

that would give it greater popularity with the Army or make itself more useful in the war effort."¹⁶ This conjecture was supported by the precedent of the British women's services, which entirely staffed most officers' messes and many general messes.

For the American WAAC's first year, Director Hobby and her advisers therefore contemplated the eventual formation of mess companies, although deferring these in order to meet the shipment schedule for the standard Table of Organization companies. As late as June of 1943 WAAC Headquarters went on record as approving the establishment of WAC mess companies to operate men's messes. The action in fact appeared essential at this time, since the collapse of recruiting plans had left the WAC with a surplus of cooks, trained to staff WAC companies that had failed to materialize. However, before this personnel could be organized into mess companies, a requisition was received from the Army Air Forces to assign the cooks to its hospital diet kitchens to prepare food for patients. Since the need of the sick appeared worthy of priority, the women—some 700 in all—were assigned to the Air Forces and, under its flexible assignment system, added to existing WAC units at stations having hospitals large enough to require them.¹⁷

With the establishment of higher recruiting standards, no such surplus of cooks ever again accumulated. The number of recruits skilled as cooks and home economics specialists was never greater than could be employed in WAC units and hospital diet kitchens. At the same time, several developments convinced the War Department that no steps should be taken to stimulate the enlistment of WAC mess personnel. One important consider-

ation was the working environment, which appeared unsuitable except in the larger messes where an all-WAC mess company could be employed.¹⁸

Also, many duties in an Army mess proved to be beyond a woman's strength. Even in the small WAC unit messes, some assistance from men was often required in unloading hundred-pound cartons or in lifting garbage and grease containers. In the larger messes the kettles and other cooking utensils, when filled, were sometimes too heavy for women to lift, while few women could for many months sustain even such duties as large-scale meat-cutting and baking. Obviously even an all-WAC mess company would necessarily be confined to skilled cooks and mess sergeants, unless troop allotments could be expanded to allow two women for one man in heavier work. Under the circumstances, Colonel Catron informed the War Department at the time of the conversion that priority would be given to WAC messes and hospital messes, and consideration of running enlisted men's messes postponed until these needs were satisfied.¹⁹

This priority was never to be reversed. Not only were recruits too few to fill more urgent needs in offices, but the results of recruiting surveys indicated that any public awareness of the use of Wacs in cooking duties constituted a severe drag upon the recruiting of skilled and capable women. Even the limited use already undertaken had shown adverse effects, and after a receipt of one Gallup report to this effect,

¹⁶ Ltr, Capt Ruth Woodworth, 6th SvC, to Dir WAC, 9 Oct 43. SPWA 331.4.

¹⁷ (1) Min cited n. 9. (2) Memo, WAAC Hq for G-1, 23 Jun 43. SPWA 331.4. (3) AAF WAC Hist.

¹⁸ Memo, G-1 for CofS, 16 Jun 43. CofS 219.9.

¹⁹ Memo, Col Catron for Dir Opng Div WAC, 6 Jul 43. Plng Proj 22, WAAC Plng Serv file, 1943.