

In recommending corrective action, Director Hobby pointed out that in her opinion conditions of overseas service were not identical for men and women. For an able-bodied man, overseas duty was an almost inevitable requirement, whereas less than one out of five Wacs could expect to go overseas, and the assignment tended to become a prize. For a man, overseas shipment meant probable combat service, but for a woman, merely the excitement of proximity to action. Misbehavior in a male soldier overseas was not as conspicuous as in a female one, since a female could not be sent to the front lines. Male soldiers looked upon shipment as a duty which a man should not be allowed to escape through malingering or misconduct, whereas Wacs considered the assignment a reward of merit.

A few months after the transfer of her office to G-1 Division, the Director secured publication of the requirement that WAC company commanders must certify the character of any enlisted woman shipped overseas, and that staff directors must certify WAC officers. The circular was approved by the War Department only after being carefully worded to indicate that the choice of Wacs for overseas service would still be made by male commanders in accordance with their command prerogative; the station commander's choice was merely limited to those women whose conduct was good according to WAC standards. This certification was generally effective, and overseas theaters shortly reported a noticeable improvement in the qualifications of new arrivals.⁸

Medical Screening

The character-screening powers of WAC officers could not be stretched to

veto the shipment of any woman whose behavior record was good, even if her physical stamina or stability appeared dubious. Army doctors and psychiatrists believed that there were many women physically and emotionally capable of service in the United States who would crack up overseas, and recommended careful physical examinations before shipment. In Auxiliary days, the European theater also requested that women get a complete physical examination before shipment, as the arrival of large numbers who had to be immediately returned for any cause, but especially for pregnancy which had existed before shipment, "would present an embarrassing situation."⁹ The War Department accordingly directed that Waacs going overseas be given a complete physical examination that would detect pregnancy and any disease or defect.¹⁰ This thorough WAAC examination was a departure from the Army system, since men going overseas merely got a superficial inspection.

Incorporation of the WAAC in the Army ended the authority for a physical examination for women, but, by some oversight, WAC training centers, in assembling shipments, continued to give complete overseas physical examinations under the old WAAC system for seven months after the ASF assumed control. In March of 1944, The Surgeon General's Office discovered that women were being given such an examination and ordered it

⁸ (1) D/F cited n. 6. (2) WD Cir 291, 11 Jul 44. (3) See ASF WAC Officer's file of acceptances and rejections in SPAP 210.3 WAC; also WD Cir 362, 6 Dec 44.

⁹ Rad 982, USFOR London to WAR, 17 May 43. SPWA 320.2 sec 4b.

¹⁰ D/F, G-1 for CG ASF, 3 Jul 43. WDGAP 201.5 WAC, in SPWA 320.2 sec 4b.