

Forces commander, Maj. Gen. George E. Stratemeyer, that any Wacs brought in by the AAF would never under any circumstances be assigned to other than Air Forces headquarters.⁶

Scrupulously careful advance preparation was the keynote of the entire Air Forces project. Wacs for shipment to India were selected by the Army Air Forces from among women proved capable and emotionally stable by service at airfields in the United States. The result was so good that General Stratemeyer, upon later checking their job performance, congratulated Director Hobby, who congratulated General Arnold, who congratulated air commands in the United States, who passed the commendation on to selecting officers at airfields—the whole project ending in a glow of mutual admiration.⁷

This success was the more remarkable in that the theater, with typical overseas optimism, asked percentages of scarce skills never remotely approached in the United States—one fourth stenographers, one fourth typists, and the rest all highly skilled in other fields.⁸ It was possible to supply these satisfactorily only because the total original request was not large, less than 300. Selection was marred only by seven cases in which the routine physical inspections failed to detect serious physical disqualifications that caused the women to be returned to the United States. Much to the theater's chagrin, the first report of its WAC experiment was given to the press by one of these women, who had never set foot in India except to enter the comfortable port hospital but who was described by reporters as the heroine of a bout with jungle, heat, and disease-bearing insects, as she personally battled her way through Burma side by side with General Stilwell.⁹

The actual reception of the Wacs was considerably less alarming. "Never has any WAC contingent received a more cordial welcome than this group," wrote the WAC staff director, Maj. Betty Clague.

Everyone from the Commanding General on down has apparently had a personal interest in our welfare and happiness. . . . Everyone is impressed with the fact that they must not let down these men who have expressed such a satisfaction in having us as an integral part of their headquarters.¹⁰

Accommodations were unique, consisting of a section of a huge eight-acre jute mill, which also sheltered headquarters' offices and many of the officers' and enlisted men's quarters. Space allotment per individual was somewhat greater than that of the zone of the interior, and Wacs had not only single-decked beds with sheets and pillows, but dressers, chests of drawers, overhead fans, and mosquito nets. Latrines had toilets, showers, tubs, and mirrored washbasins. For the less than 400 enlisted women¹¹ who eventually lived in these quarters, there were 23 Indian sweepers and about 50 ayahs, who

⁶ Ltr, CG AAF IBT to Dir WAC, 15 Nov 44, sub: WAC Utilization, (Incl 1 to IBT WAC Survey).

⁷ *Ibid.* Also Ltrs, Dir WAC to CG AAF and CG AAF IBT, 18 Dec 44. WDWAC 320.2.

⁸ IBT WAC Survey, p. 6. The 257 enlisted women on duty at that date: 67 stenographers, 61 clerk-typists, 69 clerks, and the rest qualified in such jobs as key punch operator, draftsman, radar specialist, intelligence specialist, photolaboratory technicians, classification specialist, telephone operator, medical technician, cadre, and the like.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9. See also (1) Memo, CO WAC Det for WAC Stf Dir, 14 Feb 45; (2) Ltr, WAC Stf Dir to Air WAC Off, 22 Feb 45. Folder IBT, CBI WAC files.

¹⁰ Ltr, WAC Stf Dir AAF CBI to Air WAC Off, Hq AAF, 21 Aug 44. WDWAC 320.2 CBI.

¹¹ IBT WAC Survey shows 257 EW as of that date. In her comment on a draft of this chapter, Major Simpson shows 397 as the highest number ever on Morning Report. For final theater strength figures, see Table 7, Appendix A.