

CHAPTER XXII

The Southwest Pacific Area

The last of the major overseas commands to employ considerable numbers of WAC personnel was the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA). Here, although the first shipment did not arrive until the middle of 1944, some 5,500 women eventually served—the second largest number to be employed by any overseas area.¹

The delay in employing Wacs was readily explained: there was no shortage of female clerical workers in Australia, where some 20,000 civilians were employed by the American forces. Therefore, when Army-wide surveys were made at the time of the Auxiliary's formation, and again at the time of its contemplated expansion, the theater rejected the idea of using Waacs, stating that all available shipping was needed to bring combat personnel to its authorized level.²

Until late in 1943, several of the headquarters in Australia had entertained the hope that civilian employees would be permitted to move with them when the northward attack was launched through New Guinea and the Philippines. At this time, a personnel crisis was precipitated by the immediacy of the offensive combined with the final refusal of the Australian government to let its women move from the continent, in view of existing labor shortages. The theater therefore began a series of requests to Operations Division of the War Department General Staff, seeking to raise its Troop Basis to permit

the shipment of general service men to replace the civilians. Limited service men were not wanted, in view of the unpromising nature of available material.³

These requests met with consistent refusal from the War Department. The theater was already authorized to have 3.2 percent of its military strength in overhead, as against only 1.5 percent for the

¹ No official WAC history was prepared by SWPA. (For a description of the sources used in this chapter, see Bibliographical Note.) All references, unless otherwise indicated, are to: (1) 30 folders of SWPA material, now at Kansas City Records Center, cited by folder and drawer number. (2) Historical material, WAC Assigned to SWPA, typed, undated, and unsigned, although Capt Velma P. Griffith (WAC PRO, SWPA—an eyewitness to many events and with access to theater WAC data) acknowledges authorship. Cited hereafter as Griffith Account. (3) Rpt, GHQ USAFPAC to TAG, 1 Nov 45, sub: Rpt on WAC Pers in SWPA Prepared in Accordance with AG Ltr 333.5 (9-27-45) OB-S-A, 1 Nov 45. Official copy in G-1 WD 321-333 WAC, 18 May 45, AGOF-C-333 WAC, DRB AGO. Cited as AFPAC Reply. (4) Draft of the above, prepared by WAC Staff Director, AFPAC, and approved by WAC Staff Directors, AFWESPAC and FEAF. Now in WAC Classified file. Cited as WAC Draft AFPAC Reply. (5) Official Rpt, Col Westray Boyce, Dir WAC, to CofS USA, 22 Mar 46, sub: Rpt of Visit to WAC Pers in Overseas Theaters. Also earlier draft of same. WDWAC 333.1. Cited as Boyce Rpt. (6) For list of interviews, statements, and comments, see Bibliographical Note.

² Rads: 1122 (CM-OUT 7466), 22 Aug 42, and reply by C-484 (CM-IN 5492), 13 Sep 42; 1631 (CM-OUT 508), 2 Mar 43, and reply by C-724 (CM-IN 2934), 6 Mar 43.

³ Unless otherwise cited, all references to OPD action are to OPD 320.2 Australia, Sec IX, Cases 265-303, Dec-Apr 44, DRB AGO. Cited as OPD file.