

European theater, and stations in the United States were by this time almost stripped of general service personnel. Instead, it was suggested that the theater render its headquarters mobile by screening the half-million troops it already had, among whom there were believed to be numbers of clerically skilled men.

This move was considered impracticable by the theater. Instead, there was some discussion within the several headquarters of the possibility of employing Wacs, under the misapprehension that they could be requisitioned to fill civilian job vacancies. The move was generally favored by Headquarters, Fifth Air Force, and by the Services of Supply, but rejected by the higher echelon, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE).⁴

In the early days of 1944, Operations Division of the War Department received a personal visit from Lt. Gen. George C. Kenney, Commanding General, Allied Air Forces and Fifth Air Force, who expressed a desire to get WAC personnel for his command. However, a call to ASF Military Personnel Division revealed that, of the Wacs who were expected to be available for overseas shipment during the entire year, only about 800 enlisted women and 200 officers remained unallotted. OPD at once acted to freeze this number until the Pacific's needs could be considered. Director Hobby was then overseas, but a call to her office revealed that, at the current rate of recruiting, a "reasonable number" of this 800 women could probably be obtained within a few months. At this, OPD radioed the theater asking whether General Kenney's request represented theater opinion. If so, it was promised that the theater's Troop Basis would be increased by 1,000 in order to accommodate the shipment.⁵

SWPA protested by radio:

Proposed allotment totally inadequate for minimum theater requirements. . . . Can use 10,000 or more Wacs. . . . Theater Chief of Staff who should reach Washington today has data on theater overhead requirements and on positions which Wacs may advantageously fill.⁶

Director Hobby first learned of the new development on 11 February 1944, soon after her return from Europe, when Lt. Gen. Richard K. Sutherland, General MacArthur's chief of staff, came to her office and informed her that at least 10,000 Wacs would be immediately required by the theater. "He appeared," she stated later, "to be under the impression that Wacs were still Auxiliaries and would not count against the Troop Basis."⁷

The Director informed General Sutherland that in her opinion the shipment could not be made for two reasons: first, Wacs were military personnel and would require a military allotment just as men would; and second, the WAC had not yet recovered from its conversion losses and from heavy shipments to Europe, and could not provide women in any such numbers in the clerical skills requested.

⁴ No supporting documents were found. The WAC Staff Director, USAFFE, recalled seeing in the files a USASOS request disapproved by Maj. Gen. Charles P. Stivers (USAFFE) without stated reason. Brig. Gen. Harry H. Baird (USAFFE) stated in 1948 that earlier staff studies questioned supply, housing, protection, etc.; these were not found, nor any evidence of why such doubts were not communicated to the War Department by Lt. Gen. Richard K. Sutherland in his 1944 request for Wacs. Ltr, Mary-Agnes Brown to OCMH, 23 Apr 51; Memo, Col Harry H. Baird for HD SSUSA, 29 Jul 48. OCMH.

⁵ (1) M/R, 1 Feb 44, sub: WAC Pers in SWPA, with copy of rad atchd. OPD file. (2) For final theater strength figures, see Table 7, Appendix A.

⁶ Rad C-1319 (CM-IN 4025), GHQ SWPA to WAR, 6 Feb 44.

⁷ WAC Daily Journal, 11 Feb 44; quotation from tp conv, Mrs. Hobby and author, Oct 50.