

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Leadership of Women

If the development of leaders among men was one of the Army's major problems, the development of women leaders was equally urgent for the Women's Army Corps, and even more difficult, since the Corps began its career without a nucleus of experienced personnel. Soon after the conversion to Army status, field commands noted that one of the Corps' most pressing needs was for good WAC detachment commanders; those sent out were frequently found to be deficient in the training, the experience, and the temperament for leadership.¹

There were those who held that the task was impossible, in that the terms *female* and *leader* were self-contradictory. This prevalent view was set forth, soon after the move of the Director's Office to G-1 Division, in a nationally syndicated newspaper column, which alleged:

The War Department has received thousands of letters from Wacs suggesting that officer personnel in their outfits consist of men instead of women. The revolt is so bitter and widespread that the recommendation may be accepted. . . . The gist of the general complaint seems to be that the gals would have more respect for a male boss than for a female commander. . . . Most of the communications charge that women are too "petty" to handle large groups of the same sex.²

This statement was, fortunately for the WAC, entirely inaccurate. No such avalanche of letters was received by the

War Department; there was no hint of any such "revolt"; no recommendation that WAC commanders be replaced was ever received from any major commander.³ There was much question of the way in which to discover the best female commanders and remove unsuitable ones, but there was never, after the first officer candidate classes, any question of the necessity for unit commanders of the same sex as the troops. Only the first seven WAAC training classes had male officers, who were replaced by female officers as rapidly as possible.

The question of "leadership" as here raised was distinct from the administrative and disciplinary aspects of command. In mere administration, women officers for female troops had a natural advantage: the WAC company routine of inspection, sick call, monthly physical examination and similar matters was, if not impossible, at least embarrassing for the male commander, and in all private interviews he was forced to remain constantly aware of possible charges that might be brought against him unless witnesses were present at all times. In disciplinary matters, reports on file from field commanders also attested that the average male officer was more

¹ Min, Stf Dirs Conf, New York, 1-3 Dec 43. SPWA 337 (11-10-43).

² The column "National Whirligig," 11 Apr 44. WDWAC 000.7.

³ Only one such early document was discovered, and this was never forwarded to the War Department.