

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)"

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.

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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.

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

