

eighteen months, stated that "the general health of the detachment is excellent." Except for dengue fever, mild gastrointestinal conditions, and skin infections, there had been no notable illnesses, and especially no amoebic or bacillary dysentery, or malaria. One serious exception was the Signal Corps women, who were on around-the-clock shifts, rotating every four days. Major Craighill noted:

A high incidence of sickness among the group working on irregular hours with the Signal Corps is significant. Of the 58 admissions for all causes, 20 were from this group of 14 women. This includes the hospitalization of ten of the fourteen: the other four have all been on sick call. These conditions are attributable to the irregularity of meals and the loss of sleep due to constantly shifting hours of work.

In spite of Major Craighill's recommendations, the headquarters did not modify the shift changes, since they were "in accordance with the present British system."<sup>2</sup>

No final recommendation was on record from the headquarters concerning the success of employment of Wacs. There appeared to be no very valid reason why women could not successfully fill many of the jobs in any such high administrative headquarters. On the other hand, there was no proof that local employees could not have done the work adequately without the importation of American women.

#### *The China-Burma-India Theater*

The intrinsic suitability of the China-Burma-India (CBI) theater for WAC employment was by no means identical with that of the Southeast Asia Command.<sup>3</sup> Principal supply installations were in Calcutta, a city noted for oppressive heat, disease, and filth, and generally considered even more unhealthful for unacclimated

white women than the more sparsely populated New Guinea islands. However, there were certain advantages not possessed by the Southwest Pacific Area, notably the fact that in Calcutta, a city approximately the size of Chicago, there were available civilian shops and tailoring facilities, as well as some approved recreational facilities. Nevertheless, the experience of nurses and Red Cross women already in the area was not encouraging; nurses had previously suffered from clothing shortages, emotional strain, tension, and a medical evacuation rate four times that of the men.<sup>4</sup> "Wacs in India were definitely on trial," a later report stated, "as many Army officials believed that women would not be able to stand for long the climate and diseases found in Asiatic countries."<sup>5</sup>

It was therefore not until July of 1944, two years after the Corps' establishment, that the Air Forces headquarters in Calcutta received its first Wacs. Earlier attempts to bring in Wacs had been blocked by the theater commander, Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, who eventually yielded to the Air Forces' requests only after receiving the express pledge of the Air

<sup>2</sup> 1st Ind to Memo cited n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> (1) CBI WAC files, by folder number and specific document therein. (See Bibliographical Note.) Other important sources are: (2) Rpt, AAF, IBT to TAG, 5 Jul 45, sub: Surv of WAC Health and Living Conditions in India-Burma Theater. AG 321 WAC, Hobby files, also in CBI WAC files. Hereafter cited as IBT WAC Survey. (3) Rpt, Maj Craighill to The SG through CG IBT, 30 Mar 45, sub: Med and Social Conditions of Women in Mil Serv in IBT. SGO Hist Div 319.1-2, Women, India-Burma; hereafter cited as Craighill IBT Rpt. (4) Comments on draft of present chapter by Maj. Beryl Simpson, wartime WAC Staff Director, China Theater, and Maj. Betty Clague, wartime WAC Staff Director, CBI Theater.

<sup>4</sup> Incl 3 to Craighill IBT Rpt.

<sup>5</sup> Rpt, WAC Stf Dir AAF CT, 25 Oct 45, sub: Narrative Account of WAC Activities in Chungking, China, 15 Jul-13 Oct 45. WDWAC 319.1; also in Folder, Chungking, CBI WAC Sec files.