

saving resulted from the fact that most career Army men were married and drew dependents' quarters, to which women were not entitled. The provisions for women were designed to provide a semblance of home life for career women who would perforce be denied children or settled married life if they remained with the Army. Most of these plans remained on the drawing board, since the Army would not for years be in need of much new construction.

Unit Messes

In most respects the WAC unit mess was identical with similar Army messes, except for detached benches at the tables. Many messes also had any number of adjustments needed by women and contrived by the unit or by post carpenters. These included duckboards to limit the depth of sinks to a woman's reach, shelves and wheeled carriers to minimize lifting and bending, and similar mechanical contrivances to make it possible for women to manage heavy equipment designed for men. No catalog was ever made of such local inventions, although one had been begun by WAAC Headquarters before operating functions were transferred to the Army Service Forces, which discarded the material.²⁶

Wherever local authorities permitted, WAC messes frequently took on an appearance quite different from that of the average men's mess, chiefly by the use of color, potted plants, and sometimes curtains, all either salvaged at no expense or acquired from unit or personal funds. One staff director recalled later, "I'll never see a sweet potato vine without thinking of the WAC."²⁷ At holiday seasons, decorations were generally put up, evergreens at

Christmas, autumn foliage for Thanksgiving, bunting on patriotic occasions. Quite often a piano or phonograph was borrowed from recreation buildings and installed in the mess hall to provide music with meals. The WAC unit mess invariably tended to take on something of the function of the kitchen in pioneer homes—a center for family life, visiting, and entertainment. Where there was no unit mess, and Wacs ate in consolidated messes or in city restaurants, a sense of unit solidarity was more difficult to maintain.

Consolidation of Messes

In spite of the vital role played by unit messes in morale and company unity, their maintenance presented certain difficulties. The provision of kitchen police details to staff these messes invariably caused complaint in headquarters offices, which lost a WAC working day once or twice a month. For this reason, Director Hobby for a time considered closing WAC unit messes, and allowing Wacs to eat with men at large consolidated messes where these existed.²⁸ Inquiry soon revealed that in the few cases where Wacs did not have separate mess, company commanders reported not only loss of *esprit*, but a serious nutritional problem. In a consolidated mess, the food was often too heavy and fattening for women. Also, women, after a hard day's work, were found to be going supperless to bed rather than change to clean uniforms, walk some distance to the consolidated mess, and brave the attention

²⁶ Memo, WAAC Hq to Fld, 24 Feb 43, and replies; Memo, Lt Ryan to Plng Serv, 3 Apr 43. SPWA 400.34 sec 3a (1942).

²⁷ Interv with Lt Col Helen H. Woods, USAF Res, 9 Jun 50.

²⁸ Draft of Memo, not sent, Dir WAC for G-1, 22 Jul 43. SPWA 220.6 (1943).