

the clothing supply.¹¹⁹ Women had in fact faced a difficult and dangerous environment less well equipped than the men in the same headquarters. It was noted particularly that dermatitis, sometimes popularly called "jungle rot," led all other causes for evacuation of women, even though medical officers had originally believed that women would prove less susceptible because of higher standards of personal cleanliness and more frequent laundering of garments. There appeared to be some obvious connection with the fact that the WAC service uniform had been the heavy herringbone twill, well known to cause skin irritation to women even in the United States. In fact, in the India-Burma theater the chief surgeon had refused to let Wacs wear this garment at any time, pronouncing it a major health hazard in a tropical climate. On the other hand, some medical officers noted that even had the Wacs possessed summer khaki like the men's, women might possibly still have had a higher dermatitis rate because of their more sensitive skins.

In addition, it appeared possible that the rate of loss for malaria had increased wherever Wacs substituted their cotton shirts for the coverall top, since the shirts were lighter in weight than the men's and not believed mosquitoproof by The Quartermaster General. On the other hand, as both General Denit and Colonel Brown pointed out, experimentation had never conclusively indicated what weight of shirt was really mosquitoproof, and Navy nurses in the area wore skirts instead of slacks, so that the Wacs' uniforms might possibly have offered as good protection as any other type of garment.

Other minor possibilities were also noted. It appeared that the rate of respiratory disorders might have been increased by lack of protective footwear. The short-

age of all garments had apparently increased illness during rainy seasons when not enough dry coveralls were available to permit a change. There was also some evidence that the regular WAC wool socks, heavy rayon underwear, low oxfords, and other issue items were not particularly suitable to the area.

Up to this time, all attempts at remedial action had merely demonstrated that, if women were launched into a campaign improperly equipped, no "business as usual" would produce the requisite supplies. Theater action to secure mosquito-proof slacks for women, and all other needed items, was begun in 1944 in the month of the Wacs' arrival in Australia.¹²⁰ The months of May and June were consumed in Quartermaster staff studies as to the proper amendments that should be recommended in theater Tables of Equipment. The matter was not as simple as it appeared to nonexperts in supply matters, since there were many items of WAC uniform, undergarments, and footgear to be considered, as well as the opinions of medical and technical specialists on the proper weight and design of slacks and shirts. On 6 July 1944, a large-scale conference on WAC supply was held by representatives of USAFFE and USASOS with visitors from Operations Division of the War Department General Staff. This produced no immediate results, and later in July the assistant staff director appealed by personal letter to Colonel Hobby to expedite matters by securing immediate War Department authorization for ordinary khaki slacks. In reply she was informed that The

¹¹⁹ Interv with Capt Letallier, 9 Jan 46. Entire following discussion is based on interviews and statistics already cited.

¹²⁰ Except as otherwise documented, the supply discussion is from the monthly WAC Sec USAFFE Hist Rpts.