

We do not find that hardships or rough conditions are resented on operational sites; on the contrary, they are willingly accepted by women who feel, when serving guns and balloons and radio-location, that they come near the actual war and that they are playing their part in the struggle. It is the boredom of non-operational units in old-fashioned barracks or uncomfortable quarters which is a more potent source of discontent than real hardship. . . . Grumbling does not arise over temporary conditions, however hard, which the girls instinctively feel are part and parcel of the war.¹¹

The Navy, recognizing the permanent nature of WAVES employment, provided two- and four-woman rooms similar to the dormitories of civilian women workers. The Bureau of Naval Personnel stated:

Adequate housing was an especially urgent problem for the Women's Reserve in view of the relative permanence of the women's assignment to a station, compared to the men. . . . Housing for women called for certain features not provided in men's barracks: ironing boards, lounges, and the semi-privacy of a four-person cubicle (because women spend more time in quarters than men), more stowage space (the women's uniforms called for more space if they were to be kept in good appearance), more laundry facilities. These features were called for not as special factors or coddling but because they made the women more efficient members of the organization.¹²

For the WAC, it appeared that something resembling the peacetime Army barracks would be adequate for permanent units, although division into cubicles also appeared advantageous in a nonhomogeneous unit where members were on different shifts and schedules.

As early as the summer of 1943, the Director therefore held numerous conferences with representatives of The Surgeon General, Requirements Division, ASF, and the Chief of Engineers. For housing already built, it was too late to change the

standards, but addition of more space appeared possible. The Director noted that the low ceilings in theater-of-operations-type housing, which prevented occupants of upper bunks from sitting up to read or write letters, made an uncomfortable off-duty home for women in permanent units. She therefore asked that the 42 square feet per individual be increased to 60, which would remove the need for double-decked bunks and permit more space for clothing.¹³

The Army Service Forces concurred in this request, but virtually nullified it by stating that the provision would not be retroactive. Since housing for 98,000 women had already been built, there was to be little new construction to benefit by the improved standards. After another six months, the commanding generals of the Air Forces and Ground Forces and the Chief of Engineers supported the retroactivity clause, and eventually secured the concurrence of the Service Forces.¹⁴

This decision marked the limit of wartime changes in WAC quarters. Nothing could be done about the flimsy theater-of-operations-type housing for permanent units, concerning which poor reports continued to come in. Near the end of the war, WAC inspectors found that six out of six general hospital WAC detachments visited had this type of barracks, heated only by "space heaters." In no case, inspectors reported, was this the desire of the hospitals, which felt that the maintenance cost was higher than that of central heating, in spite of the lower initial cost. Wards also lost in efficiency when obliged to relieve women from their regular duties

¹¹ *Conditions in the Three Women's Services.*

¹² WAVES Hist, pp. 111-15.

¹³ Memo cited n. 10(1).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; also Memo cited n. 10(2).