

Freeing Men to Fight: The Birth of the WAAC – World War II

When President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Selective Service Act in 1940 in response to the growing tension in the world stemming from the rise of various forms of totalitarianism in Europe and Japan, Fort Des Moines became an Induction Center where men would be processed in preparation for the probability of war.

Also, in response to the world situation, Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts began to address the possibility of forming an all-volunteer women's Army corps. Anticipating the need to get as many men as possible into fighting positions, Congresswoman Rogers knew how helpful women would be in filling all sorts of non-combat roles in the military. In fact, she had seen it—and done it. During World War I, she served with Britain's Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1917 and then with Red Cross from 1918 to 1922. She witnessed the utter devotion, bravery, efficiency and selflessness of the women in support of the military, and she was convinced that America had not made proper use of its own willing and able-bodied women to bolster the defense of the nation, in peacetime or wartime. In fact, during World War I, America had borrowed over 2,000 British women to assist its own forces overseas.

Mrs. Rogers entered Congress in 1925 to fill the seat vacated by her deceased husband, but she had already established a highly respected record in Washington, especially in the area of veterans' affairs. While in the Red Cross, she had devoted herself to the care of disabled veterans and had been the voice of veterans' issues for three presidents: Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover. Quite appropriately, when Mrs. Rogers became Congresswoman Rogers, she was appointed to the World War Veterans' Committee.

By May 1941, with the storm clouds of war on the horizon, Representative Rogers introduced a bill which would provide for an auxiliary corps of women to fill the thousands of non-combat roles in the military—from accountants to cooks, motor pool drivers to switchboard operators, interpreters to librarians, headquarters administrators to post exchange officers—all of which had been filled previously by men more suited—and needed—for combat roles.

Though Representative Rogers knew she had the implicit support of President Roosevelt and the First Lady, Eleanor, who had already spoken out in favor of American women serving as British women had, opposition to her bill came swiftly and with great furor. All conventional thought regarding womanhood, sexuality, American and military values seemed threatened by the bill, and it languished in Congress, doomed to extinction by debate and deferment.

Then came Pearl Harbor

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, the empire of Japan attacked American military bases at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and, shortly after, in the Philippines. The next day, President Roosevelt announced that the "date which will live in infamy" had jolted America into a second world war. Suddenly, every healthy male was

needed to defend his nation in what would prove to be the costliest conflict in human history, both in terms of money spent and lives lost.

Still reeling from the Great Depression of the thirties, America was ill-prepared for war, especially a war in two theaters of conflict—Europe and the Pacific. The Depression and isolationist leanings both within the government and in the general population had so weakened the military that on that fateful Sunday morning in December, the United States was ranked 17th in the world in terms of military strength (behind such countries as the Netherlands!). The fact that this nation was able to rally from this low status to equal status with the military might of Hitler's Third Reich in little over a year is profound testimony to the will and spirit of the American people. Nearly one hundred percent of peacetime factories were transformed within weeks to wartime manufacturing plants, and as young men began disappearing from the streets of every American city into the ranks of the military, women began donning overalls and entering the factories, making the guns, bullets, screws, uniforms, parachutes, and hundreds of thousands of other gadgets which they hoped and prayed would protect their loved ones and bring them home.

They also began to ration. Foodstuffs and materials which had been available even during the Depression now were rationed or simply unavailable. Coffee, sugar, meat, gasoline, tires—all rationed or restricted so that troops could have plenty of the best. New cars? Refrigerators? Not available. Nearly any domestic "machine" became the last of its kind: when it wore out, people simply did without. Interviews with those who experienced rationing emphasize the importance of this effort rather than the sacrifices it might have entailed.

Everyone sensed how high the stakes were. Though accurate information about the war itself was hard to come by, radio and movie newsreels (shown along with feature films at movie theaters) conveyed some of the dark realities of the first months of the war: in battle after battle, whether in Europe or the Pacific, American victories were infrequent. Few spoke of the possibility of defeat, but most understood that the future of humanitarian ideals, justice, freedom, and survival itself rested on the outcome of this war.

Many, including Congresswoman Rogers, believed that active military involvement by women would be essential to victory. She continued to lobby for her bill throughout the winter and early spring of 1942. Though the reality of war provided an urgency which did not exist when she first presented the bill, Rogers still faced tremendous resistance to the idea of women in the military. While the military repeatedly raised the estimates of the numbers of troops it would need to fight and win this unprecedented conflict, Congress drew lines in the sand with social norms and sexual stereotypes. One representative asked, "Who will then do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself; who will nurture the children?" The logical—and grim—answer to these questions, which no one dared to offer, was that if America failed in this conflict for lack of manpower, the question of nurturing its children would be quite irrelevant. But Congressional debates like this one merely echoed the concerns of the American people, and the debate

became lengthy and serious: ninety-eight columns of The Congressional Record were devoted to discussion of Rogers' bill. Only after the military itself, in the voice of General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, indicated support for the bill did it finally pass. General Marshall's support was fueled mainly by the stark realities of numbers: Army ground forces were already short more than 160,000 men in 1942 and were facing the unpopular prospect of drafting eighteen year olds and men with children.' The House voted 249 to 86, and the Senate 38 to 27, in favor of Rogers' bill on **May 14, 1942. This is the date the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and later the Women's Army Corps (WAC) would celebrate as their birthday**, though President Roosevelt did not sign the bill into law until the next day.

While this was a clear victory for Congresswoman Rogers, she had always hoped that women would be allowed into the Regular Army from the first day. This proved too controversial, so the law passed in 1942 provided for an auxiliary corps of women who would work with the Regular Army, not in it.

General Marshall took an active role in the organization of the WAAC from its inception, and he made the crucial decision about what kind of leadership would guide this grand experiment. To this end, perhaps the most important choice he made was his appointment of Oveta Culp Hobby as director of the WAAC.

Mrs. Hobby, a 37 year old Baylor College graduate, wife of a former governor of Texas and mother of two children, had been a parliamentarian in the Texas House of Representatives, editor and vice-president of the Houston Post, author of a textbook on parliamentary law, and Chief of the Women's Interest Section in the Public Relations Bureau in the War Department where she had assisted Congresswoman Rogers in developing plans for the WAAC. Mrs. Hobby combined the essential leadership qualities of intelligence, clarity of purpose, absolute devotion to the cause, and superb communication skills with an assured femininity and grace which would not be compromised by a "masculine" uniform or position of authority. One look at this poised, attractive, dignified yet approachable woman silenced all questions about whether WAACs would be required to "become like men." On May 16, 1942, Oveta Culp Hobby raised her right hand and took the oath of her office as Director of the WAAC and obtained the equivalent rank of an army colonel.

Recruitment of the first officer candidates and auxiliaries began on May 27, 1942. Any woman who wished to apply needed to be a U.S. citizen between the ages of 21 and 45 with excellent character (demonstrated by letters of recommendation). She could be single or married but could not have any children under the age of fourteen. Two years of high school and a satisfactory aptitude ("mental alertness") test rating were desirable, though the requirement of a high school diploma could be waived if the woman scored exceptionally high on the aptitude test. After passing the initial aptitude test and meeting all other requirements, the applicant would be screened by a local interviewing board staffed by women and an Army officer. This board would quiz the applicant on all sorts of issues, from personal to professional, as well as some truly odd areas. The one question Carrie recalled being asked was, "Do you remember the color

of the hallway you just walked down?" Fortunately, she did. Upon reflection, she realized that the board was testing her awareness of her surroundings, as well as the degree of stress she felt prior to the interview. Other WAAC applicants recall being asked if they would mind living with women, if they could tolerate long lines for food, and if they could withstand deprivation of traditional female comforts for prolonged periods of time. The most important test for applicants, however, was the Army General Classification Test (AGCT), the results of which would be used to determine job placement and potential for leadership. Many WAACs later commented on the male slant of the questions (references to sports were common), though the test was later revised to relate more specifically to female applicants.

Soon, recruiting centers were overrun with enthusiastic women seeking more information about the WAAC or hoping to sign up immediately. Planners had to reassess their original plans: they had forecast a gradual increase of the number of WAACs from 12,000 the first year to 25,000 the second, and 62,000 by the end of 1944. Instead, the number of WAACs by the end of the first year reached over 60,000.

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was born; it had its leader and tens of thousands of new applicants. Now, it needed a home.

FROM STABLES TO BARRACKS: FORT DES MOINES "PREPARES FOR THE LADIES"

Fort Des Moines was not the first choice. WAAC organizers in Washington, D.C. felt that the first training facility for women should be close to WAAC headquarters in the capital city. Even before Congress approved Congresswoman Rogers' bill, a site in Maryland was chosen for its proximity to Washington and its ideal weather which tended towards the cool side, perfect for the proposed wool uniforms the women would be wearing. Even a name was selected: the Molly Pitcher School, after the revolutionary war heroine. But Congress took so long debating the WAAC bill that the Navy acquired the property for its own pressing needs, and the WAAC remained, for a time, homeless.

As WAAC planners discussed other options, they quickly realized how few practical and immediate choices actually existed. The unique characteristics and purposes of the WAAC posed very specific challenges in terms of location: existing structures must be capable of housing hundreds of women (a first in American history), sufficient empty land must be available for new construction to commence immediately in preparation for thousands of future WAACs, and an atmosphere of racial tolerance must exist. To reflect the make-up of the general population, 10% of the WAAC was to be made up of African Americans, including the first Officer Candidates, and this fact alone eliminated locations in the deep south where any movement towards diversity, much less integration, would be met with constant, potentially violent opposition. Also necessary would be a military infrastructure—with mess halls, post exchanges, fire departments, quartermaster buildings, roads, hospitals, parade and drill fields – which could reasonably be converted to a base primarily for women.

Over and over again, the old cavalry post and current Induction Center at Fort Des Moines came into the discussions as the only possible option, despite its extreme weather, including hot, steamy summers and wickedly cold winters. The fort's location just outside of a major city with an airport and several train lines simplified transportation and supply issues, and the city's existing hotels and schools might be used to house and train the "overflow" of WAACs until the fort could be expanded sufficiently.

Fort Des Moines was also located near the geographic center of the country, had no major defense projects in operation at the time (other than the Induction Center, which could be relocated to nearby Fort Dodge), would present no race issues because of its long history of diversity and the multi-racial make-up of Des Moines itself, and, most importantly, offered the space and structures necessary to accommodate the WAAC with only minimal renovations (in the barracks once used by cavalry officers, once the urinals were replaced with toilets, the barracks were functional for the WAAC). The fort could provide immediately for 1,000 WAACs with a potential for at least an additional 5,000 once expansion efforts were complete. Of course, the nine huge cavalry stables, quickly converted to barracks, would play a major role in this capability.

For all of these reasons, **Fort Des Moines became the first home of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps on May 16, 1942.** The race was on to prepare the fort for "the arrival of the ladies." Army organizers, including Col. Don Faith, first commander of the WAAC at Fort Des Moines, left Washington immediately for the Midwest. The Army had only two months before the fort would open to the first Army women in history.

Though one of the advantages of Fort Des Moines was its many military buildings, including barracks, a post exchange, guardhouse, administration buildings, headquarters building, officers' quarters, and a hospital, changes and additions would be necessary to accommodate the first group of nearly 800 WAACs scheduled to arrive by late summer. In addition to the changes in bathroom facilities, the fort was enlarged with new quarters for nurses in the hospital area, an additional officers' mess hall, two officers' quarters, as well as a chapel, theater, two service clubs, and a post library.

Meanwhile, talk continued in Washington throughout the summer of increasing the numbers of WAACs. The president's original order called for 25,000. By November, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson approved an increase in enrollment to 150,000, which was the limit set by Congress in the passage of the original bill.

And women continued to flow into recruiting centers. Requisitions for admittance topped 80,000 by the end of the first year. The first 440 WAAC officer candidates had to be culled from over 13,000 applicants, all clear indicators that the WAAC had struck a chord with American women who desired to contribute more fully and more directly in the war effort than their predecessors had been allowed. WAAC organizers knew quite early, then, that expansion of Fort Des Moines would exceed original expectations.

By mid-June, plans for further growth at Fort Des Moines were submitted to the Chief of Staff, Construction would be increased by twenty percent, including an area officially called "Winn Area" after General John S. Winn, a famous artillery officer. WAACs would later name the area "Boomtown" to describe the way it "boomed" into existence. Located at the south end of the original fort, Boomtown would provide housing, support facilities, and classrooms for the new WAAC: 112 buildings "sprung up" in less than five months, averaging sixteen buildings a week. The total structures built in Boomtown reached 174, more buildings than many of the women saw in their hometowns. But even though the area seemed to appear overnight, its growth was actually messy and difficult, especially as the WAACs arrived before Boomtown was completed. The unpaved, muddy roads in Boomtown would figure prominently and comically in many WAACs' letters and photographs sent home.

Despite the renovation of the old fort and the expansion into Boomtown, even further measures were necessary to ready the fort for the now rather daunting certainty of thousands of WAAC personnel living and training at the fort, not to mention the thousands of military personnel who would pass through the fort in the coming war years. Until women officers were prepared and available to take over the education and training of their own, cadres of hundreds of men were needed at the fort, and their housing posed an additional space problem. Unmarried officers could live in the BOQ (Bachelors Officers' Quarters), and married officers with their families could inhabit the apartments in Officers' Row, the line of old quarters on the north and west sides of the Parade Ground. But 634 male soldiers brought in to assist the WAAC would live in a tent camp on the northeast wooded area of the fort. Because so many elements of preparing for the WAAC were coming together at once, timing was not always perfect just as Boomtown was not yet paved or built in time for the WAAC arrival, the male cadres who were expected to teach the WAACs arrived at the fort less than two weeks before their students.

As anticipated, the city of Des Moines would be called upon to help the WAAC as well. City buildings, hotels, downtown office buildings, entertainment facilities, and university classrooms, all vacant or nearly so due to the war, would be acquired by the U.S. government for the purpose of housing, schooling, and training the overflow of WAACs from Fort Des Moines.

Though Fort Des Moines was far from ready for them, **on July 20, 1942, the first 440 officer candidates and the first group of 330 enlisted WAACs arrived.** The old cavalry post, and the old American military, would never be the same.



On August 29, 1942, 436 women were commissioned as Third Officers in the WAAC, the first female officers in the U.S. military. At 10 a.m. the Fort Des Moines band led the parade of WAACs onto Parade Ground, the first time in history when women carried the colors in a military review.

In her address to the members of this historic class, Director Hobby reminded them,

“You are the first women to serve.... Never forget it.... You have given up comfortable homes, highly paid positions, leisure. You have taken off silk and put on khaki. And all for essentially the same reason: you have a date with destiny.... On your shoulders will rest the reputation and the civilian recognition of the Corps....From now on you are soldiers, defending a free way of life.... You are no longer individuals. You wear the uniform of the United States. Respect that uniform. Respect all that it stands for.... In the final analysis, the only testament free people can give to the quality of freedom is the way in which they resist the forces that peril freedom.”

Observing the singular event from the Reviewing Stand were Director Hobby; Major General Frederick Uhl, Commander of the Seventh Command; Congresswoman Edith Rogers; General James A. Ulio, Adjutant General of the Army; and General Don C. Faith, first Commandant of the training center."

The last OCS class at Fort Des Moines graduated in November 1945.

From My Mother's Fort (A Photographic Tribute to Fort Des Moines, First Home of the Women's Army Corps) by Penelope A. Blake Ph.D.2005



Charity Adams graduated with the first WAAC OCS class on August 26, 1942.

Charity Adams was the first Black officer in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later known as the Women's Army Corps) in World War II and led the first predominately Black WAC unit to serve overseas. Like many WAACs who volunteered to serve after the attack on Pearl Harbor, she was motivated by her patriotism, ambition and sense of adventure.

WAC Officer Procurement and Career Development 1948-1954

Upon entering the permanent military establishment, the WAC had one source of officers and only vague plans for their career development. In World War II, large numbers of enlisted women had applied eagerly for Officer Candidate School (OCS); consequently, WAC planners assumed that applicants would continue to provide the annual requirement for second lieutenants. But between 1948 and 1950, few enlisted women rushed to apply for OCS, and many of those who did failed the long and difficult course. The WAC sorely needed another source of officers. It also needed a program to keep its current officers interested in remaining on active duty despite the restrictions on promotion. Wartime personnel planning had been minimal. Career management planning was needed to ensure proper officer training and challenging assignments. But, because the WAC was a temporary part of the Army, a long-range officer development program was not proposed. When the Corps became permanent in 1948, WAC planners had to prepare career plans that would give WAC officers job satisfaction and offer hope for career advancement. The task would be difficult because WAC officers received little training beyond OCS and could not advance beyond the grade of lieutenant colonel.

Until 1948 the Corps had been concerned with only the total number of officers on active duty. After the Corps became part of the Regular Army, WAC planners became preoccupied not only with increasing the number of its regular officers but also with

obtaining supplementary reserve officers willing to serve on extended active duty to meet the total officer requirement. Traditional male officer procurement sources—the U.S. Military Academy and ROTC programs—were not available to the WAC. The Organized Reserve, however, was. And, in 1948, Congress authorized retirement pay for reservists who served twenty years on active duty. It, thus, became easier to attract reservists for active duty.¹ Eligible women could choose between becoming regular officers with a generally accepted commitment of thirty years on active duty or becoming reserve officers and spending twenty years on active duty. WAC officers showed a preference for the shorter reserve career over the longer, more prestigious and advantageous status of a regular officer.

Within a year Colonel Hallaren saw that OCS alone would not produce enough second lieutenants to fill the Corps' requirements. For each biannual OCS class, she had anticipated receiving 100 or more applications from which to choose 75 outstanding candidates—a total of 150 annually. With an estimated attrition rate of 11 percent, the average OCS loss during World War II, about 135 officers would enter the Corps each year. But only 81 women applied for the first class-69 were selected, 37 graduated. For the second class, 86 applied, 61 were selected, 42 graduated. In 1949 the Corps gained only 79 of the required 135 officers.

There were several explanations for the low number of OCS applications. During World War II, women between 20 and 50 years of age could apply, but after 1948, women (like men) had to be at least 20 years and 6 months old and could not be 28 or over. The educational requirement was not considered a deterrent for applicants because the requirements for enlistment and for OCS were the same—a high school diploma or a passing score on the General Educational Development Test. The necessity to obtain passing scores on the Army General Qualification Test (110) and the Officer Candidate Test (115), however, eliminated many applicants. As a matter of choice, some women with all the qualifications for OCS simply preferred enlisted status. Others considered the length of training interminable—eight weeks of basic training, eight weeks in Leaders Course, and twenty-four weeks in Officer Candidate School. News of the high rate of attrition, spreading to WAC units in the field, may also have deterred some applicants.

WAC planners were perplexed by the number of women candidates who failed to complete OCS successfully. The attrition rate for the first eight classes averaged 34.3 percent. (See Table 10.) The WAC School tried several methods to reduce attrition. Screening of applicants was tightened in 1951. Candidates received a four-hour remedial reading course before they began OCS. An analysis of the failures in the first seven classes showed "deficiencies in leadership" to be the most frequent cause. Such deficiencies included the inability to solve leadership problems, to conduct close order drill, to exercise good judgment, or to maintain the appearance, demeanor, and deportment of a leader. The staff and faculty tried to resolve these problems through extra tutoring and counseling sessions. But nothing seemed to help; attrition remained high.

The WAC was not alone in experiencing such high rates of attrition. In 1951 the chief of Army Field Forces, General Mark W. Clark, appointed a board of officers to study officer candidate school operations throughout the Army. The board's final report showed that attrition in male OCS courses at Fort Riley, Fort Sill, and Fort Benning averaged 37.12 percent; attrition from WAC OCS was only slightly higher at 37.81 percent. The study

group, presided over by Col. George G. Elms, the assistant commandant of the Army Ground School, concluded that "im-perfect procurement and selection rather than weaknesses in the OCS system constitute the principal reasons for the present attrition rate." Based on their recommendations, screening of all officer candidates was tightened to narrow the selection of applicants. Screening so reduced WAC selectees for enrollment in OCS that in 1954 the officer candidate class had to be merged with the WAC Company Officers Course (WCOC), the class for direct commission students.

Earlier, in 1949, when Colonel Hallaren had seen that WAC OCS would not provide enough officers to fill regular and reserve requirements, she had obtained approval to initiate a direct commission program similar to one used by the Navy. Under the WAC program, women college graduates received appointments as second lieutenants in the Organized Reserve, and upon successfully completing the WCOC, they applied for appointment in the Regular Army. Each applicant had signed a statement that read, in part, "I further agree to apply for a commission in the Women's Army Corps, Regular Army, upon successful completion of such training.

TABLE 10—WAC OCS, 1949-1953

Class No.	Graduation Date	Entered	Graduated	Percent Attrition	Length (weeks)
I.....	1 Apr 49	69	37	46.4	24
II.....	29 Sep 49	61	42	31.1	24
III.....	11 Apr 50	63	50	20.8	24
IV.....	19 Dec 50	42	26	38.1	17
V.....	24 Jul 51	48	21	56.3	17
VI.....	8 Mar 52	41	35	14.6	17
VII.....	19 Jul 52	13	10	23.1	17
VIII.....	14 Mar 53	25	13	44.0	20

WAC OCS (1954-1976)

Screening so reduced WAC selectees for enrollment in OCS that in 1954 the officer candidate class had to be merged with the WAC Company Officers Course (WCOC), the class for direct commission students.

The merger in 1954 of OCS and WCOC (WAC Company Officers Course) classes produced a surprising effect. OCS classes that graduated between August 1954 and June 1962 had an average attrition rate of only 18 percent.

Class VI of the WAC Officer Basic Course and Class X of the WAC Officer Candidate Course, the first combined class, began on 26 August 1954 with twenty-two student officers and six officer candidates. Student officers and officer candidates lived in a barracks designed like those at the Center for basic trainees, except that partitions were provided between each two cots in the bays.

Although leadership deficiencies still led to other reasons for failure, fewer failures occurred. The reason for the reduction in attrition perhaps lay in the merger of the student officer and officer candidate classes.

One theory was that the officer candidates benefited from the more understanding attitude that cadre and faculty members exhibited toward college students new to the Army. Previously, all class members had some Army experience. They had been selected because of their excellent leadership ability, knowledge, appearance, and ambition. Many cadre and faculty members, therefore, maintained such high standards in these areas that only overachievers could qualify. Some candidates became discouraged in trying to succeed; many finally just gave up.

When the course for student officers and officer candidates was combined, a more balanced approach to achievement prevailed, and the learning atmosphere improved for the candidates. Another theory about the lower attrition was that the candidates competed more strongly against the student officers to show that experience in the enlisted ranks was more valuable than a college education. Whatever the explanation, after the merger, attrition was never again a problem in OCS.

The continued existence of a WAC Officer Candidate School was ensured by identifying the new 20-week course as the "WAC Officer Basic Course and Officer Candidate Course (WOBC/OC Course)"

That same year, 1954, in an effort to increase officer procurement, Colonel Galloway and her staff began work on a new approach—the WAC College Junior Program. The concept, a modification of one used successfully by the Women Marines, was implemented in the summer of 1957. The primary purpose of the program was to give women in their junior year of college a taste of life as a WAC officer.

For four weeks each summer (later three), approximately sixty college juniors entered the Army as corporals in the Army Reserve. While on active duty, the Army paid for their transportation, gave them the pay and allowances due an E-4, and provided them with uniforms, food, and housing. In return, they attended introductory classes on Army organization, leadership, training, administration, close order drill, and physical training. They also went on field trips to other Army posts and worked at WAC Center headquarters, at the basic training battalion, or at WAC School.

After the orientation course, they returned to college but remained in the Army Reserve on inactive duty. Upon graduating from college, they were commissioned as second lieutenants in the Army Reserve, and they reported on active duty to the WAC Officer Basic Course the summer after graduation.

In 1964, the personnel officer at Headquarters, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), in Saigon wrote to the director, then Colonel Gorman, that the Republic of Vietnam was organizing a Women's Armed Forces Corps (WAFC) and wanted U.S. WACs to assist them in planning and developing it. The MACV commander, then General Westmoreland, authorized spaces for two WAC advisors. Before the requisitions arrived at the Pentagon, the MACV personnel officer, Brig. Gen. Ben Sternberg, wrote Colonel Gorman, offering some friendly advice: "The WAC officer should be a captain or major, fully knowledgeable in all matters pertaining to the operation of a WAC school and the

training conducted therein. She should be extremely intelligent, an extrovert and beautiful. The WAC sergeant should have somewhat the same qualities . . . and should be able to type as well." Colonel Gorman replied that the WAC would "certainly try" to send women with "the qualifications you outline." Then, she added, "The combination of brains and beauty is, of course, common in the WAC."

By the time the requisitions arrived at the Pentagon in November 1964, the director had selected Maj. Kathleen I. Wilkes and Sgt. 1st Cl. Betty L. Adams to fill the positions. Both had extensive experience in WAC training, recruiting, administration, and command. On 15 January 1965, they arrived in Saigon and were met by Maj. Tran Cam Huong, director of the WAFC and commandant of the WAFC training center and her assistant, Maj. Ho Thi Ve. The first WAC advisors to the Women's Armed Forces Corps set the pattern of duties for those who replaced them every year. They advised the WAFC director and her staff on methods of organization, inspection, and management in recruiting, training, administering, and assigning enlisted women and officer candidates. Time did not permit the first two WAC advisors to attend language school before they went to Saigon, but those who followed attended a twelve-week Vietnamese language course at the Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California. Although Major Huong and her key staff members spoke English, a knowledge of Vietnamese was helpful to the WAC advisors.

In 1968, an additional WAC officer advisor was assigned to the WAFC training center located on the outskirts of Saigon. The senior WAC advisor, then a lieutenant colonel, and the NCO advisor, then a master sergeant, remained at WAFC headquarters in the city and continued to help the director of the WAFC to develop Corps-wide plans and policies. For additional training, members of the WAFC traveled to the United States. Between 1964 and 1971, fifty-one Vietnamese women officer candidates completed the WAC Officer Basic Course at the WAC School; one officer completed the WAC Officer Advanced Course.

The DCSPER and DWAC approved TRADOC's recommendation to eliminate the direct commission programs, to integrate women into the male Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning beginning in October 1976, and to close WAC School when the last WOOC class graduated in October 1977.

The basic course, retitled the WAC Officers Orientation Course (WOOC), was reduced from eighteen to eleven weeks effective 1973. After graduation from WOOC or entry on active duty from ROTC, WAC officers attended the basic course, usually nine weeks, of another branch. An eleven-week WAC Officer Orientation Course (WOOC) for student officers and officer candidates replaced the eighteen-week WAC Officer Basic Course/Officer Candidate Course (WOBC/OCC) on 1 January 1973. Upon completion of the orientation course, the women attended an officer's basic branch course at another service school (Quartermaster, Military Police, Signal, etc.). The average length of the courses was nine weeks. The last WOBC/OCC Class (XLII), 159 student officers and 7 officer candidates, graduated on 15 December 1972.

In July 1973, a Defense Department study recommended that Fort McClellan be closed; that MP activities remain at Fort Gordon; that WAC basic training be dispersed to other training centers; and that the WAC School be deactivated.

The women's direct commission program would be discontinued, and WAC officer candidates would be trained with male officer candidates at Fort Benning, Georgia. WAC School continued to be slated for deactivation in 1976, ending separate training for women officers.

The year 1976 brought other milestones in women's training. With congressional approval, 119 women entered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (Class of 1970) on 7 July. The first women graduated from Army ROTC programs and were commissioned in May and June 1976. The WAC Student Officer Program ended with the graduation of 108 students in the last College Junior Class (XIX) on 1 August 1975. The program for enrolling women in ROTC proved so successful that the WAC Officer Orientation Course was discontinued with the graduation of 129 students in Class XVII on 27 September 1977.

After 1 October 1976 women trained with male officer candidates at the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. On 20 October 1978, President Carter signed the bill into law. PL 95584 abolished the Women's Army Corps as a separate corps, the positions of the director and deputy director, the separate WAC Regular Army promotion list, officer assignments only in WAC branch, and other policies and programs based on a separate women's corps. The Department of the Army then issued General Order 20 which discontinued the Women's Army Corps, effective 20 October 1978.

From Become a Leader - Apply for OCS, DA Pam 601-1 (October 1969) WAC (Women's Army Corps) Officer Candidate School

The first Army officer candidate classes for women began in July 1942 at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, and were filled with women selected from civilian life. These women were trained as officers in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Subsequent classes were filled from enlisted applicants who had completed basic training.

WAC officer candidate classes were discontinued in 1945 and reactivated at the WAC Training Center, Fort Lee, Va., in 1948. From 1948 to 1950, the WAC Officer Candidate School was the sole source of officers for the Women's Army Corps. WAC Officer Candidate classes were held concurrently with the direct commission courses from 1950 to 1956. Since 1956, they have been combined with the WAC Officer Basic classes conducted at the U.S. Women's Army Corps School, Fort McClellan, Alabama.

The 18-week Women's Army Corps Officer Candidate Course, held twice yearly at the U.S. Women's Army Corps School, Fort McClellan, Alabama, produces officers with the leadership ability, professional knowledge and personal attainments required to assume command and staff responsibilities appropriate to their grade and branch. It is conducted jointly with the WAC Officer Basic Course for direct commission college graduates. The pace of the course is rapid and free time is limited, particularly during the early weeks of training. Candidates are given theory and practical work in the techniques of military instruction, leadership, and command. Through rotation of command positions, candidates' leadership potential is tested and strengthened. Their practical work includes one week of on-the-job training in a basic company in a WAC Training Battalion, where they serve as platoon officers; and a WAC Company Exercise, a simulated orderly room situation which enables the candidates to put into practice the knowledge they gained during the course,

Training also includes a visit to another Army post in the Third United States Army area to observe training activities and operational procedures of a WAC detachment and/ or a male unit.

Academically, the Officer Candidate Course covers Army management, doctrine and organization, unit administration, military law, leadership, command and staff functions on an overall orientation and policy level with emphasis on procedures at the unit, company and post levels. Specialized instruction is given in such fields as signal communications, automatic data processing systems, Army information programs, writing, speaking intelligently, emergency medical care, map and aerial photo reading.

In addition, of course, students have drill and physical training, stand inspections and participate in sports and social activities. Appropriate instruction on customs and courtesies of the service, the conduct expected of an officer and the amenities of Army social life is included in the candidate's training to assist in the transition to commissioned status. The course is challenging and demanding but also rewarding in stimulating personal development, self-confidence and maturity. Candidates are continuously observed, evaluated and counseled to prepare each of them to confidently and capably assume the responsibilities and duties of an Army officer.

On graduation day, the candidates take the oath of appointment as second lieutenants in the U.S. Army Reserve before the assembled class and guests. In a joint ceremony with their direct commission classmates, they are awarded their graduation certificates and step forward to receive individual class honors and awards. They depart for their first assignments as officers ready for the challenge lying ahead.





graduates receive the oath of office as second lieutenants from Colonel Maxene B. Michl, Commandant, WAC School, Fort McClellan, June 1970.

Experience as a WAC (1975) By Anna Northcutt

I grew up in an Air Force family and my brother was in ROTC at the college I attended, so the idea of the military was not foreign to me, though I had not considered the military as a career path. In the fall of 1973, I was a junior in college and like many college students needed to fund my last year of college. I saw a flyer on campus for the Women's Army Corps College Junior Program. I had never heard of the program, but I completed a postcard expressing interest and requesting more information. After completing paperwork and my first Army physical, I was selected to participate in the College Junior Program during the summer of 1974.

The WAC College Junior Program was first proposed in 1954, implemented in 1957, and discontinued in 1975. The program was designed to give young women enrolled in college the opportunity to experience military life. It provided a pathway to military service as an officer, at a time when neither the military academies nor ROTC were open to women. Participants in the College Junior Program were paid at the E-4 level and an assessment of the program costs showed it to be the most financially efficient method of recruiting military officers. A study done in 1966-67 showed the cost of the College Junior Program leading to commissioning in the WAC was \$3,050 per student, the cost of the military academy was \$48,000, and an ROTC scholarship was \$10,000.

In 1974, my class was the one of the last College Junior classes. The last class was held the following summer in 1975, just prior to me beginning the WAC Officer Orientation/Officer Candidate Course in August 1975. By the following year, 1976, women were attending OCS at Fort Benning, were enrolled in ROTC and the military academies

so there was no longer a need for the College Junior Program or a separate WAC Officer Orientation/Officer Candidate Course.

During the College Junior weeks at Fort McClellan, not only were we assessing whether the military was right for us, the officers of the WAC were assessing us to determine if we were right for the Army. Those of us interested in joining the Women's Army Corps as officers participated in multiple interviews with senior WAC officers during our final days at Fort McClellan. I remember sitting in a straight back chair in the middle of the room, across the room from a table where several WAC officers were seated, all asking questions on how I saw my future.

I returned home from Fort McClellan and learned just a few days before leaving to return to college that I had been selected to continue in the program during my senior year of college. Those of us who were continuing in the program remained E-4s in a paid training, inactive status for our final year of college. We were responsible for all our college expenses, including tuition and housing and upon commissioning were expected to fulfill a two-year obligation with the Women's Army Corps.

After my college graduation, I returned to Fort McClellan to attend the WAC Officer Orientation/Officer Candidate Course. The training was standard military training, including weapons training, map reading, and field exercises. We were housed in a WAC company area. The housing was not set up in the traditional barracks format, but rather there were two women to a room and four women to a suite, sharing a bathroom.

At the end of our WAC training, we had an opportunity to select the branch of Army to which we would be detailed. We were still a part of the WAC but would be assigned to other military branches. I chose the Military Police Corps and received that branch. The MP school was also at Fort McClellan and during the time between the end of my WAC training and start of the MP Officer Basic Course, I was assigned to the MP company at Fort McClellan and selected to attend the Northeast Alabama Police Academy. It was an interesting experiment. There were no women attending the police academy and I recall having to wait outside the classroom, in the hall with another woman, also assigned to the MP Corps, while the Director of the Police Academy explained to the other students that two female MP officers would be attending the police academy training. Our initial reception was rather like—a wet dog at a wedding—though by the end of the police academy training, we were much more accepted. I went on to serve at Fort Hood and later returned to Fort McClellan as an instructor at the MP school. I left the military in 1981 to attend graduate school and embark on another career path.

The Women's Army Corps has a proud history and I am honored to have been a part of this organization. Women serving in the military today have opportunities available to them because of the foundation established by the Women's Army Corps and women who came before them.

***Information for this article came from personal experience, papers, and *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* by Bettie J. Morden.**

Note: The WAC OCS was closed in December 1976 and the Fort Benning Branch Immaterial OCS integrated female candidates to become the only Officer Candidate School in the Active Army WAC OCS

DIRECTORS—WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS



Col. Oveta Culp Hobby
16 May 1942—11 Jul 1945



Col. Westray Battle Boyce Long
12 Jul 1945—4 Mar 1947



Col. Mary A. Hallaren
5 Mar 1947—2 Jan 1953



Col. Irene O. Galloway
3 Jan 1953—2 Jan 1957



Col. Mary L. M. Rasmuson
3 Jan 1957—31 Jul 1962



Col. Emily C. Gorman
1 Aug 1962—31 Jul 1966



Brig. Gen. Elizabeth P. Hoisington
1 Aug 1966—31 Jul 1971



Brig. Gen. Mildred I. C. Bailey
1 Aug 1971—31 Jul 1975



Brig. Gen. Mary E. Clarke
1 Aug 1975—28 Apr 1978