

Congressmen asked who will cook, clean?

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manded high manual dexterity. Congressional opposition centered around southern congressmen. With women in the armed services, 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?" After a long and acrimonious debate which filled ninety-eight columns in the Congressional Record, the bill finally passed the House 249-86.

The Senate approved the bill 38-27 on May 14. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill into law the next day, he set a recruitment goal of 25,000 for the first year. WAAC recruiting topped that by November, when Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson authorized enrollment at 150,000, the original ceiling. The day the bill became law, Stimson appointed Oveta Culp Hobby as director of the WAAC. As chief of the Women's Interest Section in the Public Relations Bureau at the War Department, Hobby had helped shepherd the bill through Congress. She had impressed both the media and the public when she testified in January.

Prior to her arrival in Washington, Hobby had had 10 years' experience as editor of a Houston newspaper. The wife of former Texas Governor William P. Hobby, she was well versed in national and local politics.

Hobby was the perfect choice for director of the new corps. The position needed a woman with a proven record of achievement. The individual selected had to be politically astute, with an understanding of how things got done in Washington and in the War

Department. Most important, the director had to show a skeptical American public that a woman could be "a lady" and serve in the armed forces at the same time.

Initially, Major Hobby and the WAAC captured the fancy of press and public alike. William Hobby was quoted again and again when he joked, "My wife has so many ideas, some of them have got to be good!" Hobby handled her first press conference with typical aplomb. Although the press concentrated on such frivolous questions as whether WAACs would be allowed to wear makeup and date officers, Hobby diffused most such questions with calm sensibility.

Only one statement by the director caused unfavorable comment. "Any member of the Corps who becomes pregnant will receive an immediate discharge," said Hobby. The *Times Herald* claimed that the birth rate would be adversely affected if corps members were discouraged from having babies. "This will hurt us twenty years from now," said the newspaper, "when we get ready to fight the next war." Several newspapers picked up this theme, which caused much debate among columnists across the nation.

Maj. Hobby immediately began organizing the WAAC recruiting drive and training centers. Fort Des Moines, Iowa, was selected as the site of the first WAAC training center. Applications for the WAAC officer training program were made available at Army recruiting stations on 27 May, with a return deadline of June 4.

The first female training station
Fort Des Moines hosted the formation of the first Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), later renamed the Women's Army Corps (WAC), train-

Woman soldier said GI bill was valuable

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orders were to give them 30 days leave and reassign them.

"They wanted all the nurses out in 24 hours. I didn't know much about the Navy, but we cut their orders and shipped them out. They may still be looking for some of them."

Sutton said she was not considering the Army as a career and was anxious to get home to finish her degree. She was released in January 1946, and went to the University of Northern Colorado, where she got a teaching degree. She said she used the GI bill for the one year, recalling that having that benefit "was like being given a million bucks."

Sutton had graduated from Goodland High School in 1936, and had gone to the University of Wyoming for three years.

After getting her teaching degree, she went back to Wyoming and stayed there for 40 years, teaching everything from first grade through college.

She taught in Cody, Wyo., for 15 years, Laramie, for nine years and

Casper for four. She came back to Kansas to take care of her mother, and taught in Kanorado until 1983.

Sutton says she has been back to Des Moines several times. The old fort was closed and most of the buildings have been torn down, she said. Apartments were built on the old parade ground.

Sutton is interested in the Women In Service Memorial which has been built at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery across the river from Washington.

"There was no complete list of women in service in World War II, and they are building a database at the memorial," Sutton said. "I sent them my photograph along with service number and details of where I served."

She had three sisters, one in San Francisco; one in Baltimore, who was a WAC and served in Europe; and one in Idaho. She said the one in Baltimore has died, so she has not visited Washington since the Women In Service Memorial was finished, but she had seen the Vietnam Wall on an earlier trip.

ing 72,000 troops and commissioning the first female officers for non-combat duty between 1942-1945.

Applicants had to be U.S. citizens between the ages of 21 and 45 with no dependents, at least five feet tall, and

weigh 100 pounds or more. Over 35,000 women applied for less than 1,000 anticipated positions.

On July 20, the first officer candidate training class of 440 women started a six-week course at Fort Des Moines.

Interviews conducted by an eager press revealed that the average officer candidate was 25 years old, had attended college, and was working as an office administrator, executive secretary or teacher. One out of five had enlisted because a male member of her family was in the armed forces and she wanted to help him get home sooner. Several were combat widows from Pearl Harbor and Bataan. All of the women professed a desire to aid their country in time of need by "releasing a man for combat duty."

The press was asked to leave Fort Des Moines after the first day so as not to interfere with the training. Although a few reporters were disgruntled because they were not allowed to "follow" a candidate through basic officer training, most left satisfied after having obtained interviews and photographs of WAACs in their new uniforms. Even the titillating question of the color of WAAC underwear (khaki) was answered for the folks back home.

Forty black women who entered the first WAAC officer candidate class were placed in a separate platoon. Although they attended classes and mess with the other candidates, post facilities such as service clubs, theaters, and beauty shops were segregated. Black officer candidates had backgrounds similar to those of white officer candidates. Almost 80 percent had attended college, and the majority had work experience.

In July, Army recruiting centers were supplied with applications for volunteers to enlist in the WAAC as auxiliaries (enlisted women). The response, although not as dramatic as the officer candidate applications, was still strong. Those who had applied unsuccessfully for officer training and who

had stated on their applications that they would be willing to come in as auxiliaries did not have to reapply. The first auxiliary class started its four-week basic training at Fort Des Moines on Aug. 17. The average auxiliary was slightly younger than the officer candidates, with a high school education and less work experience. These women enlisted for the same reasons as the officer candidates. Many with family members in the armed forces believed that the men would come home sooner if women actively helped win the war and that the most efficient way a woman could help the war effort was to free a man for combat duty.

Although the first officer candidate class started its training before the enlisted class, the first enlisted WAACs entered training before their future officers graduated. Consequently, the first classes of both WAAC officer candidates and enlisted personnel were trained by male Regular Army officers. Col. Donald C. Faith was chosen to command the center. Faith's background as an educator and his interest in the psychology of military education rendered him well suited.

Women officers took over the training of the rest of the corps. The majority of the newly trained WAAC officers were assigned to Fort Des Moines to conduct basic training. As officer classes continued to graduate throughout the fall of 1942, many were assigned to staff three new WAAC training centers in Daytona Beach, Fla.; Fort Oglethorpe, Ga.; and Fort Devens, Mass. Others accompanied WAAC companies sent to field installations across the country. Black officers were assigned to black auxiliary and officer candidate units at Fort Des Moines and Fort Devens.

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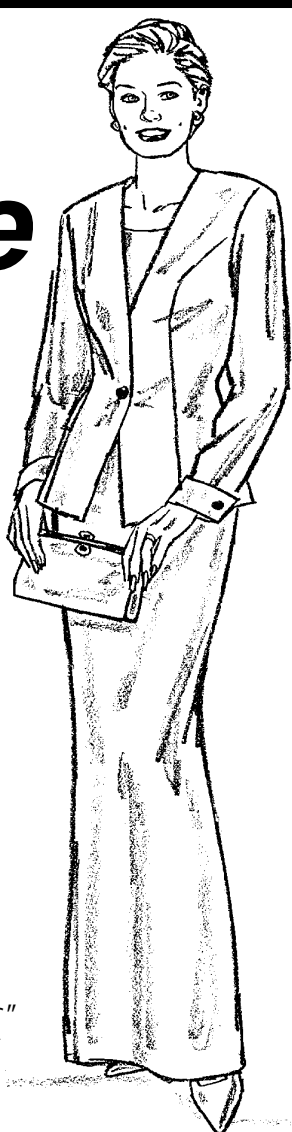
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