

... welcomed the WAC; spoke of the magnificent contribution of Australia to the war effort; praised the nurses and Red Cross women; spoke of how horrible war is; the two enemies our men have to fight—Japs and nature; and the morale factor of the presence of the WAC besides their contribution to their jobs . . . that he had asked the War Department for 10,000 Wacs and that he was getting less than half that number.²⁷

This was the last official conference with General MacArthur until just before the Wacs departed at the end of the war.

First WAC Contingent in Australia

A few days later, after all preparations had been made for the reception of the first Wacs at Brisbane, it was discovered that the ship was about to put in at Sydney. Colonel Brown and other welcoming officers flew to Sydney, where it was found that USASOS personnel, long desirous of obtaining Wacs, had planned a cordial reception. On the morning of 12 May, an impressive number of general officers, heads of Australian services, and curious soldiers and sailors were on the pier to watch the first 640 Wacs disembark from the transport *West Point*.²⁸ The Wacs made a good military appearance in their winter uniforms, according to a public relations officer:

With every eye trained on them, the Wacs marched off in their best military formation to pile into trucks. They were dressed in Class A uniform plus utility coat, field shoes, helmet, full field pack strapped on the back, and they carried in their hands everything from Red Cross ditty-bags to pillows, candy, radios, typewriters, and other cherished treasures. One Wac even carried a guitar. "Gee, they're real American girls," remarked one GI unbelievably.²⁹

The Wacs proceeded at once to Brisbane, which was only a two-week stopover for the first group destined for New

Guinea, but where others were to stay for several months while civilian employees were replaced and the various headquarters rendered mobile. The 526 enlisted women and 114 officers were divided between USAFFE and USASOS. Most of the officers, and one company of the enlisted women, were assigned to operate the Central Postal Directory at Port Moresby, New Guinea. USAFFE's remaining 198 enlisted women were assigned to various headquarters offices, including 55 to the adjutant general, and from one to ten each to G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, the chaplain, inspector general, headquarters commandant, judge advocate, provost marshal, special services, information and education, and finance. USASOS assignments were not recorded, but were presumably similar.³⁰

Army officers responsible for the women's placement reported strong initial resistance on the part of many section chiefs, who were not enthusiastic about releasing civilian employees, but such objections were usually short-lived in view of the prospective departure from Australia.³¹ An additional difficulty in replacement was presented by the fact that the first to arrive were in many cases not clerical workers, the higher clerical skills in the United States having been already well combed over by the European thea-

²⁷ WAC Sec USAFFE Hist Rpt, May 44.

²⁸ Paragraphs on landing and stay in Australia, unless otherwise specified, are from: (1) Griffith Account, "Australia." (2) AFPAC Reply, both draft and approved versions.

²⁹ Griffith Account. Numbers are from AFPAC Reply, although Colonel Brown later believed that nearer 1,000 had landed.

³⁰ Folder 203.1, 1st Contingent, Theater WAC Stf Dir files.

³¹ Col. A. Robert Ginsburgh, "The Good Staff Officer in the Field," *Infantry Journal*, August 1946, pp. 10-11.