

publication, in the summer of 1943, of a medical circular giving detailed directions as to the proper procedure for conduct of the monthly physical inspection for female troops. This definitely made it clear that a pelvic examination would not be given routinely; if it seemed indicated by other symptoms, it might be made in a dispensary or hospital. It was also specified that the pelvic examination would be made rectally "where indicated"; this provision met the objections of young unmarried women to enlistment. It was required that the monthly inspection be simple and private, preferably in the WAC barracks, with the subject suitably draped; inspections in the nude were forbidden.²⁸

Even after this action, objections continued to come in. Company commanders pointed out that their women were of excellent moral character and found the monthly inspection embarrassing. Women also frequently questioned the necessity for any examination at all, since it could not detect venereal disease and was so brief—15 seconds in one training center—that in their opinion it served no purpose but to waste time and require undressing and dressing. Major Craighill in reply urged WAC commanders to educate their women to the purposes of the examination, which was not intended to imply a suspicion that they had contracted venereal disease, but rather to detect any deterioration in physical condition before it became serious, and to promote a friendly doctor-patient acquaintance that would make medical care easier in the event of illness.²⁹

To this end, another Surgeon General letter was sent out, advising doctors that more care should be taken to consider the modesty of the individual and to explain the purpose of the examination. It was added that a female company officer

should be present at all times, that personnel would wear underwear in addition to being covered with a sheet or blanket, and that an inspection of the pubic hair would not be made routinely. This last requirement alone did much to end the near-rebellion with which many women had regarded the monthly inspection.³⁰

Women's higher degree of modesty in physical matters obviously posed a continuing problem for examiners, and one which, in the opinion of medical authorities, was not likely to be changed in the current century. General Menninger noted, "Girls are raised in a manner entirely different from boys in relation to the emphasis on modesty and privacy in dressing, bathing, and toilet."³¹ Equally important was the fact that examining physicians were of the opposite sex in all but the very few installations that employed women doctors. It appeared that male personnel likewise might have offered some objections to monthly nude examination by women doctors. Well toward the end of the war, The Surgeon General's Office continued to receive objections based on this factor, and to find evidence that some medical officers were still unfamiliar with the precautions prescribed in medical directives, particularly that concerning the presence of the female commanding officer.³²

²⁸ SGO Cir Ltr 135, 27 Jul 43, in SPWA 314.7 sec 3.

²⁹ Memo, Craighill for Gen Bliss, 25 Mar 44, sub: Visit to Ft Des Moines and Chicago. Folder Capt Berlien, SGO Hist Div.

³⁰ (1) Ltr to 3d SvC, 4 Dec 43, with 1st Ind, SGO to Dir WAC, 25 Jan 44; (2) Ltr, SG to all SvCs, 9 Feb 44, incl Change to SGO Cir 1, 1 Jan 44; amends SGO Cir Ltr 135, 27 Jul 43. SPWA 702 (12-4-43), 1943.

³¹ Menninger, *Psychiatry in a Troubled World*.

³² (1) Memo, Asst Consultant on Women's Health for Col Freer, SGO, 27 Sep 44. SGO Cl 321 WAC. (2) D/F, G-1 to SGO, 29 Sep 45. WDGAP 201.5 WAC, in WDWAC 201.5.