The Ninety-Day Wonders - OCS and the Modern American Army

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The Ninety-Day Wonders Chapter Seven

WAC OCS DURING WORLD WAR II

Until World War I, there was little thought of a women's corps in the United States Army. For pioneer women in America, home defense was a necessary survival skill and there were popular stories of females who disguised themselves well enough to enlist in the Army as men but their sex was usually discovered, sometimes when they were wounded or killed. Thousands of women served openly in combat during the Revolutionary War. Of greater significance for the future were the scattered cases in which, because of the Army's need for skills which were unique to women, the Army employed groups of civilian women as nurses, laundresses, clerks and emergency aids of many types, sometimes in uniforms of their own devising. In 1775 General George Washington sponsored the creation of a hospital department for the Army and allowed it to pay civilian nurses approximately twenty-five cents a day. Reputable women sometimes worked as nurses, seamstresses and laundresses, but there was a thin line in the public mind between camp followers, very often prostitutes, and women who served the Army in other, more legitimate ways.

With the twentieth century concept of total war, serious consideration of an official women's corps became more likely. Long before the Army began to employ women, such fields as clerks, typists and telephone operators had become so commonly filled by women in civilian life that they came to be regarded as jobs for women. Nevertheless, there remained room for doubt as to the value of a woman as a member of the Army. Army planners had noted delicately that a woman had a "physiological handicap which renders her abnormal, unstable, etc., at certain times." Women were generally smaller than men in stature, lighter in weight and had only about sixty percent of the strength of men. Well after the Army was willing to accept women and place them in limited roles in the military, there was another obstacle that had to be overcome - the opposition of the American public. The public still believed generally that a woman's place was in the home.

During World War I, thousands of American women served in various capacities in Europe. Where there were women serving as civilian volunteers in Europe in World War I, there was confusion in the absence of any direct Army controls. The Army, in its effort to hire women as laundresses and in other capacities, found that often only women of doubtful character showed any real inclination to serve as long as the volunteer system of employment was involved. The Army's inability to enlist women late in the war was in contrast to the Navy's ability to enlist women whenever it needed them. About 13,000 women enlisted in the Navy

and Marine Corps on virtually the same status as men. These women were the first American women to be admitted to full military rank and status.

American women were liberated by their experiences during World War I. They did volunteer work at home and abroad and worked in wartime industry in jobs previously held by men. Their voluminous dresses and long hair, which proved dangerous when working around machinery, gave way to bobbed hair and formfitting dresses - the famous "flapper" look of the twenties. The Nineteenth Amendment (1920) gave women the vote and they were determined to play their full part in American life, including national defense. Moreover, Army leaders learned that American women were dangerously susceptible to the charms of pacifism and other doctrines that advocated the abolition of the military as the best means of ensuring peace. To stem this tide of opinion, the Army sought to teach women voters about its own nature and purpose. The women learned that the Army was "a progressive, socially minded human institution" and not a "ruthless and mindless military machine."

During the period between the world wars, the Army began to compile data on utilization of women during World War I. In 1920 Secretary of War Newton D. Baker created the Bureau of Women's Relations for the Army and sought the opinions of the British, among others, on the use of women in the military service. A 1928 report sponsored by the Army concluded that women should be fully utilized and should be ".. .. accorded the same rights, privileges and benefits as militarized men. " The fact was becoming clearer, at least in some quarters, that women would inevitably play a part in the next war. The more nearly total the war, the greater the part they would play. It would be futile to debate whether women should enter combat zones because of the likelihood that strategic air power would make all areas combat zones. It was imperative that both men and women involved in planning for the training and utilization of women be people of acute understanding of the problems of militarization of women. There remained strong sentiment that only women sent overseas or into danger zones should be militarized. Other women required by the Army should be civilian employees. It would take another crisis to bring women other than nurses into the Army.

On 1 September 1939, the date that Hitler launched his invasion of Poland and commenced World War II in Europe, the remarkably able and enlightened General George C. Marshall was appointed Chief of Staff of the United States Army. One month later, planning for a women's Army corps began in earnest. Giving full military status to women was not contemplated during the early planning. The Civilian Conservation Corps, founded in 1933 as a New Deal soil conservation and relief measure, was decided upon as the model. Women would wear Army uniforms and be controlled by Army commissioned and noncommissioned officers without being full-fledged members of the Army. With the sudden collapse of France in June 1940 all aspects of military planning in the United States received renewed attention.

In September 1940, the first peacetime selective service act became law. Women's groups increased their demand that they be allowed to play their full part in the national defense. This time they had a powerful ally, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The inevitability of American involvement in World War II produced an awareness that many of the errors of World War I in the employment of women could be avoided if careful planning started early. A crucial element in the eventual establishment of a women's corps was the enthusiastic support of General Marshall. He clearly understood that the next war would be driven by many technological advances and developments where women could cope at least as well as men could.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, plans for a women's Army corps accelerated. The real issue at various Congressional hearings on such plans was the old one of militarization vs. civil service. Army spokesmen were obliged to offer reassurances that women soldiers would be used only where civilians were unobtainable, or where security required military personnel. One member of Congress argued that a soldier would go forward in battle, even if his buddy was shot down beside him, but if his buddy was a woman he would stop and render aid.

Another Congressman stated: “I think it's a reflection on the courageous manhood of the country, to pass a law inviting women to join the Armed Forces . . . who will then do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble, homely tasks to which every woman has devoted herself? Think of the humiliation.”

Even before the creation of a women's Army corps, a director had been sought who would be of an active temperament, between the ages of thirty and fifty, with executive experience, involved in the successful management of both men .and women and, most important, she must have had no previous affiliation with any pressure group. The eventual choice was Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby, thirty-seven years old, wife of a former governor of Texas and mother of two children. She had served as parliamentarian of the Texas legislature, as a newspaper and radio executive, publisher, lawyer, writer, president of the Texas League of Women Voters and civic worker in numerous state and city organizations involving both men and women. She had worked earlier with the Bureau of Women's Relations in the War Department and had worked on the planning of a women's Army corps. Over a period of several months, careful study was given to recruitment, location for a training center and a suitable uniform for women.

The problem of a uniform was of great importance. Clothing which would be appropriate for men would scarcely be appropriate for women. Some officers suggested nothing fancier for women than for combat soldiers, which would have left women doing office work in boots and coveralls. Male soldiers were inducted, their hair was closely cropped and they were usually issued ill-fitting clothing. This might be amusing for male soldiers who would bear it with good humor, but such treatment would be devastating for female soldiers. Planners

were keenly aware that matters which would be of little or no concern in the case of male soldiers would assume greater significance for female soldiers. For instance, slacks might be more appropriate for most of the jobs that women did, but a rough or masculine appearance of women soldiers might cause unfavorable public comments.

The problem for Army planners was to meet the special needs for women while introducing, so far as practicable, women's uniforms similar in appearance to those of men. All agreed that a shirt with a tie was more military and dignified than one worn with an open collar. The choice of a skirt or pants and headgear was a much greater problem. There was a question of the more fashionable pumps or oxfords for women, and of stockings or socks. It was noted that some women might require foundation garments in order to present a neat appearance. Similarly, men were not issued pajamas and bathrobes, but nude or seminude women in the barracks would likely occasion great embarrassment if men were posted nearby. Men might take physical training with only a pair of shorts on, but it hardly seemed proper to have women assemble on the drill field in nothing but panties. Housing accommodations were also expected to be more of a problem for women than for men. It was feared that women might not adjust to communal living so readily as men. The use of common, open bathrooms might also prove a problem for women.

As the Congress and the War Department prepared for the passage of the bill establishing the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, they braced for the furious reaction they expected would follow the passage of the bill. Men who had never seen an enlisted woman, and women who had never been one, had together planned for the future welfare and efficiency of women in the Army. On 14 May 1942 Congress passed the bill. President Roosevelt signed it the following day. On the rainy morning of 16 May 1942 Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby took the oath of office as director, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Shortly thereafter she was commissioned colonel, thus becoming the first woman in the United States Army. The WAAC was replaced by the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in September 1943 and WAC will be used hereinafter to refer to women in the Army.

Colonel Hobby's choice as director was fortunate indeed. She realized that her first and most important task was to counteract three stereotypes of the American woman: that she was a giddy, featherbrained creature with few interests beyond clothes, cosmetics and dates; she was a henpecking old battle-ax who loved to boss the male species; or she was a sainted wife and mother until she left the kitchen whereupon she became potentially a scarlet woman. One idea Colonel Hobby was particularly anxious to lay to rest was the suspicion that WACs were needed not to fill Army jobs so much as to provide companionship for male soldiers. At an early press conference, she had to answer questions on subjects such as whether the WACs would be issued girdles and allowed to wear makeup and nail polish. Would WAC officers be allowed to date enlisted men? Would they be put in guardhouses in case of violations of Army rules and regulations? How would the Army respond to children, legitimate or illegitimate, born to WACs? Colonel Hobby

stated that WACs who became pregnant, married or unmarried, would be discharged forthwith.

The first months of the WAC, which was supervised initially by Army Service Forces, was absolutely chaotic. The new director of the Corps had to begin the process of selection of officer candidates and the establishment of a training center for Officer Candidate School. Colonel Hobby was very much aware the successful launching of the WAC was a public-relations problem to a greater extent than any other current War Department activity. However, Colonel Hobby felt little sympathy for those who clamored for her attention. She said later:

“Most of them were just curiosity seekers. They could have gotten accurate information from any Army officer in our headquarters, but they wanted to sit and chat with that new curiosity, a woman in an Army uniform.”

From the moment of its creation, WAC headquarters had been besieged by telephone calls, telegrams, visitors and letters of application, all seeking commissions for individuals. Congressmen, Army officers and public officials were swamped by demands from friends and constituents. Ranking Army officers sought commissions for young civilian women on their staff. Powerful pressure groups sought to name assistant directors of the WAC. Every important person had a candidate, said a WAC staff member, and they all wanted guarantees of a commission and important positions. The WAC could have been authorized to commission many of its officers directly from civilian life with appropriate rank as the Army did, and as other women's services were later to do. Direct commissioning for some prominent political and social women was advocated as a way to boost the WAC with the public, but Colonel Hobby felt that this would not be the proper way to go. To commission even two or three women directly would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to refuse hundreds of others with prominent sponsors.

Barely two weeks after the establishment of the WAC the call went out for officer-candidate applications. WAC OCS applicants were required to score at least 110 on the AGCT, as were male candidates for OCS. Recommendation of an examining board of two women and one male Army officer was required. The response was a rush that swamped recruiting stations and startled recruiters. The Army had optimistically sent each Army corps area 10,000 application forms, a total of 90,000, although only 500 candidates were to be selected initially. Within a few days recruiting stations were appealing for more forms. Some recruiting officers attempted to weed out the obviously unqualified and to give the scarce forms only to those they believed to be truly eligible. In five days, 5,200 women had received application forms in New York City alone, although only thirty women could be picked from the states of New York, New Jersey and Delaware. A great variety of women received applications for WAC OCS. Newspapers featured an Indian woman in full tribal

regalia, a sixteen-year-old girl who waited to get away from home and a wild-eyed woman brandishing a pistol and demanding to be sent to the front.

The preparation and occupation of the WAC's new post, in Des Moines, Iowa, furnished a kind of comic interlude in 1942, a year which was otherwise a grim one for the allied powers on nearly all fronts. An unanticipated problem that cropped up quickly was the question of whether Army induction and physical examination facilities could be used for both men and women. The recruiting stations were not always clean or in the best state of repair. Nevertheless, 30,000 women braved all of the obstacles and filed applications. Candidates were given an AGCT and those who scored 110 or higher were screened by a local board consisting of two women and a male Army officer selected by the local Army commander. A board of eleven prominent psychiatrists assisted in evaluating the work histories of applicants. This was not done in the case of male applicants for OCS. Application forms also revealed data on parents and family life, whether applicants had ever lived in clubs or dormitories, had traveled, or had sports interests. After a process far more rigorous than male applicants to OCS were required to complete, the final selection of candidates was completed late on the night of 30 June 1942. Within a week, 500 successful candidates were notified to close out their jobs, take the oath and get to Fort Des Moines for the opening of WAC OCS on 20 July 1942.

Those WACs selected in the first batch of candidates had one characteristic in common -- ninety percent had been successfully employed in civilian life. Although there was no such educational requirement, ninety percent had college training and many had college degrees. Local interviews of WAC OCS candidates were conducted by a board of two "prominent" local women and one male Army officer. They tended to put more stress than did male OCS boards on candidates being well educated and well rounded, poised, cultured and evidently possessed of "good" character. "Would I want my daughter to come under the influence of this woman?" was a question the WAC OCS selection board was instructed to consider in selecting a candidate. Most candidates were twenty-five to thirty-nine years of age. Sixteen percent were under twenty-five and ten percent were forty or older. About twenty percent were married, most of them to men in service, and there were some mothers, although none with small children. The candidates included a dean of women, a school owner/director, a Red Cross official, several editors and many others who had been reporters, lawyers, social workers, Army employees and teachers.

A serious problem involved the selection of Black officer candidates. Prominent Black leaders had written President Franklin Roosevelt, protesting the appointment of a southern-born woman as director of the WAC. The opposition was unexpected since the War Department had earlier informed Congress that it would train black WAC officers up to ten percent of the total number admitted to OCS. Forty Black women were candidates in the first WAC OCS class. The real cause of the objections came out later. Black leaders had hoped to use the new WAC to break the traditional and undemocratic Army and Navy policy

of segregating Black personnel in separate units. The WAC had been directed to follow the Army policy of segregating Black and white soldiers. Until November 1942, the WAC officer candidates were segregated in mess halls, barracks and recreational facilities. When segregation ended in November 1942, WAC recruiting of whites suffered to some extent.

It soon became apparent that comparatively few Black women qualified as candidates for OCS and it was feared that WAC failure to fill the quota of ten percent would be interpreted by the Black press as discrimination. A group of Army officers went to five outstanding Black colleges to try and recruit qualified WAC OCS candidates. Throughout the war only six percent of black WAC recruits scored in Class I or II on the AGCT while forty-three percent of white WACs did so. The peak strength of Black people in the WAC was only four percent in 1945. The requirement of a minimum score of 110 on the AGCT proved an insurmountable obstacle for black WACs who were interested in becoming OCS candidates.

The situation at Fort Des Moines could scarcely have been termed tranquil. A skeleton crew arrived at Fort Des Moines only two months before the opening date and this gave them very little time to prepare. The officer in charge of preparing the base for the arrival of the women insisted few concessions would be made to feminine vanity. The best way to combat the skeptical attitude on the part of the press and the public was to train the new soldiers in those qualities which the Army valued most highly -- neatness in dress, punctiliousness in military courtesy, smartness and precision in drill and willingness to do the job. In the beginning all of the instructional staff at the WAC OCS were men since there were few women in the Army. The Director of Instruction was a former instructor at The Citadel, the distinguished, highly disciplined military school in South Carolina, and the rest of the staff consisted of forty-one officers and 192 enlisted men. These men would serve as instructors in OCS classes until properly qualified and trained WAC officers could take over. The instructional personnel no sooner reported than it was discovered that few, if any, of the instructors were qualified for the exacting and unprecedented task ahead.

By the day of the opening of the first WAC OCS class, the mounting interest of the press and public had reached the point of near hysteria. The old post at Fort Des Moines swarmed with dignitaries, invited and uninvited, who braved the steaming midsummer weather in order to view history in the making. Four press associations, four foreign news organizations, six motion-picture companies, two photo services and nineteen newspapers were represented on opening day. There was great interest in the WAC underwear and their response to Army latrines. Every angle of the new scene was documented by the press, while photographers invaded the barracks in search of the elusive WAC underwear. Authorities discovered that a number of women reporters had resolved to participate in the first weeks of the process in order to reveal to the waiting public a woman's every sensation when she was converted to a soldier. The press was finally informed that the post was theirs for one day only. After that, a two-week news blackout was enforced.

Before crowds of interested Des Moines citizens, arriving WACs were whisked from incoming trains to waiting Army trucks. At the fort, processing moved efficiently and included a brief physical exam, a meal and assignment to one of four companies. Each woman was assigned a bed, a wall locker, a footlocker and a metal chair. They soon discovered that the Army had no bathrooms, only something two flights of stairs away called a latrine. Male company officers and enlisted men clung to their orderly rooms and supply rooms and informed all corners, without being entirely truthful, that only married men with children had been given the sensitive WAC assignments. The underwear and foundation garments, which had been the subject of so much curiosity, were issued to the women and proved to be of excellent quality. The brownish color of slips and panties must have been slightly disconcerting for the new WACs.

Another problem quickly developed. The clothing shipped by the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot bore little resemblance to the various models that had been approved by the WAC planners. The heavy khaki shirts, cut to fit men's hips, buckled and wrinkled across the stomach, so that even the slimmest WAC presented a potbellied appearance once she had sat down once or twice. The skirts tended to climb well above the knees while the WACs were marching unless a firm grip on the skirt was substituted for the required arm swing. The "Hobby hats", as they were called, proved to be uncomfortable and unattractive. Moreover, there were not enough small sizes in outer garments and extensive alterations were necessary. The alterations usually proved to be unsatisfactory. The processing, carried on intermittently during the first week, closely followed the Army pattern for men. The WACs were given tetanus, typhoid, smallpox and other shots, while outside the dispensary an embarrassed male sergeant stood ready with smelling salts in case any of the ladies fainted. His services proved not to be in demand at all.

When Colonel Hobby spoke to the OCS candidates for the first time, she was very much aware of the historic occasion she was participating in. She informed the recruits:

“You must make your own tradition because there is no established tradition. But in making your own, you do have one tradition, the integrity of all the brave American women of all time who have loved their country. You, as you gather here, are living history. On your shoulders will rest the military reputation and the civilian recognition of this corps. I have no fear that any woman here will fail the standards of the corps. From now on you are soldiers, defending a free way of life. Your performance will set the standards for the corps. You will live in the spotlight. Even though the lamps of experience are dim, few, if any mistakes will be permitted you. You are no longer individuals. You wear the uniform of the Army of the United States. Respect that uniform. Make the adjustment from civilian to military life without faltering and without complaint. In the final analysis, the only testament a free people can give to the quality of freedom is in the way in which they resist the forces that put that freedom in jeopardy.”

The training course for the women in WAC OCS required the women to rise at 5:30, or earlier, in order to be neatly dressed for 6:00 reveille. After making beds and cleaning and policing the area, the women marched to breakfast and then began classes which lasted until 5:00 in the afternoon, with an intermission for lunch. The women initially had a policing duty which men generally did not. They had to pick up photographers' expended flashbulbs. After supper, there was a required study hour and then a session devoted to washing and pressing uniforms and shining shoes.

The WAC OCS course was virtually identical to OCS for men, except for the omission of combat subjects. (WAC OCS was only six weeks):

Curriculum	Hours
Military Customs and Courtesy	**4**
Board and Court Procedure	**12**
Care of Clothing & Equipment, Shoe Fitting	**2**
Defense against Chemical Attack	**4**
Defense against Air Attack	**3**
Map Reading	**8**
Methods of Training	**8**
Organization of the Army and the WAC	**5**
Leadership	**10**
Mess Management	**20**
Supply (Property Accounting)	**15**
Company Administration	**55**
Interior Guard	**2**
Current History	**6**
Classification	**4**
Morale and Special Services	**3**
Sanitation, First Aid, Personal Hygiene	**5**
Drill (without arms)	**30**
Physical Training	**24**
Inspection and Ceremonies	**24**
Commandant's Time	**18**
TOTAL	**264**

A few courses were more or less adapted to women. The hygiene course was designed by local hospital personnel. Drill was without arms and the physical-training course was carefully devised and conducted by a civilian consultant. The military-courtesy instructors soon ran into the inescapable fact that there were socially accepted differences for women which the Army must learn to conform to. For example, women of some faiths did not remove their hats in church, which was proper for men, and most women felt self-conscious about removing hats in places such as dining rooms and lobbies. There were unexpected difficulties, but women were agreeable about inspection and did not have hysterics in the barracks or faint at the discomforts of open showers and open latrines.

One problem was that few laundry tubs and ironing boards had been provided, partly because men's barracks ordinarily did not have them. Drying racks and irons also proved inadequate. Women had to stand in line until late at night for a turn at an iron. Many WACs had brought their own irons and used them so frequently that fuses blew and their use had to be limited. The WACs could not use local laundries because they usually took up to a week. The WACs believed that to maintain a neat appearance in the hot climate required one or more clean shirts daily. Army commanders and psychologists found out very quickly what some had already suspected -- that a woman's grooming was literally connected, not only with her morale, but with her health and her conduct. Absence of an opportunity to iron a shirt for the next day was to prove a greater morale hazard to a woman soldier than any lack of movies, camp shows or pinball machines.

The women felt the Army provided too few brooms, too little scrubbing powder and not enough dustcloths. The women also suffered somewhat from sleeplessness, sore feet, heat and humidity and, perhaps more than men did, from the general lack of privacy. Most WACs liked parades and bands and ceremonies of all sorts. They took well to drill and, after an exhausting day, enthusiastic squads could be seen in the summer twilight going through extra practice in drill. One company officer stated: "They learn more in a day than my squad of men used to learn in a week." The summer uniforms proved hot and generally unsuitable. The WACs adjusted easily to discipline and regimentation, their shoes were shined, uniforms neat, beds tightly made and footlockers neat. They did not prove especially quarrelsome, and were as good comrades as the members of men's units.

A disappointment to the women and an embarrassment to the Army was the caliber of instruction at the WAC OCS. Ninety percent of the WACs had attended college and many were college graduates. They expected challenging classes. Many of the instructors fell far short of the expectations of the WAC candidates. It became apparent to the candidates on the first day of classes that most of the instructors were not teachers or public speakers or college men and many had little or no Army experience in the subjects they were teaching. It was a lucky young instructor who did not confront in every class some student with college training or years of teaching experience. One instructor opened his class by instructing his class to "put dem hats on de table." Another instructor did not know how to

pronounce "anopheles," a type of mosquito that transmits malaria. Candidates were advised by one instructor that care should be taken in "wrenching" dishes. The average age of the first class of WAC OCS was twenty-nine and most instructors were barely out of their teens. One candidate, aged forty-two, was told by an instructor that she was so old he did not see how she had made the journey to Fort Des Moines. The candidate would later command 55,000 WACs as a senior officer.

The young male officers and instructors often did not know how to deal with females who curried favors and classroom showoffs whose tactics were transparent to other women. The food was good and abundant, but not always attractively prepared, at least not according to the WACs. Women were generally more knowledgeable than the average man in that area. WACs would prove less tolerant of imperfection than men, which Army psychologists believed to be due less to their sex than to the fact that they were all volunteers. Male volunteers also traditionally showed greater impatience than did draftees. Generally, morale was at unprecedented heights. The women stood retreat with real appreciation of the ceremony which brought to a close the day's formal training activities. They trembled as their company officers gave them a gig for some slip up and they practiced their salutes on everything that glistened. They all shared the same general desire to justify the Army's decision to admit women to its ranks.

On the eve of graduation the release of the roster of class standings showed that young women who had dated the company officers had mysteriously soared in the class standings above older women who had led their classes in various measurements of training activities. To some of the male officers, a woman appeared to be a leader if she were somewhat mannish in appearance or mannerisms, with a good loud voice for drill. The women valued cheerfulness, unselfishness, maturity and a willingness to do her best as characteristics of a leader. It was concluded, or perhaps hoped, that the problem would correct itself in later OCS classes in which women replaced men as company officers and instructors.

A potential disaster involving the first WAC OCS was narrowly averted. Because the WAC itself had been organized at about the same time as the first OCS class had begun, there was obviously no immediate need for the 500 or so WAC officers who would be commissioned. The War Department planned to commission only a part of the first class and to give other successful candidates a certificate of eligibility for a commission when the need for additional officers arose. The candidates had been sent off from home by excited family members and friends who expected them to be commissioned on August 29. Disaster was averted and all were commissioned on completion of WAC OCS. Graduation on 29 August 1942 saw 496 (only four candidates had washed out) new officers sporting new gold bars after completing the six-week WAC OCS program. General Marshall sent a congratulatory telegram to Colonel Hobby: "Please act for me in welcoming them

into the Army. This is only the beginning of a magnificent war service by the women of America."

In the weeks and months that followed, a steady stream of new WAC officers were commissioned at Fort Des Moines. Most initial assignments were to the WAC training center. Male officers were thereby made available to meet the Army's pressing personnel needs in 1942. WAC officers also took over much of the instruction. Few major responsibilities were turned over to the newly commissioned WACs, but they were assigned as assistants to various section commanders. One of the most serious problems encountered at Fort Des Moines was the lack of winter uniforms. The Quartermaster's shipment schedules were not being met. The supply of summer uniforms had not always arrived on time and almost no winter clothing of any sort had been received.

An unseasonable cold spell struck in September 1942 blanketing Fort Des Moines in snow. Temperatures plunged to near freezing in the newly constructed barracks and classrooms, in some of which heating equipment had not been installed. Within a few days, respiratory disorders swept the student body. Colonel Hobby managed to secure several thousand enlisted men's overcoats from a neighboring station's surplus. These were to be worn most the of winter while the War Department tried to solve the problem. The men's overcoats proved excellent substitutes not only as coats, but as mittens and leggings, since they covered hands and feet and trailed on the ground. The WACs found their first real Army SNAFU (situation normal, all fouled up) so amusing that they sent photos of themselves wearing their overcoats to friends and relatives. Army brass and recruiters were not amused. In spite of the inconveniences of supply and weather, the women's morale remained high.

By the end of September 1942, there were more than 3,000 WACs at Fort Des Moines, including 792 officers. Their average AGCT score was higher than that of the rest of the Army. In the month of September, sixty percent of all WACs were found to be in the first of second AGCT groups, having scores required to become officer candidates, and less than one percent were in the fifth, or lowest group. Furthermore, nearly every recruit possessed civilian skills useful to the Army. Almost all of the early WAC OCS candidates had come from the training centers and as the training centers were combed again and again for successive classes of officer candidates, quality fell rapidly. Certain applicants who had earlier been judged by boards as unsatisfactory because of poor appearance, manners or education were used to fill later WAC OCS quotas.

In order to meet WAC expansion plans many candidates were accepted who would likely make adequate second lieutenants but would be unlikely to advance to higher rank. During the hectic early months of expansion, the WAC encountered an unanticipated problem. Performance on the drill field was being used as a means of separating those with leadership qualities from those lacking such characteristics. A loud voice, an imposing

presence and a general air of confidence had long been regarded by the Army as characteristics of an effective leader. Colonel Hobby became convinced that too much emphasis was being placed on youth and physical attractiveness, and too little upon character and past accomplishments. At a time when field stations were pleading for mature and able officers, WAC officer candidate examining boards were informing applicants of thirty-five or more, or those who appeared that age or older, that they were not qualified.

In spite of Colonel Hobby's efforts to correct the problems, by the end of 1942 half of all WAC OCS graduates were in jobs no more responsible than those of clerks, typists, stenographers and secretaries. Graduates of WAC OCS included sixteen actresses, fourteen chorus girls, fourteen waitresses, as well as numbers of beauticians, cleaning women, laborers, chauffeurs, housekeepers and one undertaker. Many WAC officers had finished college, and only one in twenty had failed to complete high school. The WAC, by July 1943, had over 5,800 officers. Only a few hundred more were to be commissioned in the remaining years of the war. Many of the officers commissioned in the hectic early months of the Corps were rapidly promoted to higher rank. The average WAC officer's education attainments remained equal to or slightly higher than that of Army male officers throughout the war.

A far more serious problem for the WAC were reports that certain Army officers in highly responsible positions were drinking and behaving unprofessionally with WAC officers and were promoting to positions of leadership only WAC officers who were personal friends or favorites. The problem was perhaps exacerbated by the common practice of assigning second-rate male officers to staff women's schools, including WAC OCS. Observers noted that these unsuitable officers had an unfortunate effect upon newly commissioned, inexperienced and eager-to-please female officers. Through unconscious imitation or through a conscious desire to secure advancement, WAC officers emulated supervisors who were not themselves models of Army decorum and leadership.

For the WAC, the Army Air Force (AAF) proved to be very supportive. The AAF was the first to assign women to all noncombat positions, including some previously deemed inappropriate for women. It was the first major command to support a school for the advanced training of WAC troop officers. The AAF insisted that WAC officer-candidate selection boards contain at least one WAC officer. In these and other ways, the AAF demonstrated a very progressive attitude in its concern for WAC officers and their enthusiastic and effective utilization in new and unconventional jobs. The WAC OCS began operating barely three years before the end of the war. During the last years of the war, WAC officers were gradually integrated into many of the typical noncombat assignments in the Army, both at home and abroad. Obviously, few WAC officers advanced beyond company-grade rank, i.e., through captain's ranks.

Old attitudes and prejudices tended to die hard, even in the Army, and all too often WAC officers were assigned to jobs which could have been performed as well by civilian clerks. WAC officers in the Army were sometimes assigned to general officers as aides, secretaries and chauffeurs. Aides were expected to aid the general in any way the general required but WAC aides were often used in ways more suitable for a maid than an aide. One such WAC officer, upon her return to the United States, gave reporters a description of her duties which got national publicity:

I took all of the dictation and did the typing. . .. I did all of the filing and answered the telephone . . .. I always saw to it that he had his eyeglasses and his wallet.. I kept a check on clean shirts. . .. I laid out clean clothes and would pack his bags for trips. I also sewed on ribbons and buttons. . .. I always had so much do to, with my office in my bedroom. She also, she added, served as hostess at parties. For these duties, she was promoted to major and received a medal.

Inappropriate assignments of WAC officers eventually became so prevalent that the War Department wrote personal letters to all domestic and overseas commands:

It has been brought to the attention of the Chief of Staff that commissioned officers of the Women's Army Corps have sometimes been assigned or utilized as aides to general officers, as chauffeurs; and for routine stenographic duty normally performed by enlisted or civilian personnel . . . such assignments of female officers are considered inappropriate and inadvisable,.. It is particularly desired that there be no publicity on this subject.

In the European theater, by the end of the war, no fewer than forty-five WAC officers — fourteen percent of the total — were serving as personal assistants to ranking officers. The impression was created that WAC officers at times received promotions and awards for activities that were not essentially those of an officer.

In 1943 steps were taken to raise the WAC ratio of officers to enlisted personnel to the same level as that of the Army, or about one to eleven. The WAC ratio had been somewhat lower, about one to fourteen. However, by this time, male Army officers were available in numbers well above the current or anticipated needs of the Army. Moreover, most Army commands continued to manifest a strong preference for male officers, even in noncombat assignments. The planned expansion of the WAC did not develop and about 1,500 WAC officers were idled and placed in a WAC officers pool. The WAC OCS program was reduced to a level of about 200 graduates per year. The idled officers were formed in companies and commanded like enlisted women. The unassigned officers' morale plummeted, and their attitude plumbed the depths of despair, anger and disillusionment. All officers who spent months in this kind of Army limbo denounced the experience. Many potential WAC leaders were permanently affected by the experience.

Early in 1944 Colonel Hobby finally persuaded the Army to assign WAC officers to permanent jobs which would release male troop officers needed for the planned invasion

of the European continent. Within a few weeks, more than eighty percent of the WAC officers pool had been assigned to new duties. WAC officers were required to fill all slots in WAC training companies. A survey was conducted in 1944 to determine how many WAC officers could be released for assignment to duty with WAC troops. Domestic Army commands admitted that of 5,038 WAC officers, only 1,626 were being used on troop work, and the remaining 3,412 were in staff jobs that could be filled by a male officer. Of these 3,412, Army commands claimed that all but sixty-three were in work too essential to permit them to be released and replaced by a man. This resulted in a scramble for the few officers who were graduating from the reduced WAC OCS enrollment.

The competition for their service, while gratifying to new WAC lieutenants, was unfortunate for the Corps. Of some 70,000 recruits obtained after the virtual cessation of officer candidate training, very few had the opportunity to be commissioned. Many of the recruits were doubtless far superior in leadership potential to those so hastily commissioned earlier. Among those women already commissioned troop duty, which was intended to be their primary interest, was forsaken as soon as possible by many of the most capable officers. In the absence of a supply of new lieutenants, troop officers were frozen in their jobs and company duty became a dead end with little chance for promotion. On the other hand, WAC officers in Army staff jobs progressed normally and soon had too much rank to be rotated to junior company jobs even if they had been able to secure their release from their staff jobs. Staff jobs not only offered greater possibilities in rank and responsibility but shorter hours and far less stressful responsibilities. Over a period of time, troop duty not only failed to attract the ablest of officers but fell more and more to officers of inferior ability who could not qualify for staff positions. This remained a problem for WAC leadership throughout the war.

Although other officer candidate schools were not open to them, the process of integrating women officer specialists into other services had begun in a small way before the end of the war. Women were beginning to be treated as were men in eligibility for direct commissions, but all direct commissions had to be in the WAC with transfer to the appropriate branch following. In no case were direct commissions offered to civilian women but only to qualified WAC enlisted women. Colonel Hobby was steadfast on this requirement, failing in only four cases to maintain her policy against direct commissioning of civilian women. The four women, all commissioned outside the United States, obviously had powerful advocates working in their behalf. Colonel Hobby was besieged throughout the war by members of Congress and other prominent figures seeking direct commissions for some young woman or other.

Promotion of WAC officers was a problem. The first officers were commissioned barely three years before the end of the war. No WACs had, by the end of the Corps' first eighteen months, been made lieutenant colonels, although many had occupied positions which called for this rank. The Army's official position was that no exceptions should be made to

the time-in-grade requirements, which were waived only for men in Air Corps positions -- or in "meritorious" cases. General Marshall overruled the policy and there was some easing of the time-in-grade requirements for WACs. Nevertheless, at its peak strength in the spring of 1945, the WAC ranked far behind the Army in its percentage of field grade officers:

May 1945	Actual Strength	Entitled by Army
General officers	0	20
Colonels	1	29
Lieutenant Colonels	16	336
Majors	146	331
Captains	1,024	2,325
First lieutenants	3,646	3,849
Second lieutenants	975	2,483

Final tallies on WAC officers showed unusually high intellectual levels. The educational level of WAC officers slightly surpassed that of male officers:

Educational Level	WAC Officers	Male Officers
Elementary School	.26%	1.50%
1, 2, 3, years high school	4.01%	12.00%
High school graduate	27.84%	22.20%
1, 2, 3, years college	26.98%	26.20%
College graduate	26.23%	21.70%
Postgraduate	16.4 %	4.68%

Army observers considered the high intellectual level of WAC officers to be even more remarkable in that they were not chosen as specialists while the male officers included those directly commissioned, such as physicians, engineers, lawyers, teachers and chaplains. Many of the problems encountered by WAC OCS grew out of the need to concentrate on the production of officers for WAC troop administration and training. It would have been impossible to duplicate the training of officers in the dozen or so arms and services to which WAC officers might be assigned.

In 1943, the OCS course was extended from the previous six weeks to three months, since men's officer-candidate courses averaged about this length. This greatly increased the number of hours available, since women were not instructed in such subjects as weapons training and combat orientation. Twice as much time as previously was spent on map reading, defense against air attack and military courtesy. These subjects were deemed necessary for the "complete" soldier, WAC or otherwise. Courses that aimed at developing leadership and the ability to manage a group received only about fifteen percent of instructional time. Candidates received more hours in map reading than in duties of an officer. This deficiency was, of course, not peculiar to WAC OCS. Army historians later noted of men's OCSs that the courses most frequently omitted from curricula were those connected with morale, management and training of men.

For all the problems they encountered, the WAC made a very substantial contribution to the American war effort. They proved that women could function in an integrated man's Army. The WAC grew from 727 enlisted women and one officer in July 1942 to a peak strength of 93,542 enlisted women and 5,717 officers in April 1945. Peak strength of the WAC in the Air Force was reached in January 1945 with 30,430 enlisted personnel and 1,541 officers serving in about sixty different occupational specialties. In July 1945 15,833 enlisted personnel and 1,202 officers were serving in various overseas theaters of war. Just under four percent of the total WAC enrollment was black in December 1944 with 3,920 enlisted personnel and 120 officers.

The women who served in the WAC served honorably and ably in the American war effort. They proved their detractors wrong in one especially crucial area. Fears that WACs would become high-class camp followers were not borne out by the facts. Between July 1942 and December 1946 10,937 enlisted women and 465 officers were discharged because of pregnancy, a rate of about forty-eight per 1,000 per year. The rate of pregnancy was far below the rate of 117 pregnancies per 1,000 per year for civilian women in comparable age groups. Even so, the reputation of members of the WAC was subject to vicious rumors of wanton conduct throughout the war and for years afterward. The WACs bore the unjust criticism with patience and forbearance and soldiered on in the best Army tradition. They were the pioneers who paved the way for the women of today who fill virtually every position in the Army, including limited duty in the combat arms.