

except those already to the rear, even where somewhat primitive conditions existed. As a result, USASOS Wacs were moved from Oro Bay not only to Hollandia but, on 24 November, to Base E at Lae and, on 6 December 1944, to Base F at Finschhafen. The USASOS staff director visited these bases in advance of troops, to help select WAC areas, and no particular difficulty was reported. Wacs at Lae lived in a hospital area, and those at Finschhafen in quarters of native construction, which were considered superior to tents. Both groups were later to be the last to leave as other bases moved forward. Jobs remained the familiar USASOS routine of cargo tonnage, troops movements, vessel routing reports, and other service paper work.

On 13 February 1945, the USAFFE mail and censorship unit likewise moved forward from Port Moresby to the coral island of Biak. Although the location presented problems of heat and glare, it eventually offered many conveniences. Except for an air raid in which no WAC casualties were suffered, the Biak Wacs' closest approach to war came with their visits to hospital ships and general hospitals.

Manila

On 7 March 1945, four days after organized resistance ended in Manila, the GHQ Wacs left Leyte and reached the area by air, across a bay still clogged with sunken ships. A WAC officer described their arrival:

The plane landed on a black-top highway⁷² that served as an air-strip. Wacs climbed out and sat cross-legged on the ground taking in the scene. Down this modern roadway passed an array of assorted vehicles . . . people and their belongings coming back to the city. . . . Heavy artillery fire could be heard in the distance routing

the Japs out of the hills only a few miles away. The route into the city led past . . . a once thriving business section, now a pile of crushed buildings, twisted iron gratings, debris. . . . Dead Japs still lay along the streets awaiting burial. GHQ and USAFFE Wacs were housed in De La Salle College . . . called "atrocities college" because of the atrocities committed there by the Japanese. Bodies had been removed a day previously and floors and walls creosoted and fumigated.⁷³

Fighting was still going on in the outskirts of the city, snipers were being routed out, and guards were heavy. One Japanese prowler was later caught in the WAC mess hall, and two others were shot down and died at WAC onlookers' feet, but there was, an observer reported, "no hysterics" among the women.

The disturbed conditions continued for some weeks. Water was scarce and had to be hauled. The GHQ Wacs bathed in helmets, lived by candlelight at night. Latrines were erected in the courtyard, with half a dozen shower heads. Men's mess halls lacked space to serve the women, and Wacs lived on K rations until they could get their own mess hall into operation. Dehydrated food was the chief sustenance for all troops; some women lost their appetites, preferred to sleep at mealtimes, and often ate only one meal a day. Until blood and filth could be removed, flies were so numerous that a severe epidemic of dysentery afflicted the GHQ Wacs. Their commander's greatest fear was that some of the violently ill women, groping their way in the blackout to the outdoor latrines, would fall and detonate the remaining Japanese booby traps believed to be on either side

⁷² A later description refers to the highway as a city street and gives a route somewhat different from that in the present account.

⁷³ Griffith Account for entire Manila discussion unless otherwise cited.