

CHAPTER XXIII

Other Overseas Theaters

In addition to being employed in the three major overseas theaters, Wacs were stationed in every other active theater of war. In each case the employment was relatively minor, never exceeding a few hundred women. Nevertheless, remaining records of the various experiments often provided clear-cut indications of the practicability of employment of womanpower in differing climates and administrative situations.

Southeast Asia Command

Pioneer in the employment of American Wacs in India was Vice-Adm. Lord Louis Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command. The headquarters already employed nurses, British servicewomen, members of the Indian WAC, and local civilians, so that no great venture was undertaken when a small unit of sixty-two enlisted Wacs and four officers was added to the staff in October of 1943. After six months in New Delhi, the unit was transferred in April of 1944 to Southeast Asia Command headquarters in Ceylon, where it remained for the duration.¹

Fourteen of the enlisted women were assigned to Signal Corps duties, and the remainder to routine clerical work in offices of the headquarters, both British and American. Officers, in addition to company duty, were assigned operational jobs in the same offices.

No great difficulties were encountered by the unit in the performance of its jobs. The two stations of assignment, while by no means pleasure resorts, were not the most trying in India. New Delhi, the capital, was one of India's cleaner and more healthful cities in spite of temperatures ranging up to 110° F. The Wacs nevertheless soon discovered the ailment theater veterans designated as "Delhi belly." The climate of Ceylon was tropical, without extremes of heat but with excessive humidity during the rainy seasons. Enlisted women were housed in barracks in the WRNS area, which inspectors pronounced excellent in spite of the customary bucket latrines and absence of hot water. Both men and women ate at a joint mess, which lacked cold-storage facilities and thus had only small amounts of meat and few fresh vegetables. Drinking water was boiled and stored in Lyster bags. The working day generally followed the nonstrenuous British schedule, with an 8-hour day and one day off per week.

Major Craighill, who visited the unit after Wacs had been in India for some

¹ No records of this group were found, with the exception of Memo, Maj Craighill for The SG through SEAC and IBT, 6 Apr 45, sub: Med and Social Conditions of Women in Mil Serv in Ceylon. SGO Hist Div 319 Special, Ceylon, Women In. In addition, comments on drafts of the present chapter were given by Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, authors of *Stilwell's Mission to China*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1953).