

*The Maternalistic Commander*

an exaggerated effect upon women, who were unable to take her shortcomings lightly and were completely demoralized, while a capable commander found them unprecedentedly malleable, and was able to build an unusually high company discipline and spirit. Army men commented that women seemed noticeably more sensitive to discipline than were the average male troops whom they had commanded. "Women don't require the needling that men do," said Colonel McCoskrie of Fort Des Moines.

Women hate to fail. Words of encouragement go further with them than blame. It is fatal to assume the same attitude one would with men—you just scare them and then get nothing further from them.<sup>18</sup>

This difference appeared partly due to women's social training, which, according to Dr. Durfee, "makes them tend to want to please and not offend," and partly due to the fact that they were volunteers, above average in aptitude, and eager to demonstrate the abilities of their sex.

Because of this trait, the successful WAC commander was always obliged to have positive qualities of leadership instead of merely negative ones of authority. "You don't command women—you lead them," Colonel McCoskrie reported. Dr. Durfee noted that "there is a great difference between ordering your women around because you are their commanding officer and winning their cooperation because you are their leader."<sup>19</sup> Colonel Hobby urged selection boards to consider this factor, saying:

In the beginning we put too much stress on this business of command anyway. We never want to make the mistake of substituting force for real leadership. My experience is that leadership is mostly by example.<sup>20</sup>

Women leaders, apparently more than men, also needed to guard against an overprotective attitude toward their companies. In spite of the Wacs' dependency upon their commander, they seldom enjoyed being the recipients of applied child psychology, in which too many WAC officers appeared to be experts. The leadership situation was definitely not that of parent and child, nor even that of teacher and child. Dr. Durfee noted:

The criticism most often heard of WAC officers is that they treat their troops too much like children and talk down to them too much. This tendency to fall into a house-mother role is understandable, and is probably due, in part, to the natural maternalism of women, in part to the dependence of troops on their company commanders. It is well for WAC officers to remember that they are dealing with grown women, many of whom have managed their own affairs for years.

Of officers who failed on this score, enlisted women commented:

"She treated her command as she probably did her 4B grade class."

"She never seemed to realize we might be intelligent too."

"She regarded us as so many figures to be pushed around on a checkerboard."

Of those whom they considered real leaders, enlisted women said:

"She acted as though she thought highly of everyone of us and gave us fair adult treatment."

"She treated us with respect and automatically received in kind."

<sup>18</sup> Interv, 29 Jan 46.

<sup>19</sup> *The WAC Officer*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> M/R, A Statement of Policy on Selection of OCs, 12 Mar 43. SPWA 314.7 (1-7-43)(11) sec 1.