until after the cessation of buzz-bomb danger very few American

civilians went to the area, and British employees lived at home and seldom wore uniforms. To Colonel Hobby's inquiry, Colonel Wilson replied, "This is a situation about which we are not unduly concerned." In the early and dangerous days of the invasion, Wacs were the only female employees in most cases. Later, the theater decided to take female civilians to the Continent as soon as conditions became safe and stable, and it was necessary to provide them with quarters and identifying uniforms. Colonel Wilson concurred in a recommendation that civilians get separate messes and distinctive uniforms, but instead the theater authorized officer accommodations for them and allowed each command to prescribe its own uniform. At this, a considerable morale problem resulted among equally qualified enlisted women, mitigated somewhat in cases where British civilians were veteran employees who had shared the bombings and rationings.⁶⁵

Early in 1945, a morale crisis was precipitated by news of plans to send overseas large numbers of American civilian women as soon as hostilities ended. At this time Director Hobby's staff learned that "a meeting was held in the Secretary of War's office, at which representatives of the Quartermaster and G-1 were present, but no representative of this office . . . those present agreed that the WAC uniform should be provided for civilians overseas." In a series of confidential memoranda, the

⁶³ Memo, Dir WAAC for CofS, 10 Oct 42, sub: Ltr of Instr to CG ETO. SPWA 320.2 sec 1.

⁶⁴ D/F, Dir Mil Pers ASF to Dir WAAC, 16 Oct 42. SPGA M/322.5 WAAC (10-10-42), in SPWA 320.2 sec 1.

⁶⁵ (1) ETO Bd Rpt, Vol. I, pp. 71, 21; Vol. III, App. 135; Vol. III, App. 10, p. 7. (2) Quotation from Memo, WAC Stf Dir ETOUSA, for Col Howard E. Kessinger, Exec, G-1 WDGS (on tour of ETO), 28 Aug 44. WDWAC 421.