

**RESTRICTED**

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THE SECOND WORLD WAR

1939-1945

ROYAL AIR FORCE

MINISTRY OF  
DEFENCE  
AIR HISTORICAL  
BRANCH  
(RAF)

# THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE

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## PREFACE

The record of service of British women in the war of 1939-45 is outstanding and compares well with that of any country among the belligerent nations; their achievements are soberly set out in the White Paper CMD 6564, 'Statistics relating to the war effort of the United Kingdom.' Among these, the record of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force holds no mean place.

The size of the W.A.A.F. alone is striking.<sup>1</sup> At the point in May 1943, when further entry into the service was stopped by the Ministry of Labour, the strength was 182,000, and during six years of war a quarter of a million women served in its ranks. This, in a force which did not come into being until June 1939, and which, on the outbreak of war in September, was less than 2,000 strong, is remarkable. The relative strengths are still more surprising; the W.A.A.F. was 16 per cent of the total strength of the R.A.F. at the height of the struggle, and 22 per cent of that of the R.A.F. in home commands. Moreover, the number of trades in the W.A.A.F. increased from six at the onset to eighty at the end of the war. In fact, by that time, there was hardly a station in the United Kingdom which had no W.A.A.F. section; there were even two important groups, Nos. 26 and 60, which had more W.A.A.F. than R.A.F. personnel.

These are bald facts; but they are given to point out the strength of the service and its value to the R.A.F.—a result only made possible by the courage, patience and selflessness of most of its members. Women joined the W.A.A.F. for a variety of reasons; most of them, in the early days at any rate, with a simple and unambitious desire to share to the best of their ability in the nation's war effort; others it is true, were moved less by an appreciation of what lay behind that effort than a longing to escape from the drab monotony of days which they had known in civilian life. Whatever their reasons, they became in the end welded into one service and absorbed something of the spirit of the early recruits. The mood changed as the war progressed and as the strain of long hours and hard work began to take effect; but the early spirit was never entirely lost, and even after V.E. Day, during a period of excitement and unrest, the amount of absence without leave did not show any perceptible increase.

Although the women's services received a fair amount of publicity during the war, much of it was distasteful to the women themselves; the Press and even the B.B.C. seemed to concentrate on the so-called glamorous trades or to attempt to glamorize the life of the W.A.A.F. The result was a misleading picture of service life. By far the larger part of the W.A.A.F. lived and worked under conditions far from easy, luxurious or exciting; most of them accepted routine work and found it more or less interesting according to the nature of the work and the temperament of the worker; but the noticeable eagerness for overseas service shows that the spirit of adventure was still alive.

The entry of women into full-time service with a purely masculine military force under active service conditions presents certain problems, the solution of which can only be found by experience. The most urgent of these is, of course, housing. No living quarters for women had been planned at all before

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<sup>1</sup> All figures supplied by M.2. (b).

the outbreak of war; and, while the use of evacuated married quarters and requisitioned houses relieved the immediate difficulty, the supply of accommodation remained a major problem throughout the war. The question of the communal use of mess and recreation rooms, or, at the other extreme, complete segregation of the sexes also demanded attention.

A second problem is that of administration. The reason for employing women at all is to replace men where practicable, and to render all possible assistance to the parent service. Will this object be most readily attained if the women's service is run as a separate entity, having its own method of procedure, and administered entirely by its own women officers; or should it be an integral part of and be administered by the parent service? Which course will produce the maximum efficiency and (an essential factor in this country) the greatest economy in manpower? The Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force all solved this problem according to their individual requirements, the R.A.F. ending in a compromise between the two courses.

A third question is that of disciplinary code and legal status. At the outset, the legal status of the W.A.A.F. was similar to that of the approved camp-follower (native servant overseas), but it was found necessary to modify this position later.

A fourth difficulty, nebulous but none the less real, was the attitude of the parent service. In peace-time, servicemen were not accustomed to working with women as were men in the commercial and business worlds—the idea of women in uniform working alongside the men, entering and living on a camp intended purely for men, and being under a degree of military discipline, was most alarming to many regular officers and airmen. It was years before some commanding officers could be induced to accept a W.A.A.F. section on their stations; but the reverse attitude, which welcomed women as a lively social asset, was just as difficult. Much time and tact, with guidance and instructions from authority, together with the pressure of emergency, were needed before women were treated naturally as a useful section of the R.A.F.

Further problems arise from the facts that women are generally less conditioned in their early years than men to community life and its attendant discipline, that few of them reach positions of authority at an early age, and that, since most women over twenty-five are either married or already embarked on a career, the great majority in a military service will be young, and suffering from the normal disadvantages of youth—lack of experience of life, of meeting and accepting new people and conditions, a liability to take some matters too lightly and some too seriously, sometimes a lack of sense of responsibility and, it may be, a lack of staying power. Thus the field from which suitable officers and N.C.O.s may be drawn is automatically more restricted than in a men's service, and furthermore, it must be remembered that in the case of the W.A.A.F. there was at the outbreak of war not one single woman who had any service experience worthy of the name. As the years went by, experience was gained; but this lack of training, tradition and experience had a profound effect on the early history of the W.A.A.F.

The W.A.A.F. was thus almost an unknown quantity at the beginning of the war. Many senior officers, for example, expressed doubts about the behaviour of women under fire; these were set at rest for good during the first raids in 1940. No one knew how far substitution could satisfactorily be carried out. It was taken for granted that women would be useful in domestic and clerical

trades for instance; but no one could foresee whether they would be successful in trades which had no counterpart, or in which women were not usually employed, in civil life, such as radar, flight mechanic, electrician. No one knew whether, in countries where white women had usually led easy and sheltered lives, they could now successfully replace men, living and working in a military service under war conditions.

These apparently overwhelming difficulties were counterbalanced by two powerful factors. One was the intelligent and sympathetic help given to the new service by individual members of the R.A.F. of all ranks. There can be few early members of the W.A.A.F. who do not recall with gratitude the kindly help, advice and forbearance received from some officer or N.C.O. of the parent service. The other factor was the spirit of the women themselves, from every walk of life, whose enthusiasm overcame official resistance and brought the women's services into existence, whose determination carried them through the grim winter of 1939-40, adjusting themselves to new work and a new way of life, often in very hard living conditions, with incomplete uniform, and with officers and N.C.O.s too inexperienced to give them any substantial help, and whose loyalty and devotion, overcoming all difficulties, made the W.A.A.F. the valuable service it eventually became.

The history of the women in the W.A.A.F. outlined in the following pages is intended to present a sober record of fact; a story of the hasty mobilization of a tiny, new service, of rapid expansion, of adjustment to new conditions, of difficulties met and overcome, of hard work and of success achieved by the combined efforts of thousands of women. The story is not one of a corps inspired to great heights by a great leader, but rather the story of the united efforts of thousands of individual women, who saw in the W.A.A.F. a chance to make a direct and concrete contribution to the nation's war effort. The measure of their success can best be given in the following words:—

‘It is the view of the Air Council that an essential operational factor of the R.A.F. would be lacking if there was no W.A.A.F.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from *Hansard*:—Speech by Mr. John Strachey, U.S. of S., in the House of Commons on 12 March 1946.

**PART I**

**ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**



## CHAPTER 1

### FORMATION AND MOBILIZATION

At the end of the 1914-18 war plans for the permanent employment of a limited number of women with the R.A.F. had been drawn up; but drastic economy made it impossible to put them into effect. This was unfortunate, for many lessons learned during those years were quite lost. In fact, twenty years later many people appeared to have completely forgotten that women had actually served with the fighting forces during that war.

#### The First World War

In December 1916, when the shortage of manpower had become a serious problem, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the British Armies in France, agreed to accept women for duty in the back areas. In February 1917, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps was formed, and by the summer of that year, the advantages of employing women under military authority having been recognized, the W.A.A.C. was extended to home service. As a result there was also a large increase in the numbers employed with the Royal Flying Corps as cooks, clerks, orderlies and on some types of technical work. In November 1917, the Admiralty decided on the employment of women in naval establishments ashore, and constituted the Women's Royal Naval Service, of which a considerable proportion served with the Royal Naval Air Service. In addition, to these two women's services, the Women's Legion, a private organization under the presidency of the Marchioness of Londonderry, provided motor drivers for military formations, including units of the Royal Flying Corps.

On 29 January 1918 the Air Council agreed, subject to Treasury approval, to the formation of a Women's Air Force Corps. Thus on 1 April 1918, the day on which the Royal Air Force was formed, the Women's Royal Air Force also came into existence, and women in the W.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. already serving with air units of the Army and the Navy were offered transfer to the new service.

Soon the work of members of the W.R.A.F. covered a wide field; 9,000 were cooks and orderlies, 1,100 were employed as clerks, while others served in workshops and as storeswomen, photographers, draughtswomen, wireless operators, telephonists and drivers. Early in 1919 when men of long service, those in key industries and older men were demobilized, their places were taken by 1,000 members of the W.R.A.F., who accompanied their respective units of the R.A.F. in the field to Germany and served with the Forces of Occupation. At that time they were the only non-commissioned women personnel in the occupied area, the remainder being nurses, V.A.D. members and a few officers of Queen Mary's Auxiliary Army Corps (formerly the W.A.A.C.). When the disbandment of the W.R.A.F. was finally completed on 1 April 1920, thirty-two thousand women had served in its ranks.

#### Proposals for Women's Forces

Of the women's services, only the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry remained alive during the next fifteen years; but by 1935, when the country was beginning

to realize that another war was far from impossible; the idea began to germinate that it might be as well to enrol and train a corps of women for service with the armed forces.

From 1934 to 1936 proposals for the formation of a joint women's service, such as the Women's Legion, to supply personnel for all three armed forces, were considered but never developed, partly for financial reasons, and partly because of the decisions of the Women's Reserve Sub-Committee of the Manpower Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. This Committee reported in May 1936, that the formation of a reserve of women in peace was neither desirable nor necessary, and recommended that no direct Government financial support should be given to voluntary organizations, although Service Departments were free to give them assistance by the provision of lectures, if deemed useful. Only the Air Ministry appears to have regretted the decision, for, as the Air Member for Personnel pointed out, the Royal Air Force would be in a different position from the other two services on the outbreak of a home defence war, and would have to face immediate attack. He made it clear that certain categories of women would be needed at once, and felt that, by having an organization on the lines of the Women's Legion, the necessary personnel could be obtained at two or three hours' notice, already trained in the work for which they were required. Unfortunately the Air Ministry representatives were in the minority.<sup>1</sup>

One voluntary organization which took the greatest advantage of assistance from the Royal Air Force was the 'Emergency Service', which, originally formed in 1935 as an officers' training section of the Women's Legion, became a separate body in October 1936, its purpose being to find women who could take supervisory posts and to give them, by instruction and practical experience, some idea of the duties of an officer. Help was given by the R.A.F. in the form of lectures by R.A.F. officers and visits to R.A.F. stations.

In 1937 an article in the *Daily Mail* by Amy Johnson, the famous woman pilot, and careful notes submitted to the Secretary at the Air Ministry by William Courtenay, the Air Correspondent of the *Evening Standard*, suggested that women should be trained in both flying and ground duties in preparation for an emergency. These proposals were impracticable owing to the heavy pressure already imposed on R.A.F. training resources by the instruction of male pilots, and, though they were partially implemented later by the admission of women to the Air Transport Auxiliary, members of the W.A.A.F. were never employed as pilots in any capacity.

#### **Formation of the A.T.S.**

By 1938, however, it was realized that, in any future war, manpower would have to be supplemented by woman-power, Cabinet policy was reversed and, in April, the Air Ministry was informed by the War Office of a 'scheme for a Women's Supplementary Reserve' to provide trained women to replace soldiers on mobilization in non-combatant duties'. The possibility of a R.A.F. section of that Reserve was also adumbrated. The scheme seems to have been prompted by the need to take advantage of the existing enthusiasm for service among women in general, and it is evident from articles in the Press and membership

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.36521/35.

of women's organizations, such as the Women's Transport, the Women's Legion, the Emergency Service and the F.A.N.Y. that it was the anxiety of the women from 1934 onwards for some kind of pre-service training that led to action on the part of the authorities. One after another, the heads of these various organizations had urged the Secretaries of State at the War Office and Air Ministry to approve and support the formation of Women's Sections of the Armed Forces: finally their enthusiasm had effect.

On 6 May 1938, the Air Ministry was represented at a meeting at the War Office to discuss the proposal for a 'Women's Auxiliary Corps' designed to serve all three Armed Forces of the Crown. It was to be organized on a county basis under the Director General, Territorial Army, raised and maintained by local Territorial Army and Air Force Associations, and administered by the War Office. At subsequent meetings the name 'Auxiliary Territorial Service' was selected and khaki uniform was approved. On 23 August 1938, an Air Council letter addressed to the War Office supported the scheme for a common service, but desired that women enrolled for duty with the R.A.F. should be segregated in separate companies and should wear a distinctive badge to denote their affiliation with the R.A.F. The need was emphasized that adequate information about officers should be available at the Air Ministry and about other ranks at the R.A.F. Record Office. A list of categories in which the women could be employed was given, including cooks, clerks, drivers, aircrafthands (waitresses, cleaners, messengers, telephone operators, fabric workers, etc.), equipment assistants, photographers, draughtsmen, tracers and filterers.<sup>1</sup>

By 2 September the War Office was found to have made considerable preparation for the launching of the scheme which was to be made public on 1 October. It was in fact announced on 27 September 1938, as, during the Munich crisis, the War Office realized that women who would be useful to the A.T.S. were, through ignorance of the proposed formation of a women's service, committing themselves to other duties.

### **R.A.F. Companies**

Owing to the acceleration of the public announcement and the preoccupation of the R.A.F. with its own expansion, details of the establishment and operation of the R.A.F. companies had not been worked out. The Air Council, therefore, restricted their requirements for the time being to those they shared with the Army—clerks, cooks, drivers, equipment assistants and orderlies—although they asked that recruits with qualifications as fabric workers, upholsterers, photographers, draughtsmen and tracers should be noted on enrolment. This information was transmitted by the War Office to the Territorial Army and Air Force Association on 10 October 1938, so that recruiting might start with the help of the Women's Legion who had been invited to co-operate in providing personnel.

From the start the members of the R.A.F. companies showed a keen desire to be closely associated with the Royal Air Force. On 27 October 1938, the London Territorial Army and Air Force Association suggested that, as the territorial units had already as many A.T.S. companies affiliated to them as they could deal with, the R.A.F. companies should be affiliated to No. 601 (Fighter) Squadron

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.44610.

and to the Balloon Barrage Squadrons at Kidbrooke. This was the first stage of an extensive development, provision of the necessary accommodation was promised by the R.A.F. squadrons and the first affiliation came into force.

By that time the Air Ministry was becoming increasingly aware that the system as originally agreed was not going to work. Consequently on 2 December 1938 the Director of Organisation advised the Air Member for Personnel that some reorganization of distribution would be necessary to enable the companies to maintain closer touch with R.A.F. formations, and he proposed that, in order to arrange adequate R.A.F. training, the R.A.F. companies of the A.T.S. be re-allocated to places where they could conveniently be affiliated to units of the Auxiliary Air Force. At the same time, he suggested that the actual establishments of the companies should be reorganized. It had already been decided that owing to the shortage of suitable accommodation at R.A.F. stations, employment of women with the R.A.F. would be impracticable for some months after the outbreak of war; therefore, the companies should be used rather to train potential officers and N.C.O.s who would some day form the nucleus of a vastly expanded force, than to furnish replacements for airmen. For this purpose the membership of the companies should be so arranged that each company should perform the full range of duties, whereas the Army companies of the A.T.S. were established in separate companies for different duties, such as clerical, driving, general duties, etc., as it was intended that they should continue to be so used in time of war.<sup>1</sup>

These recommendations were implemented in a letter of 19 January 1939, which informed the War Office of the Air Council's views and on 27 January 1939, the position was clarified by a series of letters to R.A.F. Commands and Groups, to Territorial Associations and to A.T.S. officers. To meet the requirements of the R.A.F. they:—

- (a) Laid down the principle of officer and N.C.O. producing companies, emphasizing that the right type of personnel should be enrolled.
- (b) Provided that the division of the companies into clerical, motor transport and general duties (following the Army companies' example) should cease, and that each company should, in future, include personnel for each of the five duties so far authorized.
- (c) Announced the affiliation of the R.A.F. companies of the A.T.S. to units of the Auxiliary Air Force, and their administration by the Air Ministry instead of the War Office.
- (d) Gave instructions that documents of R.A.F. personnel should be held by the Air Ministry and the R.A.F. Record Office.

From that time the R.A.F. companies were viewed as an Air Council responsibility.

#### **Formation of the W.A.A.F.**

Finally, on 25 April 1939, the Air Member for Personnel wrote to the Secretary of State that it was essential to break away entirely from the Army owing to the different requirements of the Army and the Royal Air Force.<sup>2</sup> For one thing, he said, Army procedure of control differed vastly from that of the R.A.F.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.44610.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39 Min. 1.

especially as Army and A.T.S. administration was worked out on a geographical instead of a functional basis as in the case of the Royal Air Force. Furthermore, the training requirements of the R.A.F. companies were entirely different from those of the A.T.S.

After further discussion on the general peace-time administration, the Air Council decided in May 1939, that it was desirable to form a separate Women's Service for the R.A.F. to be entitled the 'Women's Auxiliary Air Force'.<sup>1</sup> Treasury agreement and the King's approval were obtained, and with effect from 28 June 1939, the new service came into being.<sup>2</sup>

*Training.* Broadly speaking, peacetime training was planned on a dual basis. Firstly, there were, at units, drill parades and weekly lectures on R.A.F. administration and the technical duties of the five trades in which the women were to be employed. Secondly, a series of courses of a week's duration were held in London, in order that personnel should obtain a more thorough knowledge of officers' duties and of R.A.F. and Auxiliary Air Force organization. These courses took the place of annual camps.

When the R.A.F. companies were formed in December 1938, it was decided that a syllabus of training specially adapted to the needs of the R.A.F. should be prepared. In the meantime the weekly lectures were to conform to the syllabus arranged by the War Office for the Army companies. Six weeks later, however, when the new syllabus was drawn up, the policy had been changed and the R.A.F. companies were to train potential officers and N.C.O.s. A revised type of instruction was therefore required. Discussions continued, and on 28 July 1939, a letter to all Company Commanders stated that 'a training syllabus will shortly be available.'<sup>3</sup> Owing to the advent of war, however, it was never issued, and with the call-up of the W.A.A.F. entirely different training arrangements were made.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Company Commanders continued training their personnel throughout the pre-war months with no guidance save the somewhat sketchy instructions originally drawn up by the War Office. They used, with varying success, their own judgment and commonsense, and in the circumstances some companies were reasonably well trained both in their trade duties and in general administration; but when they were called out for full-time duty on the outbreak of war they found that their knowledge was woefully scanty. Indeed few of the companies had started any training before the spring of 1939: the meetings ceased in the middle of July for the summer recess, and they were never resumed owing to the outbreak of war. As a result, the majority of the personnel had been given little more than three or four months' instruction.

Whilst the unit training was going on, special courses were held at intervals at the A.T.S. School of Instruction in Chelsea for members of the R.A.F. companies. Three courses took place in 1939, on 20 March, 8 May and 5 June, attended by approximately 100 members, so only a very small proportion of the W.A.A.F. had this extra training. Lectures of one hour were given on R.A.F. organization, equipment procedure, unit administration, officers' duties and catering and hygiene, in addition to drill parades and practice in writing letters and memoranda; but as the instruction was mainly in the hands of amateurs, themselves almost unqualified, it proved of little practical value to the trainee.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A. 912129/39 Encl. 4.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File 925029/39.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File 850784/38.

<sup>4</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

*Uniform.* In a letter to the War Office on 8 December 1938, A.M.P. had already voiced an opinion that the R.A.F. companies should have their own blue uniform to show their close connection with the R.A.F. However, on 16 December 1938, at a meeting at which both the Air Ministry and the War Office were represented, it was agreed that, to facilitate administration and prevent disruption within the A.T.S., all members should continue to wear khaki, although the R.A.F. companies should have a special arm-badge incorporating the R.A.F. wings. In the following March the question was raised once more; but although the Director of Personal Services and A.M.P. emphasized the desirability of blue, it was again shelved as the Director of Equipment stated that 'there was not a stitch to be had'. Later that month, however, the Chief Commandant of the A.T.S. wrote to the Air Ministry pointing out the importance of a uniform for the women being identical with that of the parent service. Recalling the problems of the 1914-18 war, she was convinced that khaki would hinder the acceptance of the women as part of the R.A.F. whereas blue uniform would not only encourage their loyalty and enthusiasm but would also be an aid to good discipline. There was equally strong opposition to khaki on the part of many members of the companies, and, therefore, at the end of March, A.M.P. finally arranged with the D. of E. that R.A.F. blue cloth should after all, be used.

The Chief Commandant of the A.T.S. and the Commandant of the City of London Unit of the A.T.S. were invited to advise on the detail of design, and after the King's approval had been obtained, the new uniform was procured just in time for a first appearance on 2 July 1939, at the Royal Review of the Services and Civil Defence Organizations in Hyde Park.<sup>1</sup> As in the 1914-18 war, the cut of the jacket was identical with that of the R.A.F. and the R.A.F. badge and badges of rank were authorized. A free issue of cap, jacket, skirt, shirt, tie, stockings and shoes was made to other ranks, whilst officers were given a grant of £16 to cover the cost of providing themselves with these items in accordance with the sealed pattern.

#### **Appointment of Director, W.A.A.F.**

In accordance with the policy of keeping the R.A.F. companies of the A.T.S. in close touch with the Royal Air Force, A.M.P. suggested in April 1939, that the time had come when a woman should be appointed to the Air Ministry staff to maintain liaison between the companies and the Air Ministry and to advise them on A.T.S. problems of organization, personnel, accommodation and training. This was agreed by the Secretary of State and the Chief of the Air Staff, who also approved the proposal for an assistant. The Treasury expressed the view that a lady 'who would be prepared to serve without remuneration should be appointed,' but it was stressed that it was not a figurehead that was required, but a woman who knew her job and was prepared to give herself fully to it. In these circumstances the Treasury on 24 June 1939, finally sanctioned a salary not exceeding £800 a year 'to compensate the lady selected for the income she was surrendering in order to take up the appointment'.<sup>2</sup>

The appointment, subject to a month's notice of termination on either side, was offered to Miss Jane Trefusis-Forbes, with effect from 1 July 1939. By that time the W.A.A.F. had been formed as a separate service, and she was,

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 875043/39.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.907145/39.

therefore, given the title of 'Director, W.A.A.F.' She was informed that her duties would be advisory and would not include executive functions, although she would correspond direct with W.A.A.F. Area Controllers, that a secretarial branch composed of civil servants would issue correspondence on policy matters, that the appointment was to be temporary, subject to review at the end of the year, and that the salary had been worked out on a civilian basis, not according to military rank. On assuming office she wore the rank badges of an Air Commodore and was given the rank title of 'Senior Controller'.

In August 1939 financial approval was given for the appointment of an assistant to the Director, W.A.A.F., whose duties would be in the nature of those of an adjutant. Mrs. Van Baerle, who had been a deputy company commander in the A.T.S., was selected for the post.<sup>1</sup>

### Organization of the W.A.A.F.

When the W.A.A.F. was formed as a separate service, it was decided that it should be administered on a geographical basis, with a senior woman officer for each area, to provide a link between the company commanders and the Air Ministry. However, war came before these Area Controllers were appointed.

The Treasury had refused to approve payment of subsistence allowance to the Area Controllers, but agreed to the payment of travelling expenses for four journeys a year. At the same time Treasury approval was obtained for the payment of a cash bonus and travelling expenses to other ranks attending a specific number of drills per year, travelling expenses but no cash bonus to officers, grants to County Associations for the administration and accommodation of W.A.A.F. companies, a weekly allowance to personnel attending courses at the School of Instruction and a gratuity to personnel unable to follow their normal occupation owing to a disability arising out of training.

On 18 July 1939, instructions were sent to R.A.F. Commands informing them that the R.A.F. Companies had been reconstituted as the W.A.A.F. and that:—<sup>2</sup>

- (a) The personnel would conform to Station Standing Orders and the instructions of commanding officers while under training at units, although they would be administered and disciplined by their own officers.
- (b) Training would occupy a maximum of two hours per week, with one full day every three weeks. All officers would be required to attend a course at the A.T.S. School of Instruction. It was expected, however, that administrative rather than trade training would be required, owing to the fact that the wartime functions of the women would be confined to administration as officers and N.C.O.s.
- (c) The women were to be trained in but not employed on airmen's duties at their affiliated units, as they were likely to be drafted away in time of war.

### *Conversion of Companies to include 'Other Ranks'*

The question of converting certain of the R.A.F. companies to include personnel for employment in the ranks in time of war, as opposed to using them purely as officer and N.C.O. producing units, was first raised at a meeting held

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 907145/39.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

under the chairmanship of A.M.P. on 20 April 1939. Certain branches of the R.A.F., especially the signals branch were pressing for uniformed women to be employed in various trades such as teleprinter operators and radar operators. The W.A.A.F. would be required immediately on the outbreak of war to fill gaps in the establishment. A.M.P. pointed out that such a scheme was not likely to be practicable owing to the lack of domestic accommodation; but he ruled that both questions should be studied. It was also agreed that a special company should be earmarked for clerical duties at the R.A.F. Record Office.

There was no appreciable development of these proposals during the remaining months of peace; but with the emergency the whole aspect of the W.A.A.F. changed suddenly. There was an immediate requirement for W.A.A.F. tradeswomen, and in a letter to the Treasury dated 1 September 1939, it was stated that the Air Council intended to expand the companies to include 'other ranks' personnel, including a company specially allocated for duty at the Record Office.

### **Mobilization**

The previous intention not to call up W.A.A.F. personnel until some months after the outbreak of war was suddenly reversed at the end of August 1939. As soon as conflict with Germany appeared inevitable, D.P.S., D.W.A.A.F. and other responsible officers all felt that no time should be lost in embodying the officer and N.C.O. producing companies, and in recruiting 'other rank' personnel. Numerous requests for the women to be available at once in war were unsatisfied, and this had the effect of diverting enquiries to civilian sources of supply. It thus seemed probable that the W.A.A.F. might turn into an officer and N.C.O. cadre of far larger dimensions than 'other ranks' requirements warranted.

It was, therefore, decided to take the plunge. On 28 August 1939 an Air Ministry instruction authorized both the enrolment of recruits as telephonists, teleprinter operators, cooks, plotters and mess staff, and the calling up of personnel required for company duty and to assist at the unit to which the company was affiliated. Thus the majority of pre-war officers and airwomen were mobilized before the actual outbreak of war. At first they lived at home, and went daily to their units, clad in a motley of civilian clothes, but on 1 September 1939, instructions were issued that, unless conditions reverted to normal, posting to stations to fill war establishment vacancies would be made by the R.A.F. Record Office, in the ratio of three women to replace two men. A further instruction on 4 September 1939, laid down that, in general the W.A.A.F. would be drafted in groups of not less than ten, with either an officer or a N.C.O. in charge.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.



## CHAPTER 2

# SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATION AND DISCIPLINARY CODE

### Administration

The system of administration in the W.A.A.F. is not easily defined nor readily understood other than by those who were concerned in its implementation. It was essentially fluid, continually being altered and adapted to suit changing conditions.

Once mobilized, the W.A.A.F. was never a complete service in itself, never a separate entity as were other uniformed women's services; it was in no sense a service within a service, but was closely integrated with the R.A.F. In the end one could almost say that the W.A.A.F. was welded into the framework of the R.A.F. so that finally no major policy decisions could be taken without in some measure, however small, taking the W.A.A.F. aspect into consideration—for example, no separate release scheme could be planned for the W.A.A.F.; their release had to be part of the R.A.F. scheme. Yet, from the start, and in fact throughout the war, this factor was understood by few R.A.F. officers and fully appreciated by hardly any—a circumstance which considerably influenced the history of the W.A.A.F., for close integration of a fully mobilized women's force within that of its parent male force implies a complicated system of administration, dependent for its successful working on tact and goodwill all round, liable without these qualities to creak badly, and in any case extremely difficult to define.

A fundamental difficulty arose from the fact that the W.A.A.F., an integrated service, had a different disciplinary code from that of the R.A.F., and that both W.A.A.F. officers and N.C.O.s had only very restricted powers of command over the R.A.F. On the other hand, the R.A.F. had virtually full powers of command over the W.A.A.F. despite the fact that normal saluting between the services remained on the basis of 'courtesy' and not of the disciplinary code until the end of the war.

When the W.A.A.F., to the surprise of its humbler members, was called out for duty on the outbreak of war and so soon after its foundation, virtually no scheme had been laid down for its administration.<sup>1</sup> For the next few months, *ad hoc* rules were made and officers carried on as best they could. Their task was no easy one. Most of them were not women of outstanding ability, for most had been selected because they had free time and an adequate social background rather than for their ability. Few of them were 'business' or 'public' women, or had dealt with official correspondence, nor had they, in the main, any experience of handling women, other than their own servants. Their service training was so slight as to be almost negligible and even so, was on A.T.S. lines and ill-suited to the W.A.A.F. Those officers who had gone through the A.T.S. course at Chelsea had naturally enough come away with the idea that they were to run their companies as separate entities, small units accommodated and perhaps assisted by a R.A.F. squadron but administered

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

solely by their women officers. With this sketchy background of knowledge and ideas, with no help other than that, variable in quantity and quality, given by the squadrons to which they were affiliated, the W.A.A.F. officers faced the great difficulties of administering and supervising a rapidly expanding force of new recruits, eager and willing to unite, but without any nucleus of trained personnel: a force which had no equipment, no clear idea of its duties, no standard accommodation, few rules and no tradition. It is not surprising that the level of administration varied considerably on different stations. There was no uniform standard of either administration or discipline; after all, no standard had yet been agreed as desirable.

The first official publication about the W.A.A.F. was contained in A.M.O. N.767 dated 10 August 1939, which announced the appointment of D.W.A.A.F. and gave her duties as:—

- (a) To advise the Air Member for Personnel on all questions concerning the training and welfare of the W.A.A.F.
- (b) To advise the Air Ministry branches on all questions peculiar to the W.A.A.F.
- (c) To act as adviser to area administrators of the W.A.A.F. with whom she may correspond direct, with the object of promoting uniformity of treatment of W.A.A.F. problems, particularly in regard to personnel matters.

Thereafter information on various matters of administration was issued in a number of letters from Air Ministry<sup>1</sup> and on 22 December 1939, A.M.O. A.550/39, the first of a long series of A.M.O.s dealing with the organization of the W.A.A.F., was published. This A.M.O. defined the organization of the W.A.A.F. as follows:—

‘Officers and airwomen of the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force will, when posted for duty at R.A.F. Stations and Units, be under the orders of the C.O., whose instructions will be conveyed through the Air Force officer concerned in matters affecting Air Force duty and through the senior W.A.A.F. officer in matters of an administrative and disciplinary nature. The officer-in-charge of the detachment of the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force will be responsible to the officer commanding the R.A.F. unit for the efficiency, discipline, well-being and training (where practicable) of all ranks of the detachment.’

The posting of officers was to be effected by the Director of Postings, Air Ministry, and that of other ranks by the Officer i/c Records: the procedure for promotion, reclassification and termination of service was to conform to current R.A.F. procedure: the Provost Marshal’s branch was given authority over officers and airwomen as over civilians.

So the W.A.A.F. struggled through the first winter and its system of administration began to take shape or rather various shapes. It was obvious that with no clear terms of reference, and no experience, the system would be interpreted on separate stations according to the personalities of those concerned. Some officers, lacking guidance from higher authority, built up a good system of purely feminine administration, accepted and even admired by the R.A.F.: some muddled along and slid into a chaos which was later, with

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 31826/39.

difficulty, cleared up: some received intelligent and sympathetic help from the R.A.F. and from the first fitted their W.A.A.F. companies and sections into the framework of the R.A.F. station.

Meanwhile, early in 1940, as a result of allegations of mismanagement within the W.A.A.F., the Secretary of State requested a complete investigation into every aspect of W.A.A.F. life and administration. Lengthy minutes and reports passed between him, his Under-Secretary of State (C), members of Council and Directors, culminating in a meeting under the chairmanship of the Under-Secretary of State on 4 May 1940. It was realized, even at this early date, that the W.A.A.F. would eventually be of great value to the R.A.F. and the problems of its administration were considered with care and an intelligent appreciation. The points most ardently discussed were:—

- (a) The action to be taken by R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. officers in the event of disagreement, i.e. in the event of the R.A.F. officer concerned disregarding the advice of the W.A.A.F. officer.
- (b) The signing of official correspondence by W.A.A.F. officers.
- (c) The use of R.A.F. messes by W.A.A.F. personnel.
- (d) Saluting.
- (e) D.W.A.A.F.'s status and duties.
- (f) D.W.A.A.F.'s claim that W.A.A.F. administrative officers should be regarded as specialists.
- (g) The powers of the Provost Marshal over W.A.A.F. personnel.

It may be noted that with the exception of (c) above, which force of circumstances and shortage of accommodation clarified automatically as time went on, all these points continued to be debated for some years.

Finally on 8 August 1940, with the publication of A.M.O.s A.567 and A.578, which cancelled the two previous orders, the duties and status of D.W.A.A.F., and the organization of the W.A.A.F. were restated and clarified. It was now laid down that D.W.A.A.F. was to be regarded as a specialist and was to be consulted accordingly on all questions concerning the administration and welfare of the W.A.A.F. She was authorized to control the posting of W.A.A.F. officers, to convene and attend conferences of W.A.A.F. staff officers and senior officers and to visit and report on stations. Now for the first time a direct W.A.A.F. channel of communication was made available—a factor which proved of great value to junior W.A.A.F. officers faced with difficult situations on their stations.

The W.A.A.F. officers at Commands, Groups and Stations were to be purely advisory, but the A.O.C.-in-C., A.O.C. or C.O. was to regard his W.A.A.F. officer as a specialist in W.A.A.F. matters and was to seek and give due weight to her advice. But in this term 'specialist in W.A.A.F. matters' lay the seed of difficulty; it was an unfortunate term, which in the eyes of the R.A.F. might mean anything from a kindly, motherly body (known to the W.A.A.F. as a 'good hostel officer') to a skilled secretary with all the appropriate regulations at her finger-tips, but with little human interest in the women in her charge. It was in fact most difficult to define the duties of a W.A.A.F. administrative (or 'G' as she was later called) officer and to give her clear terms of reference.

In spite of these A.M.O.s, integration of the W.A.A.F. within the R.A.F. was still by no means complete; some senior W.A.A.F. officers still tried to retain executive power and resisted any measure of R.A.F. control over the W.A.A.F.; indeed some few continued until the end of the war to yearn for executive power or at least the outward symbols of such power. Early in 1941, however, the fact was realized that the most stringent economy in both man and woman power would be necessary to win the war. It became apparent that W.A.A.F. 'overheads' were too heavy, and that there was duplication in some directions, e.g. separate W.A.A.F. orderly rooms and a separate system of W.A.A.F. administration were in existence on a good many stations. A conference, held in the Air Ministry on 12 August 1941, with D.G.O. in the chair, and R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. representatives from each Command present, crystallized the policy of integration<sup>1</sup>. Separate W.A.A.F. orderly rooms were to be abolished, the W.A.A.F. administrative staffs were to be reduced wherever possible and the separate W.A.A.F. establishments were to be discontinued; officers at Command and Group Headquarters were to have only advisory and not executive functions; W.A.A.F. substitution officers and technical N.C.O.s were to be asked, and this for the first time, to undertake administrative and welfare duties; attempts were again made to define the functions of W.A.A.F. administrative officers. To many R.A.F. officers, the necessity for the existence of W.A.A.F. administrative officers and N.C.O.s seemed to have disappeared by this time; it was in fact only the strong representations made by D.W.A.A.F., who viewed with alarm the prospect of a big expansion both in numbers and in scope of duties with no W.A.A.F. administrative staff to handle it, that kept the administrative branch in existence.

As a direct result of this conference, A.M.S.O. and A.M.P. on 5 December 1941 submitted to the Air Council a paper on the organization of the W.A.A.F.,<sup>2</sup> which clearly indicated the importance of the W.A.A.F. in the view of the Air Council. The factors contributing to this opinion were the existing and target strengths of the service, the fact that there were already over fifty trades open to women, the increase in numbers which foreshadowed the W.A.A.F. becoming much larger in proportion to the R.A.F. than had at first been contemplated, the new status of the W.A.A.F. as part of the Armed Forces of the Crown and the fact, implied though not specifically stated, that the women had stood up well under fire. The paper reiterated the policy of integration with all its implications and put forward the following cardinal principles:—

- (a) That the W.A.A.F. is an integral part of the R.A.F. and must be employed and administered as far as possible within the normal R.A.F. framework.
- (b) That W.A.A.F. personnel, when off duty, should be dealt with as far as possible by women.
- (c) That W.A.A.F. personnel, whether off duty or not, should be dealt with in all matters concerning their welfare as women, by women. In matters of discipline they must be dealt with by women in the first instance.

These principles were ultimately accepted as the basis for the administration of the W.A.A.F.;<sup>3</sup> but discussion of their interpretation continued until near the end of the war, with frequent revision of the A.M.O.s which prescribed the administration and discipline of the W.A.A.F.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.70819/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.C. Paper 65 (41).

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.361913/43.

The Air Council at its meeting on 9 December 1941, realizing that the policy of integration was not entirely straightforward, in that it is not possible to deal with women in exactly the same manner as men, recognizing also that the status of the women's Services is always watched carefully by Parliament and by the general public, set up a committee to consider the future organization of the W.A.A.F.<sup>1</sup> Four meetings were held between 15 December and 14 January, D.W.A.A.F. being present at the second and third meetings. The arguments appear mainly to have centred round the duties and status of D.W.A.A.F. herself, not unnaturally, for the status of the W.A.A.F. administrative officer at each formation was in theory modelled on that of D.W.A.A.F.

In the end A.M.O. A.83/42 appeared on 29 January 1942. The principle of integration was stated and the need for avoidance of duplication in administration stressed. D.W.A.A.F. was now given certain executive powers; she was allowed:—

- (a) To deal with W.A.A.F. complaints and grievances.
- (b) To control the posting of W.A.A.F. (G) officers (as W.A.A.F. Administrative officers in future were to be called).
- (c) To control W.A.A.F. officer Selection Boards.
- (d) To deal (in conjunction with D.G.M.S., D.A.F.W. and the Chaplain-in-Chief) with specifically feminine matters; these to be defined through confidential channels.
- (e) To collaborate with A.M.T. in the preparation of disciplinary training courses.
- (f) To decide on compassionate discharges.
- (g) To issue minor disciplinary instructions through normal R.A.F. channels, with the concurrence of D.P.S., for the W.A.A.F.
- (h) To administer certain welfare matters, particularly in co-operation with private welfare organizations.

For the rest, no great changes in the policy laid down in A.578/40 were made; the previous policy was amplified, the channels of communication clearly stated and the W.A.A.F. channel clarified. During the discussions, which led to the publication of this A.M.O., the suggestion was put forward and strongly supported that W.A.A.F. Staff Officers should be appointed to Air Ministry Directorates; however, this plan, which implied the dispersal of the functions of the W.A.A.F. Directorate, was dropped for the time.

In the meantime, forces were at work outside the Air Ministry, which were to have considerable effect on the administration of the W.A.A.F. During 1941, rumours had arisen and found expression in the press, in Parliament and in public places, that conditions in the three women's Services were unsatisfactory; the rumours almost amounted to a whispering campaign, inspired, it was said, by enemy agency, and alleging that moral and physical standards in the women's Services were deplorable. The Government set up a Committee of Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State of the three Services and of the Ministry of Labour to review the conditions in the women's Services but public opinion was not satisfied. At the end of January the Committee was

<sup>1</sup> The Committee comprised U.S. of S (C), A.M.P., A.M.S.O. and P.U.S., with D.W.A.A.F. in attendance as necessary.

replaced by an independent body under the chairmanship of Miss Violet Markham. This Committee held its first meeting on 2 March 1942, and set out to enquire into every aspect of the life and work of women in the three Services. The Committee visited a number of stations in the R.A.F. and produced its report in August 1942, a most competent, complete and valuable report which gives a good picture of life in the three women's Services.<sup>1</sup>

The Air Council gave careful consideration to the whole of the report, which contained four recommendations bearing on the system of administration in the W.A.A.F. Of these one was considered impracticable and was dismissed, viz. :—

*Recommendation 17.* That consideration should be given to the possibility of reorganizing the work of the women group officers in the W.A.A.F. on a compact geographical basis.

The other three were accepted by the Air Council and were implemented as follows:—

(i) *Recommendation 6.* The number of inspectors on the staff of the Director, W.A.A.F. should be increased. Women Directors and their deputies in all three services should be free to visit without prior notice.

Although D.W.A.A.F. considered that visits and inspections should be done from her Directorate, the Air Council decided to appoint a W.A.A.F. officer on the staff of the Inspector-General. Her reports would be impartial and would be submitted direct to the Air Council. She was established in the rank of Group Officer.

(ii) *Recommendation 7.* There should be a greater degree of delegation to Commands and Groups of postings and cross-postings in the A.T.S. and the W.A.A.F.

In spite of D.W.A.A.F.'s opposition, the posting of officers up to the rank of Flight Officer was decentralized to Commands.

(iii) *Recommendation 16.* The Air Ministry organization for the W.A.A.F. should be brought more into line with that obtaining in the War Office for the A.T.S. W.A.A.F. staff officers should be appointed to such directorates in the Air Ministry as deal with matters affecting the W.A.A.F.

Again in spite of opposition from D.W.A.A.F., group officers were established in the Departments of the Air Member for Supply and Organisation and the Air Member for Training, a wing officer in the Directorate of Air Force Welfare and a woman medical officer in the Directorate General of Medical Services. W.A.A.F. 'G' Staff Officers were also established in Air Ministry Directorates as appropriate. The W.A.A.F. Advisory Council was constituted and was to meet monthly; to consist of D.W.A.A.F., D.D.W.A.A.F., the Inspector W.A.A.F., and the officers from A.M.S.O., A.M.T., D.G.P.S., D.A.F.W., and D.G.M.S. D.W.A.A.F. was to submit formal advice to the Air Council through the medium of this Advisory Council. The W.A.A.F. Standing Conference was constituted to consist of D.W.A.A.F. and the members of the Advisory Council, the W.A.A.F. 'G' Staff Officers located in Air Ministry Directorates. This conference was normally to meet immediately before the

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare conditions in the Three Women's Services (Cmd. 6384) published by H.M. Stationery Office.

Advisory Council. These instructions resulted in a radical change in the functions of D.W.A.A.F. herself, but allowed wider scope for the submission of W.A.A.F. problems to the highest authority—the Air Council.<sup>1</sup>

The discussions on the Markham Report were concerned with matters of high policy only and were on the whole unknown to and unnoticed by the Service outside the Air Ministry. Throughout 1942, however, the shortage of man and woman power had been growing more and more acute and the Government was urging the greatest possible economy in every direction. D.O.Est. and D. of M. in the Air Ministry had for some time felt that too many officers and N.C.O.s were occupied in direct administration of the W.A.A.F. They felt that in such a closely integrated Service, the administration of the R.A.F. should also cover the W.A.A.F. A feature of W.A.A.F. administration was that it lay entirely in the hands of 'G' officers, so-called 'specialist' officers. In a male military service, in theory at least, all officers are expected to take their share in the supervision of the men of their Service. In the W.A.A.F., even in theory, the officers posted in direct substitution of R.A.F. officers were not expected to undertake any duties than their technical ones; it is true that a good many of them did in fact lend a hand with W.A.A.F., or R.A.F. administration, but it was unfortunate that from the start it was not taken for granted that all W.A.A.F. officers should accept, in some degree, responsibility for the care of the airwomen serving at the same unit. From the start, the detail of supervision, administration and welfare arrangements had been in the hands of the administrative N.C.O.s. Technical N.C.O.s took even less interest in the administration of the airwomen than did non-'G' officers. An airman must, before he is promoted to Corporal, or more particularly, to Sergeant, have satisfied his officer that he is capable of taking an appropriate share in the disciplinary and administrative supervision of airmen. An airwoman, however, was promoted to N.C.O. rank during the first three years of the war for a variety of reasons, often with little or no regard to the qualities required of men in similar circumstances. It was unfortunate, moreover, that most R.A.F. Section Commanders continually resisted the early suggestions and later instructions that their W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s should take their share in W.A.A.F. administrative duties. The Signals, Accounts, Orderly Room, Equipment Sections, in fact every Section on the Station was almost invariably difficult on this point; this, together with the uneven quality of the N.C.O.s themselves and their lack of training and of sense of responsibility, made them of uncertain value to the Unit W.A.A.F. 'G' officers.

D.W.A.A.F. strongly opposed any sudden or severe cut in establishment of 'G' officers and administrative N.C.O.s, but under pressure conceded that in time W.A.A.F. substitution officers and technical N.C.O.s could be trained to undertake 'G' duties.<sup>2</sup> After protracted discussion, A.M.O. A.209/43 was issued on 4 March 1943, which defined in detail the 'G' duties of both 'G' and non-'G' officers and attempted to outline the new qualities which a good non-'G' officer should possess. Provision was made, as far as possible, for the adequate care of airwomen on unusually difficult, isolated and very dispersed stations. It contained the first official instructions which directed non-'G' officers to take their share of 'G' (administrative) duties. The implementation of the A.M.O. was the subject of sporadic discussion for the

<sup>1</sup> A.M.O. A.1392/42. Office Memorandum 205/42.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File S.86809.

the rest of the war. No doubt it effected a saving in woman power, but one of its by-products was a surplus of unemployable, unremusterable administrative N.C.O.s who were a problem for many months. D.W.A.A.F. and the Advisory Council were never really happy about the provisions of the A.M.O. and only accepted them because of the stringency of the manpower situation. Minor adjustments were made during the next two years. When the war with Germany ended and releases from the Service began, D.W.A.A.F. asked for a revision of the scales of administrative staffs, in order that the airwomen might be adequately supervised during the difficult Phase II; however, in view of the fact that releases had caused a serious shortage of 'G' officers and administrative N.C.O.s, the scales were not increased, indeed, in some directions they were decreased.

The administration of the W.A.A.F. rested on the shoulders of the W.A.A.F. 'G' officers who had always been at a great disadvantage in that their terms of reference were not clear.<sup>1</sup> Those of the 'G' officers at Command and Group Headquarters had never been clearly stated and the officers themselves had varying ideas of their status and functions. In May 1945, the W.A.A.F. Advisory Council considered this question and submitted a paper to the Air Council on the subject. A.M.O. A.727/45 was issued as a result, the Air Council accepting the paper virtually with no amendment. 'G' Officers at Group and Command Headquarters were in future to be looked on as Staff Officers and consulted on every matter which concerned the W.A.A.F.

It will be seen that integration within the R.A.F. is the keynote of the system of W.A.A.F. administration through its history. The need for this was realized even before the war, when the Air Council rejected the preferred share in the proposed single women's Service, and demanded its own separate service.<sup>2</sup> Given this essential factor and realizing the difficulties which were inherent therein, the system worked surprisingly well, since it was essentially flexible and was changed continually to meet the demands of changing conditions. It suffered from a lack of well-trained and carefully selected officers, from a duality of functions of all 'G' officers and from the rift between 'G' and non-'G' officers. But its greatest weakness lay in that it depended too much for its satisfactory working on the personalities of the officers concerned, both R.A.F. and W.A.A.F., senior and junior, for a clash of personalities seems to have more disastrous results when the persons concerned are of different sex.

Briefly then, the system of administration in the W.A.A.F. was as follows. At unit level the W.A.A.F. 'G' officer was posted as adviser on W.A.A.F. matters to her C.O. and his staff on whom it was incumbent to seek her advice; her executive authority was limited to purely feminine matters and her disciplinary powers were very limited and were controlled by her C.O. She was expected to hold frequent meetings of all W.A.A.F. officers and N.C.O.s, to keep them informed of all changes in W.A.A.F. policy and through them to have a complete knowledge of her W.A.A.F. section. At group level, the W.A.A.F. 'G' officer was adviser to the A.O.C. and his staff; her executive power was again limited to purely feminine matters: she was expected to convene regular meetings of unit officers. At Command level, the W.A.A.F.

<sup>1</sup> A.M.O. A.209/43 laid down, as far as it was possible to do so, the duties of the Unit 'G' Officer.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File S.44610.



Staff Officer was adviser to her A.O.C.-in-C. and his staff—she also was expected to convene and attend meetings of her senior officers stationed at Group Headquarters and was a member of the W.A.A.F. Standing Conference. At Air Ministry level, D.W.A.A.F. and the Advisory Council were to advise the Air Council on all W.A.A.F. matters, D.W.A.A.F. having direct access to Air Members, and also executive authority in all purely feminine matters, in the selection of new officers and the posting of senior officers, in the granting of compassionate discharges, and in dealing with complaints and grievances. The channel of communication was normally the R.A.F. official channel, but in addition, there was a W.A.A.F. channel from the unit officer through Group and Command to D.W.A.A.F. through which passed specifically feminine matters and which was also used in the event of disagreement between R.A.F. or W.A.A.F. officers.

No note on the system of administration in the W.A.A.F. would be complete without a mention of the Secretariat which dealt with W.A.A.F. matters, the members of which gave to D.W.A.A.F. and to the W.A.A.F. the greatest and most loyal help throughout. Without their experience and intelligent sympathy, the W.A.A.F. could never have become the success it undoubtedly was.

### Discipline

The first enrolment form for the W.A.A.F. W.1434, which was introduced on 28 August 1939 contained the following two paragraphs:—

15. Do you understand that when employed by or in the service of, or accompanying H.M. Air Force when on active service you will be subject to Air Force Law and further that during a period of national emergency you may by reason of your employment under this enrolment become subject to such penalties as may then be prescribed by law for offences committed in breach of this contract of service?

Do you understand that if, when in employment under this enrolment, you are guilty of any act or neglect in breach of this enrolment of any of the rules, regulations or instructions laid down from time to time for your service, you will be liable to any of the following minor punishments to be awarded by such authority male or female as the Air Council shall appoint:—

- (i) extra duties;
- (ii) stoppage of leave;
- (iii) restriction of privileges;
- (iv) admonition.

The first instructions on the organization and administration of the W.A.A.F., issued on 22 December 1939,<sup>1</sup> included a paragraph dealing with discipline, which stated that personnel of the W.A.A.F. would be required to conform to the disciplinary regulations laid down for their service, and that officers and airwomen were subject to the Air Force Act when employed by or in the service of H.M. Air Force when on active service. This order was followed on 3 January 1940 by an Air Council letter setting out the sections of the Air Force

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<sup>1</sup> A.M.O. A.550/39.

Act considered to be applicable to W.A.A.F., and including regulations for the award of minor punishments and action to be taken in the case of civil offences.<sup>1</sup> A list of rules for delinquents was attached in this letter. A.M.O. A.550/39 was subsequently cancelled by A.M.O. 578/40 issued on 8 August 1940, which stated that officers and airwomen were subject to the Air Force Act under sections 175 (7) and 176 (9) respectively, and which contained regulations about saluting by W.A.A.F. personnel. This order was followed by a further Air Council letter dated 25 September 1940 amplifying the original letter on W.A.A.F. discipline of 3 January 1940 and again setting out the sections of the Air Force Act applicable to W.A.A.F.

It was unfortunate that the Judge Advocate General had ruled that certain basic disciplinary requirements, for contravention of which penalties are provided in the Act, could not be held to apply to the W.A.A.F., e.g. members of the W.A.A.F. could not be charged with the offence of desertion or absence without leave (sections 10 (4) and 12 (1) (a) ) nor could charges be disposed of summarily (sections 46 and 47). The ruling that the powers of summary disposal of charges did not apply to the W.A.A.F. meant that a charge against a member of the W.A.A.F. for any offence, however trivial, under the Air Force Act, could only be proceeded with by way of court martial—there were many objections to this, among them the fact that a W.A.A.F. officer, not being an ‘officer’ within the meaning of the Air Force Act (under J. A. G.’s ruling), could not sit as a member of a Court Martial, and that any member of the W.A.A.F. brought before a Court would be tried by male officers only. The fact that airwomen could not be charged with desertion or absence without leave had the effect that enforcement of any punishment for minor offences was dependent on the goodwill of the airwoman, i.e. if she chose not to accept punishment she could leave the service without notice and no charge could be preferred against her for so doing. In fact as a means of holding W.A.A.F. personnel to their engagements or of enforcing discipline the Air Force Act was virtually a dead letter.

This unsatisfactory situation was very fully discussed during 1940 and as a remedy it was suggested that a Defence Regulation should be made which would:—

- (a) Punish desertion by way of imprisonment or fine to be awarded on conviction in the civil courts.
- (b) Punish by means of fines at an airwoman’s unit the offences of:—
  - (i) Absence without leave.
  - (ii) Neglect of duty.
  - (iii) Loss or destruction of Government property.

This suggestion was, however, discarded by the Cabinet Home Policy Committee on 3 September 1940 which asked for the possible further application of military law to the three Women’s Services to be further explored. It was considered that the suggested Regulation would have many disadvantages. It would not, for instance, be conducive to good order and discipline in the W.A.A.F. for service offences to be aired in civil courts, and in any case the

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.40391/39.

upholding of this aspect of W.A.A.F. discipline would then be in the hand of local benches who would have no background of knowledge of the W.A.A.F.—different benches might give widely divergent verdicts according to the outlook of the justices.<sup>1</sup> The proposed order would also not have covered other important disciplinary matters, e.g.:—

- (a) A W.A.A.F. officer would still have no legal standing as regards airwomen.
- (b) The scale of minor punishments for misdemeanour would still largely depend for their enforcement on goodwill (although an airwoman might be deterred from walking out if she knew that it might involve her in a charge before the local Bench).
- (c) There was increasing evidence that the privileged position of airwomen in relation to Air Force discipline was resented by airmen.

As a result of further discussions between the Service departments it became clear that opinion was veering rapidly towards some form of militarization, and it was considered that the way to effect this was by constituting the women's services as part of the Armed Forces of the Crown by a Defence Regulation which would apply to them the necessary parts of the appropriate Acts. This course was finally adopted for the A.T.S. and W.A.A.F., and the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations were made on 25 April 1941.<sup>2</sup> These Regulations declared that all personnel enrolled in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force were members of the Armed Forces of the Crown, and provided that any such women as were selected by His Majesty to serve as officers might be granted and hold commissions. Regulation 6 empowered the Air Council to apply the Air Force Act to the W.A.A.F. to such extent and subject to such adaptations and modifications as they might specify, and Regulation 7 empowered them to make orders and Regulations in relation to the W.A.A.F. In exercise of these powers the Air Council issued instructions dated 12 June 1941, applying the Air Force Act to the W.A.A.F.<sup>3</sup> and made regulations for the W.A.A.F.<sup>4</sup> In order to make the disciplinary code applicable overseas a new section (176A) was inserted in the Army and Air Force Act by the Army and Air Force Annual Bill 1943, cancelling Regulation 6 of the Defence Regulations and empowering the Army and Air Councils to apply the Army and Air Force Acts to the A.T.S. and W.A.A.F. This had no effect on the disciplinary code other than to make it applicable overseas.

The position as regards discipline was then that specified parts of the following sections of the Air Force Act were made applicable to the W.A.A.F. by Air Council instructions under Regulation 6 of the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations 1941.

- Section 9. Disobedience to superior officer.
- Section 10. Insubordination.
- Section 14. Assistance of or connivance at desertion.
- Section 15. Absence from duty without leave.
- Section 16. Scandalous conduct of an officer.
- Section 24. Deficiency in and injury to equipment.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.40391/39.

<sup>2</sup> Statutory Rules and Orders, 1941, No. 581.

<sup>3</sup> Statutory Rules and Orders, 1941, No. 1026.

<sup>4</sup> A.M.O. A.466/41, Appendices A and B.

Section 28. Offences in relation to courts martial.

Section 39A. Damage to aircraft, etc.

Section 40. Conduct to the prejudice of discipline.

Punishments could be awarded as follows:—

**By Court Martial**

**(a) Officers:**

- (i) Cashiering;
- (ii) Dismissal from His Majesty's Service;
- (iii) Forfeiture of seniority of rank;
- (iv) Severe reprimand;
- (v) Stoppages.

**(b) Airwomen:**

- (i) In the case of a W.O. or N.C.O., reduction to the ranks or to a lower grade, or forfeiture of seniority of rank;
- (ii) In the case of a W.O. or N.C.O., severe reprimand or reprimand;
- (iii) Forfeiture of pay (maximum 28 days) and stoppages;
- (iv) Confinement to camp for a period not exceeding 28 days. (*Note:* This was added in April 1944.)

**By Summary Award under Section 47, Air Force Act**

**(c) Officers and Warrant Officers:**

- (i) Forfeiture of seniority of rank;
- (ii) Severe reprimand or reprimand;
- (iii) Any deduction authorized by the Air Force Act to be made from ordinary pay.

**By Summary Award of the C.O.**

**(d) Airwomen:**

- (i) In the case of aircraftwomen, forfeiture of pay not exceeding 14 days, subject to the right to elect trial by court martial;
- (ii) In the case of N.C.O.s and aircraftwomen, deduction from pay under section 138, A.F. Act, subject to the right to elect trial by court martial;
- (iii) In the case of N.C.O.s only, severe reprimand or reprimand;
- (iv) In the case of aircraftwomen, confinement to camp not exceeding 14 days, extra duties not exceeding three in number;
- (v) In the case of N.C.O.s and aircraftwomen, admonition.

**By Summary Award of a Subordinate Commander**

**(e) Airwomen:**

- (i) By squadron officers and above, any of the punishments in sub-para. (d) (iii) to (v) above;

(ii) By flight officers and below:—

To an N.C.O.—admonition.

To an aircraftwoman—confinement to camp not exceeding seven days; extra duties not exceeding three in number.

(Note: The regulation which prevented the trial by court martial of an aircraftwoman unless she so elected was revised in April 1944 so that a C.O. might, at his discretion, remand the case for trial by court martial.)

In August 1942, the Markham Committee, in its report, recommended, amongst other measures, that further disciplinary powers were required for all the women's services. This led to further discussion in the Air Ministry with a view to strengthening the disciplinary code by the application of additional sections of the Air Force Act to women, by a revision of the scale of punishments which might be awarded by court martial and by the introduction of a form of detention. Comments were invited from Group Commanders and in March 1944, the Air Council approved in principle the introduction of detention, subject to agreement with the War Office, an amended scale of punishments and an extended application of the Air Force Act. Later, however, as it appeared that detention would not be applied to A.T.S. personnel, and that it might attract adverse political and public criticism, its introduction to the W.A.A.F. was considered inadvisable and the idea was abandoned. Alternative suggestions were reviewed, including a recommendation that longer terms of confinement to camp should be served at certain selected stations, and the opinions of all R.A.F. Commands at home and abroad were sought. Discussions continued up to September 1945, when they were suspended. No action was, therefore, taken to implement the Air Council's decisions of March 1944 and, save for the minor amendments referred to in sub-para. (b) (iv) and the note for sub-para. (e) above, the disciplinary code remained unaltered after its inception in 1941.

## CHAPTER 3

### OFFICERS, SELECTION AND PROMOTION

Before war was declared the selection of officers in the W.A.A.F. was to a certain extent arbitrary; names were recommended by the A.T.S. County Commandants and the T.A.A.F.A. for formal approval by the Air Ministry. The choice of the Commandants was limited, in some areas at any rate, to applicants who had enough free time to devote to raising and training companies; nor were the Commandants themselves always completely aware of the qualities which would be required of an officer in a woman's service. The result was that the 234 officers appointed before the outbreak of war were a very mixed body—some proved excellent during the difficult six years which followed and entirely justified their selection; others, unfortunately, were indifferent; while some few did distinct harm to the service before they were asked to resign. Probably all this was inevitable, but the uneven quality of the original officers in the W.A.A.F. must be stressed, for it affected the history of the service. At the outbreak of war all officers were employed in the administration and supervision of the airwomen.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Selection Boards*

From the start it was realized by D.W.A.A.F. that the success of the service would largely depend on the quality of its officers.<sup>2</sup> She suggested that all future appointments to officer rank should be made on the recommendation of an agreed selection board, but that peace-time members should first be considered.

To this end travelling advisory panels of three W.A.A.F. officers toured the country and drew up a list of suitable candidates in each company; 273 airwomen were interviewed, 34 selected, of whom 18 were appointed to officer rank. The selection board suggested by D.W.A.A.F. was one R.A.F. officer, two W.A.A.F. officers, one secretary member (civilian), and for the next two years the board remained materially of this constitution; its Chairman was a retired R.A.F. or Army Officer appointed by D.P.S., the two W.A.A.F. officers were nominated by D.W.A.A.F., sometimes members of her Directorate, sometimes W.A.A.F. Staff Officers from Command Headquarters. The civilian member was a civil servant, and a technical representative was added to the board when necessary. Toward the end of 1941, D.W.A.A.F. made strong representations that she be allowed to control W.A.A.F. officer selection boards, and in January 1942, she was given the power, under paragraph 6 (g) of A.M.O. A.83/42, to 'supervise and control the boards selecting W.A.A.F. personnel for commissions'. An establishment of one Wing Officer and one Squadron Officer was agreed, and from that date the boards consisted of a Wing Officer as Chairman, one Squadron Officer and one Flight Officer, one R.A.F. Officer appointed by D.P.S. and a specialist officer, either R.A.F. or W.A.A.F. when necessary. The composition of the boards varied little from this date until the end of the war. It was decided on 15 January 1940,<sup>3</sup> after the review of pre-war airwomen had taken place, that the recommendation of airwomen was to follow R.A.F. practice; the recommendation from the senior W.A.A.F. officer must be covered by the C.O. and the A.O.C. Group.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.70819/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.564377/43.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.28882/39.

Experience proved, during the course of 1941, that the decisions of the Selection Board were not infallible, and that it could not, in a brief and formal interview, reach a complete and accurate appreciation of a candidate's character and ability. It was, therefore, suggested, and finally, in August 1942, agreed, that airwomen should undergo the officers' initial course as cadets, and should not be commissioned until they had successfully completed it.

### Direct Entry

Pre-war officers were, of course, nearly all directly appointed to officer rank, and when war was declared it seemed to be taken for granted that future appointments should be from the ranks; but D.W.A.A.F. suggested that a few qualified women, whom she named, should be considered for direct appointment.<sup>1</sup> In December 1939, these applicants appeared before the Selection Board and six were selected; they were given an intensive training of one week in the Air Ministry and then sent out as junior officers to be trained for senior posts. It proved a disappointing experiment, only one of the six attaining higher rank than Squadron Officer. Direct appointments as Code and Cypher officers were also offered, after interview by a Selection Board, to some of the wives of R.A.F. officers, who had already been employed on these duties in a civilian capacity.

By 1941, however, the increasing need for officers clashed with the increasing difficulty of finding suitable officer material. The standard of the early recruits appeared to be falling off; conscription was not yet introduced, and the increasing opportunities in industry for women of officer type meant further loss to the Services. A proposal that a system of direct entry through a cadet training school should also be instituted was discussed; but at a meeting held at the Air Ministry on 15 March 1941, it was decided to confine such direct entries to specialists. In addition, however, all measures were to be taken to 'spot the potential officer' at the earliest stage of her career, i.e. at the Depots.<sup>2</sup>

The Markham report, published in August 1942, said: 'The standard of officers is improving, but much remains to be done as sufficient and efficient officers are the key of a good service,' and it recommended the recruitment of an increased number of officers from both inside and outside the service. The Air Council's reaction is reflected in its own report where it states: 'Commissioning from the ranks is sound in principle. We consider that the only reason for departing from it should be the inability of the W.A.A.F. to produce within the time available a sufficient number of airwomen candidates of suitable calibre and qualifications. . . . Again, although the bulk supply of airwomen candidates for commissions to, say intelligence duties, is ample, we are not opposed in principle to the "direct entry" of a candidate with exceptional qualifications for a particular post if this is in the interests of the Service and no serving airwoman is eligible.'

Nevertheless, the discussion on the pros and cons of direct entry to officer rank in the W.A.A.F. recurred spasmodically for three or four years. There were many people, both R.A.F. and W.A.A.F., who felt that the W.A.A.F. would have benefited had some form of direct entry been agreed. There were many suitable candidates who would have made good officers but who hesitated to join the ranks, possibly to spend the whole of their service there, for recommendation depended in the first instance on the W.A.A.F. officer in charge of the

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.564377/43, Min. 4.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.158391/41.

Section or the officer in charge of the working section. D.W.A.A.F., however, after the initial direct entry of six 'specially qualified' women in 1939, continued to resist the suggestion that potential officer material in the ranks had been exhausted and that direct entry should be tried.

### Standard of Selection

D.W.A.A.F. early asked for guidance on the qualities needed in an officer.<sup>1</sup> There had been, she said, 'a good deal of confusion of mind' on the part of W.A.A.F. officers sitting on officer selection boards. The Air Ministry departments concerned thought it unnecessary and not altogether possible to define these qualities precisely; but D.W.A.A.F. persisted and a letter on the subject was ultimately sent to W.A.A.F. Staff Officers at Group Headquarters and to Officers in charge of Detachments. There was also much discussion as to whether Code and Cypher officers needed all the qualities considered essential for administrative officers. Later with the rapid expansion of the W.A.A.F., the agreed standard fluctuated and dipped; but during 1940 there was still much good material on which to draw. The standard fell during 1941 when the most rapid expansion of the W.A.A.F. was taking place; indeed at one point, the Board was selecting officers, not according to any set standard but according to the numbers requested of them week by week, and many of the officers commissioned during these months of pressure were inexperienced and immature. By December 1941, however, there was a general surplus of officers. It was decided, therefore, that the standard of acceptance of airwomen for commissioned rank should be 'raised to the highest level' and that all commissioning should be reduced.<sup>2</sup> But again the standard fell in 1942 when the need for officers suddenly increased. It rose sharply again in 1944, when the Air Ministry asked that all previous recommendations be reviewed in the light of a new standard laid down. A few airwomen who had been accepted some months before, and who were awaiting a vacancy on the officers' initial course were all interviewed again by the selection board; some of them were rejected and some re-allocated to the branches which then had vacancies. Throughout the war, the whole business of appointments was a 'see-saw' affair; needs suddenly far outrunning supply and resulting in frenzied commissioning, sometimes of most unsuitable people, until there was a glut of officers and the standard was again raised so that many were rejected who, a few months before, would have been accepted.

### Planning of Officer Requirements

Throughout the first four years of the war D.W.A.A.F. continued to press for authority to commission officers ahead of requirements. It would appear that no planning beyond the requirements of the moment was done. D.W.A.A.F. could never give her senior officers any idea of the number or category of officers likely to be required even during the next few months, nor was she ever allowed to appoint, train and maintain any reserve of officers. The sudden urgent demands which arose had frequently to be met by hurried appointment and training of such people as were available; the fact that by this method individuals were selected and trained for a category for which they had no particular aptitude was deemed unfortunate but unavoidable. The effect which this factor had on the efficiency of W.A.A.F. administration has already been pointed out in Chapter 2, but its effect on the individuals concerned may well be noted here.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.564377/43

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.158391/41.



For example, early in 1940, there was a considerable demand for Code and Cypher officers but few vacancies for administrative officers, so most applicants, in whatever direction their interests and abilities lay, were directed or persuaded into the Code and Cypher branch. Thus not only did the service lose many good administrators, but the officers concerned felt they had been unfairly treated, for promotion in the Code and Cypher branch was extremely slow, whereas in the administrative branch it was rapid.

Early in 1941 the need for officers suddenly became acute; this urgent and increasing need was reflected in A.M.O. A.265/41, dated 17 April 1941, which complained that 'recommendations are not at present forthcoming in sufficient numbers to keep pace with requirements' and impressed upon C.O.s that they were 'responsible for ensuring that airwomen likely to make efficient officers are recommended'. At that time large numbers of substitution as well as W.A.A.F. administrative officers were needed; officers were being or were about to be appointed in the following categories:—

- R.A.F. Administration.
- Code and Cypher.
- Intelligence.
- Photographic Interpretation.
- Operations Room.
- Equipment.
- Accountant.
- Unit and Hospital Catering.
- Psychological pre-selection testing.
- Radio.

This A.M.O., however, received little response, and a further appeal was made in May 1941, for recommendations for substitution duties at least, even if there were no suitable candidates for W.A.A.F. administration or Code and Cypher. If no suitable material at all was available, this, too, was to be notified, so that alternative means of getting officers could be considered.<sup>1</sup>

There were several reasons for the lack of response to the Air Ministry's appeal. Airwomen who had been rejected before were loth to come forward again; others who had settled happily on a station disliked the idea of making a change and losing their friends; among certain types of young women, particularly in the transport section, there was pronounced dislike of the idea of becoming an officer—as a driver one was free of responsibility and had perhaps an interesting time; as a junior officer, one would have heavier responsibility, little freedom and a great deal of work.

Increasing substitution for R.A.F. officers during the three succeeding years tied W.A.A.F. officer to R.A.F. officer intake, and at monthly Air Ministry meetings, instituted in January 1942, to review intake requirements, the W.A.A.F. as well as the R.A.F. position was considered. D.W.A.A.F.'s difficulties in maintaining an adequate supply of officer material were henceforth increased rather than diminished, for the requirements of officers in the different categories varied from week to week. A number of established posts were annotated 'may be filled either by a R.A.F. or W.A.A.F. officer'; in some

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.158391/41.

branches there was a tendency to try to fill all the posts with men, turning to the W.A.A.F. only when the supply of men was exhausted. D.W.A.A.F. was then expected to produce, train and commission suitable women at extremely short notice.

Between V.E. Day and 3 August 1945, when the last regular Air Ministry Commission Board was held, candidates were accepted by boards for special duties in certain branches only when necessary—the only branches which remained open were equipment and accounts—there were about ninety-five candidates who passed the board but were never commissioned, chiefly because at that stage they were unwilling to agree to remain in the service for a further twelve months. About 100 applications were received after V.E. Day, which were held in abeyance—twenty-two airwomen were actually commissioned during this period.

### **Substitution Officers**

Details of all the categories in which W.A.A.F. officers replaced R.A.F. officers are given later in Part II, together with the qualifications required, the training, extent of substitution and measure of success of each branch. One feature common to them all should be noted here. The first substitution officers were Code and Cypher, who were, of course, members of the Signals Branch. From the start that branch accepted the W.A.A.F. officers into its own 'Trade Union', and Signals Officers at groups and stations took the line that Cypher officers were apart from and had no concern with the administration of the W.A.A.F. This attitude was accentuated by the fact that W.A.A.F. administrative officers themselves were inclined to be jealous of interference with their own responsibilities. In any case, in 1940, W.A.A.F. sections were small and the problem was not acute. D.W.A.A.F. tried continually to prevent the Code and Cypher officers from drawing apart from the W.A.A.F. but without much success.

As other officers were appointed in substitution for R.A.F. the same attitude seemed to grow up among these also—some of them were employed on special duties and by the nature of these duties were rather cut off from the W.A.A.F. but many, such as Catering and Equipment officers, were posted to stations and should, from the start, have been allowed and expected to take a share in the life of the W.A.A.F. It was not until 1943 when W.A.A.F. administrative establishments were cut down that substitution officers began seriously to take a part in the administration and supervision of the W.A.A.F.

After V.E. Day many substitution officers, particularly those employed in Signals, Radar, Intelligence and Operations, found themselves with little to do. The early release of married officers, of whom there was a high percentage in the 'G' branch, raised anxiety about the adequate supervision of the airwomen during the post-war period. Commands were, therefore, asked to submit nominal rolls of substitution officers, surplus to branch requirements. These officers were all interviewed at the Air Ministry, where the position was explained to them, and were subsequently reposted to W.A.A.F. 'G' vacancies in the same or another Command.

### **Promotion**

The policy in the beginning was to go slow with W.A.A.F. promotions until W.A.A.F. establishments had changed over from a Company basis to R.A.F.

establishments.<sup>1</sup> Until April 1940, the only promotions since the beginning of the war were six Squadron Officers. The first promotions were not made entirely according to seniority; a certain amount of latitude was considered necessary in the first few months in order to try to get what was at that time considered the best material into the senior posts; but the system became more regularized and in line with R.A.F. procedure after the initial shuffling.

At a meeting held by A.M.P. on 24 May 1940, to consider the promotion of W.A.A.F. officers it was explained that it had not been possible to give either acting or temporary promotions up to that time, because no reliable establishments had been issued and the strengths of officers and airwomen at stations had fluctuated greatly.<sup>2</sup> Definite establishments based on wartime requirements were, however, to be issued and promotions could then be made to fill establishments. It was decided that—

- (a) No temporary promotions were to be made at that time.
- (b) Acting rank could be given to fill establishment vacancies, where the numbers of airwomen at stations permitted.
- (c) Where it was not possible to complete the establishment of airwomen, W.A.A.F. officers should not be posted to fill the senior posts and acting rank would not be given to those posted to fill the junior ones.
- (d) Acting rank up to Flight Officer should be conferred by Groups and, above that rank, by Air Ministry after receiving recommendations by Groups.

After this meeting pending the issue of an Air Ministry Order on the subject of W.A.A.F. officer promotion the Air Ministry, as an interim measure, sent to A.O.C.s on 4 June 1940,<sup>3</sup> lists of their W.A.A.F. administrative officers who appeared eligible for acting rank while holding the established posts shown and asked for recommendations to be confined to these posts. Such promotions were governed by the actual strengths of W.A.A.F. stations rather than by the strengths shown on establishments.

On 5 November 1940, the Air Ministry authorized A.O.C.s to appoint W.A.A.F. administrative officers to the acting rank of Flight Officer in accordance with establishments, but not Code and Cypher officers. This was followed on 20 February 1941, by an Air Ministry request for recommendations from Commands and Groups with a view to making a certain number of promotions in temporary rank. It was also stated that no substantive rank higher than Assistant Section Officer would be granted during the war.

In an order issued on 19 June 1941,<sup>4</sup> provision was made for the grant of war substantive rank with effect from 1 June 1941, and also for temporary promotion, but it carried a note saying that until further notice promotions would be confined to acting and war substantive ranks. Acting rank could be granted by Commands and Groups to the ranks of Flight Officer and below, and by the Air Ministry to ranks of Squadron Officer and above.

Promotion during the first three years was very rapid in the W.A.A.F. 'G' (W.A.A.F. Administration) branch, as it was bound to be in a rapidly expanding service, but in other branches, notably in Code and Cypher, it was extremely

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.25786/39.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.94371/40.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.25876/39.

<sup>4</sup> A.M.O. A.454/41.

slow. Quite a number of officers had no promotion at all for over two years, and were still Assistant Section Officers, although they were doing both satisfactory and responsible work. It was mainly for the Code and Cypher branch and for other 'dead end' posts that time promotion was introduced, for, as A.M.P. said, 'the establishments provide little or no outlet for the capable officer'.<sup>1</sup> Promotion in the substitution branches, however, never became rapid—indeed in the Code and Cypher branch many officers gave three or even four years' satisfactory service and were finally released, still Section Officers. This lack of promotion was keenly felt by many of the officers concerned, for not only did it cause them financial hardship, but they suffered from invidious comparisons with the 'G' officer. Relations and friends and the general public could hardly be expected to understand that promotion could only be granted to establishment vacancies. Many of the officers themselves never understood why their promotion was so slow, and their subconscious antagonism for the 'G' branch was thereby increased.

It was difficult, however, to obtain clear and honest confidential reports and assessments on W.A.A.F. officers, without which no fair promotion could be made. R.A.F. officers in many cases, perhaps from a mistaken sense of gallantry or from a genuine inability to appreciate what was required of any W.A.A.F. officer, wrote contradictory, misleading or vague reports. In an attempt to rectify this and to plan some kind of a career for W.A.A.F. officers to prevent them from getting into specialized 'dead-end' posts, a very comprehensive Air Ministry Order<sup>2</sup> was issued on 21 December 1943, which repeated and amplified the principles laid down in the earlier order<sup>3</sup> which it superseded. Efforts continued to be made to give guidance to all concerned in the correct rendering of confidential reports and assessments, and to stress their importance to the officers concerned. D.W.A.A.F. Pamphlet No. 6, section 5, published in December 1943, made a further attempt to instruct W.A.A.F. officers in this respect. The final procedure with regard to promotion was summarized in A.M.O. A.1158/45.

### Conclusion

The study of the story of W.A.A.F. officers throughout six years of war emphasises three points:—

- (i) All officers should be trained to consider themselves part of the whole service and should accept a share, however small, in the administration and supervision of their airwomen. There should be no general rift between officers of different branches.
- (ii) Although the small amount of direct entry into the 'G' branch after war began was not a conspicuous success, it would seem that some form of guaranteed entry to commission through the ranks would be of benefit to the service.
- (iii) The method of selection and promotion in the service should be explained to each officer early in her career to avoid the heart-burnings that arose through lack of understanding of promotions, apparently unfair, between individuals and between branches.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.25876/39. A.M.O. A.749/42 authorized promotion by the Air Ministry to the war substantive rank of Section Officer of an A/S/O who had completed one year's service and had been reported as fit for promotion. This period was later shortened to six months (A.M.O. A.1111/42).

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.1298/43.

<sup>3</sup> A.M.O. A.454/41.

## CHAPTER 4

### LIVING CONDITIONS

#### Accommodation

When the W.A.A.F. was called out for duty on the outbreak of war, no special preparation for the living accommodation of women in the R.A.F. had been made at all. An Air Ministry letter, dated 1 September 1939,<sup>1</sup> instructed that W.A.A.F. personnel were to be housed in:—

- (a) vacated married quarters,
- (b) requisitioned houses, or
- (c) civilian billets.

This apparently concise instruction, however, gave little help to the officer on the station, since, at that time, no one knew whether airwomen should have the same quality of accommodation as airmen, as N.C.O.s or as officers. *Ad hoc* arrangements were made, some highly unsatisfactory, some too comfortable. This early confusion, not, of course, confined only to the W.A.A.F., was gradually cleared up; but there was, inevitably, never much uniformity of standard in W.A.A.F. accommodation.

The following were the main types of accommodation occupied by W.A.A.F.:—

Private billets.

Contract billets (boarding houses).

Requisitioned houses.

Requisitioned blocks of flats (in and around London).

Married quarters.

Barrack blocks.

Huts—timber, concrete, Nissen.

All had certain merits, most had some disadvantages; but W.A.A.F. officers generally found by experience that private billets were the least suitable, while barrack blocks, when available, were the most satisfactory.

In the early days of the war a scale of accommodation for W.A.A.F. was evolved which covered messing, sleeping and general provision, and gave as sleeping areas 140, 70 and 45 square feet for officers, sergeants and aircraft-women respectively. Naturally, as the war progressed, the supply of material and labour decreased, and the demand for special accommodation to house the vast numbers of men and women, British, Colonial, and Allied, service and civilian, increased. Amendments to the W.A.A.F. scale were made continually throughout the war, usually to decrease, but occasionally to increase it, as experience dictated. The main items were:—

- (a) Provision for a rest room for drivers and the provision of cloakroom and changing rooms in technical sites (1940).

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

- (b) The omission of separate laundry blocks and their substitution by simpler accommodation in the ablution block giving ironing and drying facilities (1941-42).<sup>1</sup>
- (c) The provision of changing rooms for mess staffs in 1940, followed by the introduction of rest rooms for cooks in November 1942, and amended again in July 1944.<sup>2</sup>
- (d) The provision of hairdressers' shops (July 1942).<sup>3</sup>
- (e) The reduction of sleeping areas to 96, 58 and 38 square feet for officers, senior N.C.O.s and aircraftwomen respectively in December 1942.<sup>4</sup>
- (f) Introduction of combined R.A.F./W.A.A.F. messing in early 1943, which cancelled both W.A.A.F. messes and sick quarters on W.A.A.F. sites. This was a provision made necessary by the need for economy not only in building material and labour, but also in fuel, food and domestic staffs.<sup>5</sup>
- (g) The provision of a W.A.A.F. room in the Institute, July 1943.

The scale in use from 1943 until the end of the war was bleak indeed, and was only accepted by D.G.M.S. and by D.W.A.A.F. under the pressure of war-time exigency.

### **Type Designs**

Building specifically for the W.A.A.F. began in 1940, and continued up to 1945. It may be noted that during the time when designs were being prepared for the accommodation of women, no woman was employed on the staff of D.G.W., nor were these type designs automatically passed to D.W.A.A.F. for comment, before issue to Commands. The works department continued their normal practice of acting on instructions received from an administrative branch, and looked on their designing as a 'technical work-up of an agreed policy.'

### **Supply of Accommodation and its Effect**

Early in 1940 it was realized that shortage of accommodation might have unfortunate effects on the W.A.A.F. During a survey taken for the Secretary of State at that time, it was stated that the wastage in some sections of the W.A.A.F. was as high as 50 per cent.<sup>6</sup> The Under Secretary of State commented that this disastrous wastage would decrease if conditions improved. Again the Secretary of State gave warning that it would be dangerous to allow recruiting to outrun the supply of accommodation, and yet this very thing happened again and again, and reached a climax early in 1942, when over 4,000 airwomen were stagnating in 'reservoir pools' at the W.A.A.F. Depots. Substitution went on ahead of accommodation, and in many cases airwomen were put into quarters scarcely completed and not up to the agreed standard, so urgent was the need to recruit airwomen at that time.

### **Ablutions**

The best W.A.A.F. ablution blocks were to be found in quarters built early in the war for women. They were constructed at the end of a collection of

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.332652/41.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.446431/42.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.332652/41.

<sup>4</sup> A.M. File A.433389/42.

<sup>5</sup> A.M. File S.89996.

<sup>6</sup> A.M. File A.70819/40.

sleeping huts, to which they were attached by covered passages. The whole block was centrally heated, the supply of basins and baths and hot water was generous. This standard naturally could not be maintained, but the Works Department could see no reason for connecting the ablutions hut to the sleeping huts; since the airman was expected to proceed in the open air from his bed to the wash place, why should the airwoman not do likewise? The discomfort of this cold journey with its obvious effect on hygiene, and the impropriety of making women walk about in the open air, even in the public eye, in a state of *deshabille* were serious matters to the W.A.A.F. and caused concern to every officer in charge of airwomen.

### **Dispersal**

After the raids of 1940, the policy throughout the service was to disperse both living and working accommodation as much as possible. This policy was right and proper, but it increased the difficulties of administration and supervision considerably—on some stations dispersal was carried to such lengths, that personnel had to travel, usually on a bicycle after 1943, when petrol and transport became difficult, as much as thirty miles a day between sleeping, messing and working sites.

### **Joint Accommodation for R.A.F. and W.A.A.F.**

At the start of the war, it was taken for granted that W.A.A.F. living accommodation would be completely segregated from that of the R.A.F.; but as time went on, it became necessary to accept joint accommodation. A confidential order, issued on 23 January 1942,<sup>1</sup> laid down the conditions under which joint accommodation might be accepted, where necessary. There was never a great deal of such accommodation; but it raised difficult problems. For example, many Flight Headquarters in Balloon Command were situated in the crowded areas of large towns: houses were difficult to find, and yet accommodation had to be procured for offices; for working, sleeping, messing and recreation; for officers, N.C.O.s, airmen and airwomen.

### **Use of R.A.F. Messes and Institute**

Again it was taken for granted that women would not share R.A.F. messes or recreation rooms—would, in fact, seldom enter them. In December 1939, guidance on the admission of W.A.A.F. to R.A.F. messes was given by the Air Ministry in an order<sup>2</sup> which empowered Station Commanders to permit women, as a matter of courtesy, to use R.A.F. messes and institutes, and to allow them to be invited as guests 'with due regard to the traditions of the Service'. It was clear, however, that official policy and accepted custom both decreed complete segregation. Except in one or two isolated instances this arrangement persisted until early in 1941. W.A.A.F. officers and airwomen continued to mess separately, and it was the custom for them to enter ante-rooms and recreation rooms only by invitation and on special occasions. Commanding Officers were generally not in favour of joint messes and went to considerable lengths to avoid them. Gradually, however, the women were invited more and more into R.A.F. messes, and the Commanding Officers' fears of the possible results of admitting women to them began to disappear.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M.C.O. A.2/42.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.550/39.

During the early part of 1942 the rapid expansion of both R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. was putting a severe strain on accommodation; it began to appear logical that men and women working together on a station should also mess together. The fact that the domestic staffs in all messes at home were largely composed of W.A.A.F. personnel, coupled with the continued pressure on accommodation, the increasing shortage of manpower and the need for stringent economy in the use of fuel all led to the same result. Early in 1943, the Air Ministry instructed that R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. messes were in future to be combined unless entirely impracticable: a W.A.A.F. anteroom was to be provided in officers' and sergeants' messes.<sup>1</sup>

### **Recreational Accommodation**

It was always understood that airwomen should have their own recreation rooms—these varied as the accommodation varied. When expansion outstripped accommodation in 1941 and 1942, it was often found that the W.A.A.F. recreation room was being used as sleeping quarters—a serious matter at that time, when airwomen were not as a general rule allowed in station N.A.A.F.I. canteens. Gradually, again through pressure of circumstances, the rule was changed; airwomen began to share R.A.F. canteens, and finally Air Ministry instructions laid down that airwomen were to use the station canteen, but in addition were to have a quiet room or restroom of their own, not to be shared by the R.A.F.

### **Accommodation for Officers**

In the early days of the war, commanding officers were not at all clear about the status of the W.A.A.F. officer—in some places it was considered that her main function was to prevent her little flock from straying into forbidden paths. So it was felt that she should be housed with, or very close to her airwomen. The effect was to turn the officer into a kind of dragon or spy, resented by the airwomen who felt they were never free from her watchful eye; yet the officer did not belong to the Officers' Mess.

Gradually it was appreciated that W.A.A.F. officers should be treated as officers, and they were given an officers' married quarter when possible, or a small separate mess. The designs for huttied accommodation included plans for officers' huts, on the whole reasonably comfortable, except for sites which had only one or two officers, where the quarters supplied were cramped and uncomfortable.

As the war continued W.A.A.F. officers became accepted members of R.A.F. messes, using the dining-room, anteroom and games room, and were no longer expected to enter by the back door and use only the 'ladies guest room'. The arrangement was not entirely satisfactory; in some cases, particularly on operational stations, there was a tendency for the W.A.A.F. officers to remain about in the mess too late in the evening. The problem was a difficult one, perhaps even more serious overseas.

Toward the end of 1945, married quarters were re-allocated to their original purpose, and the question of the accommodation of W.A.A.F. officers again arose—a question not easy of solution. Experience proved that the best results

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.89996.



were achieved when W.A.A.F. officers had their own separate mess, were members of the R.A.F. Mess, and allowed freely to use it, also being allowed to invite guests into their own mess.

The accommodation for officers in big towns where no quarters were available was difficult, for a junior W.A.A.F. officer's pay and allowances were hardly adequate for civilian accommodation suitable for an officer. The problem was acute in London, where bombing, the requisitioning of houses and hotels to house expanded Government departments and the influx of American troops led to a serious reduction in available accommodation and a consequent rise in prices. Numbers of junior W.A.A.F. officers were posted into various departments of the Air Ministry to release R.A.F. officers, and, though most of them were young and many had never been to London before, they were left to find their own quarters and look after themselves, not easy even with the increased allowances paid to them. In 1942, D.W.A.A.F. asked for a W.A.A.F. officers' mess in London to cater for some, at least, of the 400 junior officers then working in the London area.<sup>1</sup> She pointed out the financial hardship to the individual officer, the unnecessary temptations to which she was exposed, the probability that she would be inadequately fed, the difficulty of helping her in the event of minor sickness, the possibility that she might be extremely lonely and finally the need for some focal point for W.A.A.F. officers in London. The Treasury and the finance branches were at first not impressed and saw no reason for a departure from customary policy, for there had never been a R.A.F. mess in London; but after some two years of argument, agreement was reached, and a W.A.A.F. Mess for 105 officers of the rank of Flight Officer and below was opened in three houses in St. John's Wood in March 1944. The mess was always full, was run on the lines of a club and was a great success.

### Conclusion

W.A.A.F. accommodation was patchy, in some cases extremely good, in others indifferent, in a few isolated instances very bad. Certain stations, with very large W.A.A.F. sections, had serious problems which persisted throughout most of the war. On the whole, however, given the very rapid expansion from 1940 to 1943 and the exigencies of the time, the W.A.A.F. was reasonably well housed; but, however bleak the quarters, it was most unusual for the airwomen to accept them just as they found them. Encouraged by their officers and with the help of local welfare societies, the airwomen made the most valiant efforts to brighten up the quarters and render them a little homelike. Bearing in mind their long hours of work, they kept their quarters reasonably clean.

### Personal Equipment

The W.A.A.F. uniform was approved before the war, and was designed to resemble R.A.F. uniform as closely as possible. A small number of uniforms had been issued in June 1939, but supplies were not available even for one-tenth of the pre-war W.A.A.F. by the end of August. Every effort was made to hasten supplies,<sup>2</sup> and demands were invited for raincoats, brassards, shirts, collars, tie, shoes, berets, stockings, overalls and a certain amount of underwear; in November fleecy linings, blue slacks, gloves and cardigan were added;<sup>3</sup> but it was many weeks before personnel were kitted even to this meagre

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.411047/42.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.939833/39.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

scale. For the first few months of war, airwomen were to be seen about in a strange motley of civilian clothing, aided here and there with an issue garment. In fact it became necessary to recompense personnel for the wear and tear of their plain clothes; <sup>1</sup> in December 1939, an allowance (made retrospective to pre-war members called up at the outbreak of war) was authorized of two shillings per week for the lack of a full outfit, ninepence per week for the lack of a raincoat. Larger consignments of tunics and skirts arrived in February 1940, and by April most members of the W.A.A.F. had one complete outfit, so that issues of the second tunic and skirt began in May 1940. The wait for uniform had seemed endless to the airwoman, but realizing the newness of the service and the problems which faced D.G.E.s branch at that time, this was a reasonably good achievement.

Early in 1940, D.W.A.A.F., with A.M.P.'s support, initiated a request for greatcoats for the W.A.A.F., for the severity of the winter made it clear that a raincoat, even with a 'fleece lining', would not give adequate protection. In the ensuing argument with the Treasury, D.W.A.A.F. had to agree to the withdrawal of the raincoat, and for the rest of the war, the airwoman stepping out in the rain, was obliged to wear either her greatcoat (an awkward garment to dry) or an unwieldy groundsheet, which dripped rain into her shoes. On 2 October 1940, the first issue of greatcoats were made to new recruits.<sup>2</sup>

A third shirt and two more collars were added to the scale after D.G.M.S. had pointed out the difficulty of keeping clean if one only possessed two shirts. A third pair of shoes was added to the scale after D.W.A.A.F., D.G.E. and D.G.M.S. had together presented a strong case to the Treasury. This proved both of great advantage to the W.A.A.F. and also an economy in the long run.<sup>3</sup>

*Trousers.* The suit, working, serge, or battle blouse and trousers was designed for W.A.A.F. balloon operator when she first appeared in 1941. From that moment, practically every other trade presented a strong case for inclusion among those entitled to wear suits, working, serge. Some requests even came from complete groups and the number of suits actually issued always far outran the known numbers of 'entitled' airwomen; in the end, D.G.E. seriously suggested that it would be simpler to make a 100 per cent issue of these suits and take no account of 'entitlement'. Neither A.M.P. nor D.W.A.A.F. agreed and the position continued until fashion swung the other way, and in 1945 airwomen were to be seen in blouses and skirts, not trousers. At this point a second 'part-worn' skirt was added to the scale of clothing.<sup>4</sup>

### **Barrack Equipment**

In the early days, there was a good deal of uncertainty about an appropriate scale of quarters' equipment for women. D.W.A.A.F. felt that these scales should approximate as closely as possible to R.A.F. scales, and on the whole, with only minor exceptions, this principle was maintained throughout the war. The scales are given in detail in A.P. 830, Part B, and A.P. 1827, 4th edition, and are, of course, too lengthy to be quoted here. The scale was bleak, but even this was not always attained, as the war progressed and all equipment became scarce. In actual fact, most airwomen had in their sleeping quarters only a bed (after 1943 quite often a double bunk) and bedding, 2 feet of shelving.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.24623/39.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.42661/39.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File HS.71422.

<sup>4</sup> A.M. File H.573289/41.

with two hooks, half a small mat and quarter of a folding chair. This was similar to the A.T.S. scale but below that enjoyed by the W.R.N.S. and far below that given to Canadian and American service women in this country. In March 1945, a request was submitted by the senior W.A.A.F. officer in A.M.S.O.'s department for an increase to bring the scale up to that given to the W.R.N.S. ratings, as follows:—

- 1 locker per airwoman.
- 1 chest of drawers per two airwomen.
- 2 coat hangers per airwoman.
- 1 mirror per airwoman.
- 1 small rug per airwoman.
- 4 hooks per airwoman.
- 2 yards of hessian for a hanging fitment, if no wardrobe supplied.

This was immediately refused, but the request was resubmitted, to be supplied from stocks as the force decreased in size. Ultimately the Treasury agreed the increase, as a temporary measure and 'without prejudice to the consideration of a peace-time scale, should this be necessary'.

### Recreation Rooms and Messes

Recreation rooms were furnished to a minimum scale, but here the W.A.A.F. section was usually helped by voluntary societies or by the generosity of local civilians. Messes were equipped to the airmen's scale, or the airwoman shared the airmen's mess. In addition, the W.A.A.F. had such luxuries as electric irons and also a reasonably good scale of equipment in their hairdressers' shops.

### Working Conditions

Wherever possible airwomen and airmen worked under the same conditions, since they were either working side by side, or replacing each other. Here and there, however, it was found necessary to modify the working conditions for the women; occasionally this was followed by an improvement in the men's conditions of work. In 1940, following a very careful review of hours and conditions of work, rules were laid down for their governance. These rules, which also applied in principle to the R.A.F., remained the foundations of W.A.A.F. working conditions throughout the war.<sup>1</sup> It was unfortunate that the pressure of war made it impossible to adhere strictly to the rules, which were, briefly:—

- (a) Eight hours work per day, 48 per week, except in special emergency.
- (b) Meals every four hours, except during sleep.
- (c) One day off per week, 48 hours off per month.<sup>2</sup>

In 1942 the Markham Report endorsed these rules; but the pressure of the emergency and the shortage of manpower were too strong. The Air Council considered the Report with sympathy, but decided that 'peace-time standards must be wholly disregarded', a normal working week for the R.A.F. should be not less than sixty hours. 'W.A.A.F. personnel, on the other hand, should as a general rule, not be required to work for more than a forty-eight hour week, but the Council realized that, when W.A.A.F. and R.A.F. personnel are working side by side, adherence to this rule will not be practicable', and instructions were

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.96277/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.96277/40.

issued to Commands accordingly.<sup>1</sup> In fact, for the next two and a half years, most members of the W.A.A.F. worked more, in some cases, far more, than forty-eight hours per week.

### **Watchkeepers**

Of the strength of the W.A.A.F., some 18 per cent., comprising officers and airwomen, were engaged on watchkeeping duties in radar, operations rooms, intelligence, meteorology and on cypher duties. Not unnaturally, a great deal of time and thought was spent over the years, by D.G.M.S., D.W.A.A.F. and the technical experts concerned, in trying to work out optimum hours of work, number of watches and cycles of duty. The necessity for regular, hot meals, for quiet periods of sleep after night duty, and for adequate recreation were appreciated by all those concerned, but the focus of the argument was night duty, and on this agreement was never reached. The watchkeepers felt that their point of view was not appreciated by those who did not work at night, while D.G.M.S. and D.W.A.A.F. felt that, with a little more commonsense, the watchkeepers' lot need not have been unduly hard. On individual stations, the difficulties were aggravated by awkward local conditions, such as inconvenient siting of messes or the impossibility of giving really quiet sleeping quarters to the night workers. On the other hand, many of the watchkeepers themselves were young, and instead of taking a little exercise in the fresh air, a good sleep and a good meal between night watches, they spent their free periods in pleasure. A further difficulty lay in the fact that, in some places, such as coastal signals rooms and the Cabinet offices, personnel were always, day and night, working very hard and under great strain, whereas in other places, the work was light and intermittent, and hence very boring. Instances of breakdown and neurosis were reported by Commands in 1942 and again in 1943; thereupon, following a report by the Inspector W.A.A.F., which had the full support of D.G.M.S., an order was issued which laid down the principle of continuous periods of night duty.<sup>2</sup> This principle was generally resisted by the watchkeepers themselves, but was tried, found successful and adopted on certain stations to the end of the war.

### **Domestic Staff**

The cooks suffered, perhaps more than any other trade, from the rapid expansion of the R.A.F. For the most part of the war, they worked under trying conditions in kitchens which had to feed far greater numbers than those for which they were built, sometimes with inadequate equipment, and usually very short of staff. As early as 1941, reports were coming in to the Air Ministry that the W.A.A.F. cooks were working unduly long hours, with only occasional relief. These long hours persisted in spite of genuine efforts made by everyone concerned to relieve the pressure. Serious concern was repeatedly expressed by D.W.A.A.F. and D. of M., recruiting drives for cooks (not, unnaturally, almost the only unpopular trade in the W.A.A.F.) were made, adequate rest-rooms and changing rooms and reasonable lavatory accommodation were provided at the place of duty. Unit commanders did all they could to improve conditions locally; Italian prisoners were used for rough work in the cook-houses, meals were simplified and messes combined, but the conditions under which the cooks and domestic staff worked remained generally unsatisfactory

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.84278/42.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.1014/43.

throughout the war. Yet they remained among the most cheerful and willing of the airwomen. The service owes a great deal to the women who accepted hard work, long hours, difficult conditions and a conspicuous lack of glamour, with such good heart.

### **Balloon Operators**

Balloon operators were given living and working conditions which were a startling improvement on those given to the men. A balloon crew, of course, lived on its balloon site, but, whereas the R.A.F. crew had one small hut in which to sleep, eat, cook, live and do indoor work, such as rope splicing, the W.A.A.F. crew were given a hut for cooking, messing and recreation, a second hut for sleeping and a small ablutions block. Their rations were the same as the men's, but the quarters equipment issued or collected from voluntary sources, was far better than the men's.

On the whole, conditions for other trades in the W.A.A.F. approximated very closely to those of the R.A.F.

In practically every trade, except the clerical ones, special protective or working clothing was needed, in some cases more than was required for men. It was often difficult to make the airwomen understand the necessity for using it, for example, the cooks preferred gym. shoes to clogs, the charging board operators were liable to work without their leather aprons, and the flight mechanics without their dustcaps. The equipment was supplied at considerable cost to the country, but constant supervision was needed to make the airwomen wear it.

## CHAPTER 5

### MEDICAL

#### Entry into Service

In the early days prospective recruits were medically examined by the Army Medical Officers at the Territorial Depots where they were recruited, or alternatively they produced a certificate of fitness signed by a civilian Medical Practitioner. Just before the outbreak of war, instructions were issued to auxiliary officers that arrangements for the medical examination of recruits should be made with the medical officer of the unit to which the company was affiliated. When, in October 1939, recruiting for the W.A.A.F. was taken over by the R.A.F. Inspector of Recruiting, the W.A.A.F. Recruiting Office was opened at Victory House, Kingsway, London, and later in eight provincial centres. R.A.F. medical officers, generally women doctors, were posted to the larger recruiting offices where they carried out the medical examination of recruits on entry. The remaining centres sent prospective recruits to the W.A.A.F. depots where they were medically examined by the R.A.F. medical officers, who again were usually women. Finally the medical examination of recruits was taken over by the Ministry of Labour at the centres where the women enrolled,<sup>1</sup> but exceptionally the Victory House recruits continued to be medically examined by R.A.F. doctors.

The standard of fitness was the same as for R.A.F. ground personnel, and the ordinary R.A.F. forms were used, with the addition of certain questions on menstruation. Women found to be pregnant were not accepted. The minimum height laid down was 5 feet 2 inches, or 5 feet in certain cases; later this was reduced in the case of cooks to 4 feet 8 inches. The physical standard of women wishing to join the service was on the whole good and did not deteriorate appreciably throughout the war years.

#### Medical Administration

The medical administration of the W.A.A.F. was always on precisely the same basis as that of the R.A.F. as regards medical attendance, hospital treatment, recategorization and invaliding.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1939, the question of the appointment of women medical officers for the medical care of the W.A.A.F. was raised but not pressed, as W.A.A.F. personnel were at that time only serving in small numbers on scattered R.A.F. units. Later in the year, however, a decision was reached, in view of the policy to expand the W.A.A.F., to appoint women medical officers to serve with the Medical Branch of the R.A.F. The first three such appointments were made early in 1940, and others followed at intervals to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding service. Their duties, ranks and status were defined in a series of Air Ministry Orders.<sup>3</sup>

The only posts which were established for W.M.O.s were the nine squadron leader posts at Commands (established to visit all stations within the Command

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.182129.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File 6064/39.

<sup>3</sup> A.M.O. A.417/40, as amended by A.466/41, A.850/41, A.481/41, A.652/41, A.42/42, A.203/42 and A.143/43.

and to act as adviser to the Principal Medical Officer on W.A.A.F. matters), and the wing commander post of Woman Medical Liaison Officer at the Air Ministry. In all other postings, women were acting in direct substitution for male medical officers. Filling these latter posts on 1 January 1945, there were five women squadron leaders, including a radiologist and a venereal disease specialist, sixty-eight flight lieutenants and nineteen flying officers. The majority were posted to units which had a large W.A.A.F. population, and the rest to hospitals, headquarters, etc. One of the particular duties of all women medical officers was to instruct the airwomen on such subjects as personal hygiene, sex hygiene and venereal disease. They also supervised the monthly F.F.I. inspections of W.A.A.F. on their stations. The W.M.O.s at Commands toured stations in their Commands, and endeavoured to carry out an inspection of all personnel at intervals varying between three months and a year, according to the size of the Command.

W.A.A.F. personnel were distributed among various R.A.F. units in strengths from a score to five thousand. At most stations W.A.A.F. formed only a fraction of the total strength, so that the male M.O. looked after their medical needs in the same way as the doctor in civil life. W.M.O.s were posted to as many units as possible where the W.A.A.F. population justified their substitution for male M.O.s; at large depots one W.M.O. was posted to every thousand W.A.A.F.

### Sick Quarters

It was laid down in 1939 that station sick quarters were to be provided for W.A.A.F. personnel:—

- (a) At stations where the strength of W.A.A.F. personnel would justify such provision.
- (b) At certain smaller stations selected with a view to providing accommodation for the reception of personnel from nearby stations not provided with W.A.A.F. sick quarters.

Until such time as the above could be provided, local arrangements were made for the treatment of W.A.A.F. on stations either in existing sick quarters, or by taking over a building such as a married quarter or part of a requisitioned building. Sick quarter beds were originally provided on a 1 per cent basis; but later this was increased to 2 per cent with a minimum of four beds, as experience had shown that the rate of sickness, both major and minor, was twice as high in the W.A.A.F. as in the R.A.F.<sup>1</sup> Originally these sick quarters were separate buildings; but later, shortage of materials and labour led to the erection of combined R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. sick quarters. This proved very satisfactory and effected considerable saving in heating, lighting and staff. In these combined sick quarters the W.A.A.F. accommodation was separate and self-contained.

Each detachment of W.A.A.F. included three or more airwomen who had been specially recruited for duty in connection with the care of W.A.A.F. sick in sick quarters. They were known as sick quarter attendants, and worked under the medical officer.<sup>2</sup> The first large W.A.A.F. sick quarters was opened in 1940 at the W.A.A.F. depot at West Drayton. A P.M.R.A.F. nursing sister

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.48719/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

was in charge, assisted by a staff of W.A.A.F. sick quarter attendants, and in April 1940, the first woman medical officer was posted to this station.

### **Hospital Facilities**

The same hospital facilities were provided for the W.A.A.F. as for the R.A.F., i.e., they were admitted to R.A.F. hospitals, to the hospitals of the other two services or to the E.M.S. hospitals, according to local conditions. Uxbridge was the first R.A.F. hospital to provide W.A.A.F. accommodation and the others followed suit as the need arose. Out-patient and in-patient treatment was provided at all R.A.F. hospitals for W.A.A.F.; specialist opinions could be obtained on all types of sickness and facilities existed for X-ray, massage, electro-therapy, etc. The regular staff was assisted by V.A.D. members and by W.A.A.F. nursing orderlies as sick quarter attendants were subsequently called. W.A.A.F. officers visited their sick airwomen and were responsible for seeing that the patient's next-of-kin had been informed that she was in hospital (but not of her medical condition). It was the responsibility of the Senior Medical Officer or Commanding Officer of the R.A.F. hospital to inform the next-of-kin when an airwoman was placed on the 'seriously ill' or 'dangerously ill' list.

### **Convalescent Facilities**

In April 1940, the suggestion was made to provide convalescent depots for the W.A.A.F., but was rejected as unnecessary, since at that time the majority of the airwomen preferred to spend their convalescence at home. As the country got into the full swing of war, however, difficulties began to arise. Parents were often both employed on war work, homes had been bombed, married women had no homes to go to, etc., and in 1941 the first W.A.A.F. Convalescent Depot was opened at Thurloe House, Torquay, with thirty beds, to be followed by a second at Dungavel with about sixty beds. In 1942 Thurloe House closed, as it had never been very satisfactory, and neither place was ever full. In January 1945, the W.A.A.F. Convalescent Depot was moved from Dungavel to new premises at Studley Priory, near Oxford.

W.A.A.F. convalescent depots were not medical units, although naturally the medical branch took great interest in them. W.A.A.F. officers requiring convalescent facilities were admitted to the R.A.F. officers' hospital at Torquay, and when that hospital moved to Blackpool, they continued to enjoy the same privilege. In addition beds were provided for them at the W.A.A.F. convalescent depot.

### **Rehabilitation**

For W.A.A.F. patients who no longer required active treatment but were not yet ready for sick leave or duty, use was made of the facilities offered by the British Red Cross Society's auxiliary hospitals. While there, airwomen took full advantage of the rehabilitation facilities provided, but the R.A.F. hospital which sent them exercised general supervision, and when they ceased to be 'hospital cases' they returned to the R.A.F. hospital to be discharged from there to sick leave, to the W.A.A.F. convalescent depot or to duty.

With a view to providing fuller rehabilitation facilities for W.A.A.F. orthopaedic cases, the R.A.F. made arrangements whereby beds for such cases were made available at the B.R.C.S. hospital at Brookhampton Manor, near Cheltenham. W.A.A.F. physical training instructors were established at the hospital; Innsworth supervised the treatment.



## Mass Radiography

In 1942 the examination of all W.A.A.F. recruits by miniature radiography was instituted, and was carried out at the depot to which the recruit was posted on entry, after having been passed as fit for the service by the Ministry of Labour Board. A total incidence of 0.94 per cent cases of lung tuberculosis were discovered in the first 60,000 women examined in this way, 0.36 per cent being active and 0.58 per cent inactive. The rate was found to be higher among women than among men on entry in the ratio of 4 : 3. Active cases were invalided, and inactive cases treated on their merits.

## Head Infestation

An outstanding difficulty which was met with in the early days, and one which continued to be a problem as long as recruiting lasted, was the exceedingly high proportion of women who were found at the initial examination to be suffering from infestation with *pediculus capitis* or head-lice. It came as a surprise and something of a shock to all concerned to find that 25 to 50 per cent of all recruits were affected in this way on arrival. Ireland, Glasgow and the large towns supplied the highest number of these cases, as might have been expected, but the incidence was by no means confined to women coming from poor or overcrowded homes. The disinfection of such large numbers in the shortest possible time presented a serious problem and all the then known methods of treatment were tried, but were proved to be of doubtful efficacy. In 1942, it was suggested that a new preparation, named Lethene 384 Special, the result of experimental work at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, might be useful to the women's services, and it was decided to give it a trial. Treatment was at first given under supervision, but later it was carried out on a large scale by nursing orderlies in a routine manner. The results were satisfactory, and from that time onwards, Lethene 384 Special became the authorized method of treatment.

## Feet

Another noticeable feature amongst recruits was the very high proportion who showed some degree of foot deformity, probably due to badly made and ill-fitting shoes. The majority of these recruits were accepted in Grade II (a) (feet), only those in whom the condition was likely to prove of an incapacitating nature being rejected. It was appreciated that instruction on the proper care of the feet would be necessary, and a qualified chiropodist, in which trade a number of airwomen had been enrolled, was posted to the depot to give treatment and advice in cases requiring it.

## Mental Disorders

Cases of hysteria, neuro-psychosis, etc., occurring amongst W.A.A.F. personnel were referred to the nearest R.A.F. N.Y.D.N. Centre, and were treated by the Service Neuropsychiatrist in the ordinary way. Cases of psychosis presented a more difficult problem, since prior to the passing of the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations in 1941, W.A.A.F. personnel were not subject to the Air Force Act, and it was not possible to detain a psychotic patient in hospital against her will. Such cases, therefore, had to be dealt with under the procedure that applies to civilian cases. Unfortunately even after the passing of the Defence Regulations, the Air Ministry Order which applied the Air

Force Act, with modifications and adaptations, to the W.A.A.F., did not make Section 91 of the Act, or paragraph 662 of King's Regulations applicable to women, and the position with regard to psychotic service women was not made any easier.<sup>1</sup>

These arrangements continued in force, with minor modifications, until 20 October 1941, when by arrangement between the Board of Control, the Army and the R.A.F., 100 beds were made available at St. Andrew's Military Hospital, Northampton, for the reception of cases of psychosis or suspected psychosis occurring in members of the W.A.A.F., the A.T.S. and the Army and Air Force Nursing Services. From this time all cases of psychosis amongst W.A.A.F. personnel and Women Medical and Dental Officers serving with the R.A.F. were admitted to this hospital. Disposal of cases from the hospital was either:—

- (a) Return to Unit (very few).
- (b) Invaliding from the service, after a Medical Board at the hospital, either to the care of their relatives or to a civil institution.

The invaliding rate for psychosis in the W.A.A.F. varied between 0.62 and 1.20 per thousand per annum in the war years. In January 1942, both Section 91 of the Air Force Act and paragraph 662 of King's Regulations were made applicable to W.A.A.F., who could henceforward be dealt with in precisely the same way as the R.A.F.<sup>2</sup>

### Gynæcological Conditions

In April 1941, a senior specialist in gynæcology and obstetrics was appointed to visit all R.A.F. hospitals catering for W.A.A.F. personnel and to give advice and guidance on the treatment of diseases of women generally. In addition, out-patient clinics for these diseases were established at fifteen R.A.F. hospitals where qualified gynæcological specialists were in attendance. These specialists also visited other R.A.F. stations in the vicinity, or cases were referred to the clinic from such stations.

### Venereal Disease

Official records show that the incidence of V.D. reached its peak in 1942 with a rate of 3.5 per thousand, and gradually fell during the ensuing years to 1.5 per thousand in 1945. The highest rates occurred in those trades in which women of poor intelligence were employed, such as aircrafthand, waitress, batwoman, sparking plug tester and fabric worker, whereas trades calling for high intelligence, such as radio operator, clerk special duties and teleprinter operator, showed the lowest incidence.

Originally arrangements were made for any W.A.A.F. personnel found to be suffering from one of these diseases to be treated at the London Lock Hospital; but this was not found to be very satisfactory, as, apart from the undesirability of women in uniform being seen in such a place, it entailed their being segregated with civilian women who were often of a very doubtful character. By January 1941, twenty beds were made available in a separate wing of the Infectious Diseases block of R.A.F. Hospital, St. Athan, where the patients were under the care of a W.M.O. In February 1942, it was decided to

<sup>1</sup> A.M.O. A.466/41.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.42/42.

treat V.D. in a general hospital in order to avoid undesirable notoriety becoming attached to any particular hospital, and to maintain secrecy as far as possible as to the medical disability of the individual being treated. The treatment was accordingly transferred to the R.A.F. General Hospital, Evesham, where there was a ward for cases of syphilis, one for gonorrhœa and an observation ward. The treatment of these patients was in the hands of a W.M.O. who had extensive experience of this work before the war. Practically all venereal disease in the W.A.A.F. was treated at Evesham. A very small number of cases were treated annually in civilian clinics and in Army hospitals. In 1946 Evesham closed and the centre was moved to Wilmslow. Continuation centres for the follow-up treatment of W.A.A.F. personnel were at Cosford, St. Athan, Blackpool and Ely, as well as at Evesham.

### Pregnancy

From the first any airwoman who became pregnant and produced a medical certificate to that effect was discharged from the service on compassionate grounds. The first official regulations on this subject were issued in 1943,<sup>1</sup> and an Air Ministry Order, published two months later,<sup>2</sup> laid down procedure which was adhered to throughout the war. By this order an airwoman was discharged, or an officer was required to relinquish her commission, if she became pregnant, this to take place at the end of the third month in normal circumstances, but earlier if advisable for any reason. A supporting certificate was required in all cases of pregnancy, signed by a service medical officer or by a civilian medical practitioner. If the necessary examination was carried out by a service medical officer, the woman had to give her consent to be examined for this purpose in writing. Where, in spite of the fact that a woman had not notified her condition, there were reasonable grounds to suspect that she was pregnant, she was requested to give her consent to a medical examination. If she refused, she was required to sign a certificate to that effect and became liable to discharge.

Pending approval of her discharge a woman might be allowed to leave her unit before her last day of service if unfit for duty. Leave up to fourteen days might be granted for this purpose, compassionate leave being given to supplement privilege leave if necessary. Sick leave was not to be given in such cases. A pregnant woman who was undergoing treatment for a medical disability at the time she would otherwise be discharged remained in the service until the treatment of her medical disability was completed. If, however, the medical disability necessitated invaliding, she was dealt with under the ordinary regulation as though she were not pregnant.

If a member of the W.A.A.F. who was pregnant miscarried whilst still in the service and the pregnancy was less than twenty-eight weeks advanced, she was treated as a gynaecological case, and on completion of her treatment her medical fitness for retention in the service was assessed on medical grounds in the first instance. In the event of her being found medically fit for retention, the case of an unmarried officer was reported to the Air Ministry, and normally she was required to resign her commission. In the case of an airwoman the Commanding Officer consulted the W.A.A.F. officer and reported the case to Air Ministry with a recommendation for discharge if he considered that to keep her

<sup>1</sup> A.M.C.O. 12/43.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.118/44.

in the service, even if posted to another station, would be likely to harm the moral standards of other members of the W.A.A.F. In making his recommendation he would take into account her rank and duties, bearing in mind that a very high moral standard was required of warrant officers and senior N.C.O.s, particularly if they were primarily concerned with the administration of airwomen. An officer or airwoman would not again be eligible for service in the W.A.A.F. after being discharged for pregnancy until six months had elapsed; her re-acceptance after six months would be contingent on a suitable vacancy existing, on her satisfying normal recruiting conditions including medical examination, and the production of evidence that satisfactory arrangements had been made for the care of the child. If the child did not survive, the period of six months might be reduced to three.

#### **General Health of the W.A.A.F.**

The health of the W.A.A.F. throughout the war years can be said to have been satisfactory. There were no major epidemics and the incidence of sickness decreased each year after 1940. In that year the sickness rate was higher than in 1939, but it is probable that the figures are not strictly comparable owing to the very rapid expansion in 1940. A noticeable feature of the incidence of sickness in the W.A.A.F. was that it was nearly double that of the R.A.F. each year, whether forty-eight-hour cases are included or excluded. The reason for this higher rate of sickness among women was obscure; it was not due to the incidence of diseases peculiar to women, as these were responsible for only 5 per cent of the total sickness each year. Part of it may be due to the greater encouragement which was undoubtedly given to women to report sick, and to the more sympathetic treatment which they received, but it is unlikely that much of the incidence of major sickness can be due to this cause, and the ratio of major to minor sickness was approximately the same for men and women. Infectious diseases accounted for the largest proportion of total sickness.

## CHAPTER 6

### WELFARE

In the early days of the war, W.A.A.F. detachments were rather like large families—the size of any section was relatively small (a strength of 130 seemed to be very large), all its members were volunteers, eager to take full part in their new life, its officers were, as a rule, extremely interested in the whole section, collectively and individually. Practically every member was willing to take part in whatever activity was afoot and everyone was fresh, not yet tired, and, in spite of the many material discomforts, happy. To a body of young women, actively engaged in the constructive work of building up a new service, the word 'Welfare' as such did not exist. The officers spent time and energy in supplying material comforts, cushions and curtains to brighten up the drab quarters, equipment for games to brighten the free time and books to brighten the mind; for there was not, in those first months, the urge on the part of all ranks to get away from the station as soon as might be; the tendency was, rather, to stay on camp, perhaps in the unconscious desire to absorb as much as possible of service atmosphere. Gradually, of course, conditions changed; the service expanded rapidly and the 'family' feeling was lost. Over the next three years, the word 'Welfare' came into use, to have a special meaning, particularly for the 'G' officer, and to cover a good many aspects of W.A.A.F. life.<sup>1</sup>

#### Comforts and Amenities

At first the lack of material comforts and of games equipment was felt; but the W.A.A.F. was readily given a share of the material amenities provided for the airmen. As early as December 1939, instructions were issued to ensure that airwomen should share in the station P.S.I. Fund in the same way as did airmen, and on the whole they were generously treated. A W.A.A.F. officer was included on the station welfare committee; further the Treasury grant of 3s. 6d. *per capita* enjoyed by the airmen for the provision of games equipment was extended to the W.A.A.F. Apart from this official help, the women's services received a great deal of material help from voluntary sources; Lord Nuffield, ever generous, gave during six years at least £20,000 to the W.A.A.F. alone; the R.A.F. Comforts Committee, the Government of Ceylon, the Bundles for Britain movement in the U.S.A.—all these were most generous to the W.A.A.F. In addition, local W.V.S., Y.W.C.A. and other organizations, as well as hundreds of kindly anonymous friends, gave great help to the new service. All these gifts, in cash and kind, supplied the W.A.A.F. with curtains, carpets, easy chairs, brick fireplaces, wireless sets, sewing machines, electric irons, books, games, gardening tools and countless other amenities to brighten up their lives. In fact, it can be said with certainty that if, by 1942, the W.A.A.F. quarters of any station were not reasonably well equipped, then the W.A.A.F. officer on that station had not been alive to her opportunities.

A change came in the later years of the war—many new sections, opened on new stations, were by no means as lucky as the earlier ones had been. Supplies of all kinds were less plentiful throughout the country; societies and

<sup>1</sup> Compiled from notes supplied by D.A.F.W.

individuals were less able to help the women; for, as the war progressed, interest in the women's services waned; indeed there were civilians who began to feel that service women were, in fact, better off than they themselves were.

### **Games and P.T.**

Games on stations continued with varying success throughout the war; sports kit was never an issue to the W.A.A.F. and was always a difficulty; at first, kit was bought from the N.A.A.F.I. with P.S.I. funds, but as supplies of cotton material became less plentiful, this was no longer possible. In any case, team games were liable to become the prerogative of the 'gladiators' although the R.A.F. P.T. officers did their best to encourage games among the W.A.A.F. Cups were presented for hockey, netball, tennis, cricket and table tennis, and did something to stimulate inter-station games.

P.T. has a troubled history in the W.A.A.F. Again and again instructions went out that regular P.T. was to be compulsory on all stations; here and there enthusiastic W.A.A.F. officers or station commanders stirred up a little enthusiasm locally; but P.T., as such, was always disliked by the W.A.A.F. and evaded wherever possible. The wide dispersal of quarters and the long hours worked by the W.A.A.F. did not make the matter easier. In fact, P.T. was tolerable to the W.A.A.F. only when presented, against the rules, in the form of 'Health and Beauty' classes.

### **Entertainment off Stations**

The intelligent officer began to realize, as the war progressed, that her airwomen would be likely to resent much planning of their free time and would prefer to get away from camp life where possible. Managers of local cinemas and theatres often gave facilities for service personnel to attend performances at reduced prices. There were also many hospitality schemes which offered free or inexpensive hospitality to service women for varying periods, one to fourteen nights, in town or country; so no airwoman, without home or friends, need spend her leave on camp; her officer could easily arrange an agreeable leave for her. It is not possible to assess how fully these schemes were used; the British airwoman naturally always took an independent attitude in matters concerning her private life and her free time. The Council of Voluntary War Work provided and serviced canteens, hostels and clubs on and off stations, throughout the country; these were well used and much appreciated by the airwomen.

### **N.A.A.F.I.**

The N.A.A.F.I. always gave consideration to the W.A.A.F. After early difficulties, N.A.A.F.I. amenities were available for the W.A.A.F. as for the R.A.F., and N.A.A.F.I. shops stocked also cosmetics, combs and articles of feminine appeal. It was found, however, that elaborate supper arrangements were unnecessary for the W.A.A.F., and many expensive kitchens built in Institutes on W.A.A.F. sites were unused. After the middle of 1943 it was the custom and approved policy for the W.A.A.F. to share the R.A.F. N.A.A.F.I. and on large stations a separate room for W.A.A.F. was added to the station institute. The N.A.A.F.I. clubs in towns catered for women as well as men and were well used by the W.A.A.F.

## Personal Problems

An important side of service welfare, of course, lies in dealing with personal difficulties, which may assume many forms. The problem of the unmarried woman discharged from the service for pregnancy held a very important place in the work of a W.A.A.F. 'G' officer. The service always took the attitude that, while there was no legal responsibility towards these women, there was a moral obligation to see that they were not just cast out into the world to sink or swim, and an enormous amount of work was done by W.A.A.F. officers, helped by various charitable institutions and societies in this respect. As early as 1940 a letter signed by D.W.A.A.F. was sent to all W.A.A.F. officers in charge of airwomen, stressing the need to encourage the women to disclose their condition at an early date, and pointing out that the Church of England Moral Welfare Council had offered help to any woman who needed it both before, during and after her confinement. The W.A.A.F. officer always tried to persuade the airwoman to tell her parents or guardians the reason for her discharge, and in nearly every case, despite previous threats to the contrary, they agreed to her returning home. If any airwoman under twenty-one refused to inform her people, it was the duty of the W.A.A.F. officer to do so.

Various religious and charitable organizations gave invaluable help in finding hostels, places for confinement, suitable employment after convalescence and in arranging for the adoption of the baby, if this seemed to be the best solution for all concerned. Gradually, however, the resources of this nature became seriously strained, and in 1943, agreement was reached with the Ministry of Health regarding the acceptance of a limited number of girls into hostels which up to that time had been used to accommodate pregnant women from evacuation areas.<sup>1</sup> This accommodation was intended to assist the airwoman who could not for various reasons return home and where it proved impossible to make satisfactory arrangements with the local voluntary welfare societies. This scheme did not cover airwomen stationed in Scotland. To assist them the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Help Society opened a hostel in Whitehaven to which these cases could be admitted for the period between discharge from the service and their confinement. This hostel did not take cases for the confinement.

All the information necessary to assist W.A.A.F. officers in the satisfactory disposal of airwomen about to be discharged from the service on account of pregnancy was contained in W.A.A.F. Pamphlet No. 1, which was originally issued in 1942 and revised in 1944.<sup>2</sup> This booklet contained information on all points on which an airwoman was likely to need advice together with a list of the voluntary societies and the type of help that each was able to give. In addition D.W.A.A.F. Confidential Memoranda were issued to W.A.A.F. officers from time to time to advise on any new points that arose.

There were other personal problems, too, which called for urgent assistance and intelligent handling. Financial troubles could be referred to the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund, to which most members of the W.A.A.F. contributed, and which, early in the war, extended its scope to the W.A.A.F. Several officers

<sup>1</sup> D.W.A.A.F. Confidential Memorandum No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> W.A.A.F. Pamphlet No. 1, 'Notes for Guidance of W.A.A.F. officers in dealing with pregnant airwomen.' A.M. File A.333540/42.

and airwomen, invalided out of the service, received generous help from the fund. Cases of financial hardship in respect of dependants could be referred to the War Service Grants Advisory Committee and in cases of serious hardship the special allowance was granted through the Ministry of Pensions. In numerous individual cases, the service acted in close co-operation with S.S.A.H.S. in dealing with domestic problems affecting airwomen, some of them referred from overseas. After 1944, the R.A.F. shared in the Army Legal Aid Scheme, which allowed airmen and airwomen of the rank of Sergeant and below to obtain legal aid without cost.

In fact, every kind of help was at hand to assist the individual airwoman with a private worry; but again, the value of the good officer is automatically stressed. Through her N.C.O.s, even if her section were very large, her airwomen could reach her easily. Tactfully, she could find out the cause of the trouble and set about trying to put it right. Hundreds of examples of the work of the good officer could be quoted, and also some disastrous results brought about by the lack of effort of the indifferent officer.

#### **Religious Arrangements and Guidance of the W.A.A.F.<sup>1</sup>**

From the inception of the W.A.A.F. commissioned and officiating chaplains of the R.A.F. naturally included the members of this service in all the general arrangements made for the spiritual care of the camps and units for which they were responsible. Certain arrangements were, however, specifically designed to be of help to the W.A.A.F.

- (a) Formation of the Churches Committee for Work among Women in H.M. Forces, on the initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Heads of the Free Churches.<sup>2</sup> Under the ægis of this Committee, speakers and organizers were made available in all parts of the country, who were prepared to visit stations, to lecture at the invitation of W.A.A.F. officers or chaplains. The work of the District Organizers, who were wholtime workers appointed by the Committee, became more clearly defined, and in many cases they conducted discussion groups among W.A.A.F. and assisted chaplains in taking confirmation classes and other forms of religious instruction. Finally, in 1946, four Chaplains' Assistants were appointed to work wholly with the W.A.A.F. under conditions similar to those already prevailing in the A.T.S.<sup>3</sup>
- (b) The production of a special W.A.A.F. pamphlet which made explicit the relationship between W.A.A.F. 'G' officers and chaplains, and emphasized the responsibility of 'G' officers for the spiritual well-being of the women under their charge. This was to form the basis of co-operation between 'G' officers and chaplains whenever spiritual, domestic and general welfare problems arose among W.A.A.F. personnel.
- (c) Special lectures given by the senior chaplain of all denominations at the W.A.A.F. Officers' School and at the School for W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s further stressed the need for this co-operation and the importance of spiritual values.

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled from notes supplied by the Chaplain-in-Chief.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.117605/40.

<sup>3</sup> W.A.A.F. Pamphlet No. 4, published September 1942.



- (d) The establishment of Moral Leadership courses in home and overseas commands provided special opportunities for the religious instruction of W.A.A.F. In most areas mixed courses were run, but at the C. of E. School in England, where special conditions prevailed, exclusively W.A.A.F. courses were arranged. Both types of course met with marked success.<sup>1</sup>

### Organization of the Welfare Services

From 1939 until 1942, responsibility for advising and co-ordinating welfare matters in respect of the W.A.A.F. was vested in the W.A.A.F. Directorate, and during this time an organization was developed which covered a wide sphere. In 1942 the report of the Markham Committee stressed the need for still more and for more precise welfare arrangements for service women, and during the reorganization which followed, the Air Council decided to form a separate branch in the Directorate of Air Force Welfare (D.A.F.W.), to advise on welfare matters peculiar to the W.A.A.F.—a logical sequence of the policy of close integration of the services. D.A.F.W. was required to maintain close collaboration with D.W.A.A.F.; his senior officer (a wing officer) represented D.G.P.S. on the W.A.A.F. Advisory Council. The six W.A.A.F. officers in the branch were advisers to the various branches in D.A.F.W. on all matters affecting W.A.A.F. welfare, and provided the liaison between the W.A.A.F. and the many service and civilian organizations which existed to provide amenities for and to further the well-being and morale of service women. The D.A.F.W. worked in close liaison with the Army Welfare organization. His W.A.A.F. officers also kept in touch with their opposite numbers in the W.R.N.S. and the A.T.S. to ensure a common policy; by visits to W.A.A.F. sections they kept themselves informed of actual conditions in the W.A.A.F.

In April 1944, the D.A.F.W. was reorganized to meet the changing needs of the war, and the W.A.A.F. branch was dissolved, for it seemed to be no longer necessary. A number of the officers were absorbed into appropriate R.A.F. branches and the senior officer was transferred to the branch concerned with planning for Wartime and Post-war needs of the R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. The handling of W.A.A.F. hardship cases and personal problems was transferred to the appropriate R.A.F. branch where a W.A.A.F. 'G' officer was established.

### Resettlement

The Cabinet decreed that the military services were not to be allowed to set up resettlement branches or in any way to act as employment agencies; the Ministry of Labour was charged with the task of resettling service personnel in civilian life. Nevertheless, the services felt that they could not just release their men and women without trying in some way to help them. A new Directorate, that of Morale and Rehabilitation, was established in A.M.P.'s department, to deal primarily with the problems peculiar to aircrew, but also to make the Government's Release and Resettlement Scheme as widely known and as clearly understood as possible. D.W.A.A.F. shared this concern; she had the most lively desire to give her officers and airwomen all the help she could, for she realized their anxiety about the future and the problems of readjustment which would undoubtedly await them. A W.A.A.F. branch was established in the

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.472877/42, and A.M.O. A.145/44.

D.M.R. and built up a good liaison with the department of the Ministry of Labour which was concerned with the resettlement of service women. Members of this branch were posted to Commands and spent their time visiting units to address the W.A.A.F. sections and answer questions on the Release and Resettlement Scheme. D.W.A.A.F. herself lost no opportunity of making contact with such people or organizations as might be useful to her service; she also kept her senior officers as well informed as possible of prospects in and training for civilian life.

It is not easy to come to any definite conclusions about welfare in the W.A.A.F. There were many who said that too much was done for the airwomen, so that they came to lose initiative and rely too much on the help of others to settle their problems. It cannot be denied that a great deal of the time and care of every 'G' officer was spent on welfare matters, but the youth and inexperience of officers and airwomen demanded this. Life in the service would have been bleak and hard without it; in the end it is more than likely that efficiency would have suffered.

## CHAPTER 7

### EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

The development of education in the W.A.A.F. falls roughly into three periods:—

- (a) 1939–1942, when the normal provisions of the General Education Scheme applied.
- (b) 1942–1945, when the Progressive Training Scheme developed.
- (c) 1945 onward when the Educational and Vocational Training Scheme was in force.

The following brief account of education in the W.A.A.F. is given under these three headings.<sup>1</sup>

#### General Education Scheme

The General Education Scheme of the R.A.F. provided for the general educational requirements of the service, outside the training establishments. It was organized at stations, under the direction of the station education officer, and was made available to members of the W.A.A.F. on an equal footing with the R.A.F. Classes in various subjects were held on stations, and arrangements were also made for W.A.A.F. to attend classes in local technical institutes and schools, and to take correspondence courses. The Regional Committees of the Central Advisory Council for Education in H.M. Forces helped by providing lecturers and arranging special courses. The introduction of large numbers of women into the service led to the establishment of classes in homecraft, dress-making, cooking and other subjects in which women were particularly interested. During the first two or three years of war only a small percentage of the W.A.A.F. took advantage of these facilities, either because the novelty of service life had not yet worn off, or because the service was rapidly expanding and the majority of units were under strength, or perhaps because the many social demands on their free time constituted a strong deterrent to serious study.

#### The Progressive Training Scheme

The Progressive Training Scheme was launched by D.W.A.A.F. in 1942<sup>2</sup> with the object of encouraging citizenship, stimulating a desire for education and developing powers of leadership. It was closely integrated with the General Education Scheme, and the subject matter fell into the following categories:—

- (a) Subjects of practical use, e.g. personal hygiene, homecraft, handcraft, etc.
- (b) Subjects of value to the airwoman as a citizen or as a tradeswoman.
- (c) General service knowledge and current world affairs.
- (d) Development of leadership.
- (e) Drill and P.T.

One evening of each week was set aside as 'domestic evening' when all airwomen not on essential duty were expected to practise or study one of the

<sup>1</sup> Compiled from notes supplied by D.E.S.

<sup>2</sup> W.A.A.F. Pamphlet No. 5, 'Notes for the Guidance of W.A.A.F. "G" Officers on Non-Specialist Training for W.A.A.F. Personnel.'

suggested subjects. An essential feature of the scheme was the giving of talks, lectures and practical instruction by individual officers and airwomen whose knowledge and experience qualified them for such a task. No subject was too humble to be included, and talks and classes covered a wide range. Responsibility for Progressive Training was one of the prescribed duties of the W.A.A.F. 'G' officer, and the 'domestic evening', though at first disliked by the airwomen and always a burden to the conscientious officer, soon became a regular feature of service life. W.A.A.F. officers were established on the staff of the Director of Educational Services, and Command Education Officers' reports for the period showed an increase in all branches of W.A.A.F. educational activities, domestic subjects being the most popular.

Early in 1945, to prepare women for their return to civilian life, the number of courses in domestic subjects organized by the Regional Committees was increased. A special feature was made of one-week courses in homecraft which stressed the importance of intelligent planning and endeavoured to give a realistic preparation to meet the difficulties caused by wartime restrictions on food, clothing, furniture and other domestic necessities. During the peak period, courses of this kind were running concurrently at seven or eight centres, each having a capacity of from eight to twenty pupils.

### **The Educational and Vocational Training Scheme**

The Educational and Vocational Training Scheme was launched at the termination of hostilities in Europe. The scheme fell into three sections, Educational, Vocational and Resettlement. As its name implies, Educational Training embraced all subjects of a purely educational nature including preparation for examinations. Two of these, the Forces Preliminary Examination (common to all three services and providing a qualification recognized by many universities and professional bodies) and the R.A.F. War Educational Certificate, were specially instituted for this scheme. Vocational Training was either 'initial' or 'conversion' in nature, its scope being limited mainly by the number and type of instructors (service or civilian) available. Resettlement Training was of two types:—

- (a) Citizenship, in which one hour's training per week was initially compulsory for everybody.
- (b) Practical activities, which embraced types of instruction not specifically educational, and not directed toward earning a livelihood. Domestic subjects were included under this heading.

Subject to operational commitments, every individual was entitled to six hours tuition per week in service time if she so desired. The scheme was co-educational; with very few exceptions all classes were available to R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. To look after the interests of the women, W.A.A.F. Staff Officer posts in the rank of squadron officer were established on the staffs of the Command Education Officers. Furthermore, the W.A.A.F. staff in the Directorate of Educational Services was increased to include a wing officer as well as a squadron officer.

Generally speaking, the response by the W.A.A.F. to the educational side of the scheme was somewhat disappointing. There appeared to be three main reasons for this, viz. a general lack of interest in purely educational matters, the attractive rival schemes of Resettlement Training, especially needlework and

cookery, and the fact that, as the release scheme progressed, some of the trades were seriously undermanned and W.A.A.F. personnel could not be granted time off during duty hours. Nevertheless, a fair number of officers and airwomen were enrolled in educational classes, particularly in those preparing for the War Educational Certificate, the Forces Preliminary Examination or matriculation. Some interest was also shown in language study. On the vocational side, the most popular type of subject was undoubtedly clerical, and the demand for shorthand, typing, book-keeping and allied studies was considerable. Another special development on the vocational side was designed to encourage recruitment to the nursing services. Arrangements were made with the Ministry of Health whereby W.A.A.F. were able to get practical experience in nursing by working in hospitals for one day a week. Some commands, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, ran special five-day courses, designed to give a bird's eye view of the profession and consisting of visits to different types of hospitals and lectures on the various aspects of nursing. A scheme was also devised in conjunction with the National Council of Voluntary Youth Organizations whereby those who were interested in social service could get practical experience in Youth Leadership. It was, however, in Resettlement Training that the most vigorous response was found. Music, art and handicrafts were taken up with enthusiasm and there was a great demand for domestic training of all types. In organizing domestic science training, full use was made of existing arrangements. Short residential Homecraft Courses were already being held and the organization of these was gradually decentralized to Commands. Considerable use was also made of classes run by local educational institutions and of civilian teachers.

Regional Committees and civilian technical colleges played a valuable part in the training of W.A.A.F. instructors in domestic subjects. Courses of three weeks duration were run at a number of civilian domestic colleges to enable instructors to be trained efficiently and rapidly. In addition to this special course, the majority of domestic subjects instructors also attended an E.V.T. Instructors' Course of three weeks at one of the E.V.T. Instructors' Schools. As the number of service instructors increased during the late summer of 1945, the greater part of the training was undertaken by them. The organization varied according to local conditions. A considerable number of residential homecraft courses was started in the different Commands, varying in duration from one to three weeks. Where residential courses were impracticable, classes in individual subjects were run on units, personnel attending for a specified number of hours per week. The usual subjects were cookery, needlework and dress-making, household management, household repairs, maintenance of clothing (including laundry work) and mothercraft. The latter subject was also dealt with in residential courses at external institutions.

At Air Ministry level, close liaison was maintained with other Government Departments and civilian institutions, notably with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Food (which throughout the war had given valuable help in the form of demonstrations, lectures and instructional literature, including specimen ration books for use in overseas commands), and the Board of Trade, which supplied literature on 'Make Do and Mend', civilian lecturers, notes on utility furniture and so on. In the overseas commands domestic training was run on much the same lines as in the United Kingdom, with the exception that outside civilian help was not available, apart from a series of courses for Palestinian W.A.A.F. run by the Women's International Zionist Organization at Tel Aviv.

## CHAPTER 8

### PAY AND ALLOWANCES

#### Pay

The lack of pre-war organization of the W.A.A.F. has already been stressed; there was no active service or full-time rate of pay agreed for the W.A.A.F. on the outbreak of war; its members reported for duty, in response to the Air Ministry's signal of 28 August 1939, with a touching faith in their Government and no idea whatever of their possible or probable pay. A hasty signal was sent out on 1 September 1939, to reassure Company Commanders, who were at that time also recruiting officers, that the W.A.A.F. rates would be not less than those already published for the A.T.S. Discussion between the Air Ministry and the Treasury was hastened in view of the emergency; the Treasury maintained the principle accepted throughout Government service that women should receive rates of pay two-thirds those of the equivalent male rate. The Director of Organisation considered these rates 'lamentably low', but it was felt that it would be hopeless to try to persuade the Treasury to agree to rates higher than those of the A.T.S., so on 4 September 1939, all concerned were informed of the decision that W.A.A.F. rates of pay would be two-thirds of the equivalent R.A.F. rates.<sup>1</sup>

The W.A.A.F. occupations were to be classified under appropriate R.A.F. trade groups; W.A.A.F. personnel were to be enrolled normally as A.C.W.II. The letter of 4 September 1939, laid down that reclassification was subject to a maximum proportion of 5 per cent of A.C.W.I to A.C.W.II on any one station, 10 per cent in the case of clerk G.D., instead of being without limit as in the case of the R.A.F. The classification of L.A.C.W. was not yet introduced. It was not until July 1941, and after much argument that these conditions were finally altered; from that date the reclassification of W.A.A.F. personnel followed R.A.F. procedure.

W.A.A.F. officer rates, at two-thirds the equivalent R.A.F. rates were a little higher than comparable rates in the A.T.S. Nevertheless, the Treasury agreed, provided the rank titles were altered to bear a less close relationship with the A.T.S. As already stated in Chapter 1, when a Director W.A.A.F. was first appointed, the Treasury agreed to a salary of £800. She received the equivalent rank of an Air Commodore, and for the next two and a half years constant and unremitting efforts were made to induce the Treasury to raise her pay to service rates. Increases were granted from time to time; but it was not till March 1942, that she received the salary to which her rank entitled her.<sup>2</sup>

#### Allowances

The W.A.A.F. found the rates of allowances more difficult to understand than the rates of pay. In September 1939, the Treasury decided that service women should receive lodging, fuel and light allowance at the same rate as did men, but should only receive four-fifths of the male ration allowance, for, said the Treasury, it was well known that women need and actually consume less food than do men. No dependant's allowance would be paid, nor would women require servant allowance, for a woman was obviously, by virtue of her sex, well

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.912129/39.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.907145/39.

qualified to clean her own shoes and press her own uniform. All this was accepted by the W.A.A.F. in the spirit of high endeavour in which its members went to war. After some time, however, these inequalities began to seem illogical and to rankle. W.A.A.F. messes did not find the ration allowance unduly hard; but the W.A.A.F. officer, not living in quarters, began to wonder how she could pay for meals in public places on four-fifths of the accepted ration allowance. Hotels could not be expected to appreciate the point and reduce the bill to W.A.A.F. officers accordingly. It was only in June 1944, and after repeated protests by A.M.P. that the ration allowance paid in cash to W.A.A.F. officers was raised to the R.A.F. rate. The rations issued in kind to W.A.A.F. messes were also raised to the R.A.F. rate, but the rate of ration allowance paid in mess remained four-fifths that of the R.A.F. rate. Incidentally, it was found that W.A.A.F. Balloon operators consumed as much food as did the men and their rates were adjusted accordingly.

The lack of servant allowance was a source of annoyance to the W.A.A.F. Although many officers protested against it in private and in public, no official protest was made on the subject until 1943. By that time the shortage of domestic staff was making itself seriously felt, and the few available were appropriated by the R.A.F. officers, who were entitled to servants, whereas W.A.A.F. officers were not. The latter found that they were not only doing their personal chores, but were often, of necessity, keeping their own rooms clean and lighting fires in their quarters. They felt they had little time for such duties, for their work was at least as arduous as that of most R.A.F. ground officers. Furthermore, they felt that their status as officers was suffering, and it seemed logical that in this respect they should have the same treatment as the R.A.F. officers, and that domestic difficulties should be shared by all alike. There were consultations and conferences, letters to the Treasury, bitter comments among the W.A.A.F. Finally the Treasury compromised and, on 29 June 1944, agreed that W.A.A.F. officers in the United Kingdom who were on the lodging list or billeted and unable to be dining members of a mess, should be granted a supplementary board and lodging allowance of two shillings per day. But the principle that a woman officer should be entitled to the services of a batwoman was never accepted by the Treasury. The one generous gesture made by the Treasury was toward married officers. If a W.A.A.F. officer was married to a member of the Navy, Army or R.A.F., and they were living together in lodgings, the W.A.A.F. officer did not lose her single rates of allowances, nor the R.A.F. officer his married rates.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately dependants' allowances were agreed for the W.A.A.F. on certain conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Air Ministry allowances were not at first paid to the W.A.A.F.; but, after discussion, following the War Office, an allowance of 1s. 4d. per day was agreed for wing officers and below. Further discussion followed; D.W.A.A.F. appealed for an increase in view of the financial difficulties of junior W.A.A.F. officers in London. Their numbers were increasing continually and many of them were hard put to it to make ends meet. In the end, the Treasury agreed that Air Ministry allowances for W.A.A.F. officers (except D.W.A.A.F. who was still being paid as a civilian) should be two-thirds of the equivalent R.A.F.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.39588/39.

<sup>2</sup> Air Ministry Pamphlet No. 103.

rates, but that such allowances should only be paid for established administrative posts and for staff duties only, not, for example, for code and cypher duties.<sup>1</sup>

### Uniform Outfit Grant

The principle under which uniform grants were made before and during the first few years of war was that it was a 'grant-in-aid', and not intended to cover the cost of a complete outfit. This principle was later challenged and was not generally understood by most of the officers concerned; but it helps to explain the low rate in existence on the outbreak of war. An officer was then paid £16 towards the purchase of her uniform on the basis of a peace-time or 'one-suit' scale. In November 1939, it was suggested that the allowance should be raised to £40.<sup>2</sup> The Treasury agreed to raise it, but only to £30, as they recognized the provision of uniform on a 'two-suit' basis was a necessity in war-time, though they were, as they said, 'by no means anxious to increase the emoluments of the women's forces' which, in their opinion, were generous. After the issue of greatcoats to airwomen (which had been optional for officers) and the introduction of purchase tax, the matter was again raised in November 1940. After prolonged consideration, the allowance was increased to £40 for officers who had been commissioned on or after 1 July 1941; it was later raised to £50 for officers commissioned on or after 1 December 1942, and finally to £55.<sup>3</sup> Income tax allowance for upkeep of uniform was granted at the rate of £15 a year until the 1943-44 financial year, when it was increased to £20. Scales of grants for tropical kit are dealt with later, together with notes on field and mission allowances.

### Release Benefits

The release benefits granted to the W.A.A.F. were as follows:—

- (a) Gratuity at two-thirds R.A.F. rate.
- (b) Fifty-six (or twenty-one) days' pay at the accepted rate.
- (c) A cash grant of £12 10s. for the purchase of an outfit of civilian clothes.

Again some bitterness was felt at the apparent inequality of these benefits as between R.A.F. and W.A.A.F.; but D.W.A.A.F. refused to ask for a gratuity at the same rate as the R.A.F., pointing out that it was illogical to accept two-thirds of the R.A.F. rate of pay for six years and then to demand an equal rate of gratuity, since the latter was based on the accepted rank and rate of pay. The cash grant was also criticised, both among the W.A.A.F. and in the Press, for it did not appear to be equal in value to the excellent outfit of clothes given to the men on release. Nothing, however, could be done; D.W.A.A.F., together with D.A.T.S. and D.W.R.N.S., had accepted £12 10s. after a hard battle with the Treasury, whose woman representative was convinced that a very good outfit of civilian clothing could be bought for £8 15s.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. Files A.907145/39 and A.39549/39.

<sup>3</sup> A.M.O. A.912/44.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.37140/39.



**PART II**

**RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING**



## CHAPTER 9

### RECRUITING <sup>1</sup>

As has already been stated, recruiting before the outbreak of war was carried out by the forty-eight W.A.A.F. Companies, who were each limited to a fixed establishment of sixty-seven. At the beginning of September 1939, company establishments were suddenly increased, generally to a total of about 165, and ten days later, enrolments up to 50 per cent above these new establishments were allowed in London and certain of the Home Counties to absorb the extremely large numbers of volunteers coming from the London area.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, Londoners travelled at their own expense to places as far away as Doncaster when they heard that there was a vacancy, so keen were they to join. At the main London recruiting centre, the queue of volunteers was so long that it had to be controlled by the civil police. Recruiting for most trades was discontinued at the beginning of October, partly to allow an interval during which to clear up a certain amount of confusion in the records caused by the spate of enrolments, which had necessarily been dealt with by completely untrained personnel, and partly because of lack of accommodation. This was unfortunate, since many capable women, eager to volunteer, could not be accepted, and much good material was lost to the service. While recruiting was on this small scale, it was carried on at Victory House by W.A.A.F. officers working directly under the Air Ministry.

On 15 April 1940, however, the Inspector of Recruiting took over all W.A.A.F. recruiting. This was an immediate improvement on both the old methods; the necessary machinery had already been set up for the R.A.F. and it was comparatively simple to adapt this to the W.A.A.F. As a first step, the Inspector of Recruiting published 'Recruiting Regulations for the W.A.A.F.', which laid down the procedure under which women who volunteered for the W.A.A.F. were called up, medically examined and drafted to the W.A.A.F. Recruits Centre for enrolment and training; they also gave detailed instructions on the action to be taken with the Ministry of Labour in the case of each recruit with regard to the Schedule of Reserved Occupations, and the procedure regarding such matters as nationality, security, civil convictions, etc. The Inspector of Recruiting also issued 'Instructions for the Guidance of Interviewing Officers regarding the suitability of W.A.A.F. Recruits', which was a comprehensive document giving in detail the necessary qualifications, medical category, age limit, etc., required for each trade. The London and South-Eastern Headquarters took over the W.A.A.F. recruiting at Victory House on 15 April 1940, and by 12 June 1940, the work was going ahead at the Area Headquarters at Glasgow (covering Northern Ireland), Sheffield, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Newcastle and Manchester. Medical examinations were carried out by a R.A.F. medical officer at the Area Headquarters or by an officially appointed civilian medical practitioner.

To meet increasing requirements, it became necessary, early in 1941, to decentralize recruiting still further; Northern Ireland Area Headquarters and

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled from notes supplied by the Inspector of Recruiting.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A. 912129.

certain of the Combined Recruiting Centres were opened to W.A.A.F. recruiting, and steps were taken to open Sub-Recruiting Depots in certain towns where there were no Combined Recruiting Centres. Since the Ministry of Labour medical boards at Combined Recruiting Centres did not then examine women, arrangements were made for all medical examinations to be done by civilian medical practitioners.

During the year April 1940 to April 1941, the weekly requirements of W.A.A.F. recruits rose from 150 to 1,000, and the number of trades in which women could join the service were doubled. In an effort to attract the required number of women, publicity campaigns, with loud-speaker vans, exhibitions, advertisements and parades, were organized by recruiting officers with the help of the Public Relations Directorate of the Air Ministry.

Throughout the following year, three factors affected W.A.A.F. recruiting, viz., Deferred Service, the Registration for Employment Order, and the National Service Act, No. 2, 1941.

### **Deferred Service**

On 12 May 1941, all recruiting units, including Combined Recruiting Centres, whilst continuing to accept a limited number of recruits for immediate service, were instructed to enrol women for Deferred Service. These women were interviewed, medically examined and provisionally enrolled, and after being warned that they would be called up at any time within three months, they were sent home. The Air Officer-in-charge of Records maintained a central register of all deferred recruits, and calling-up notices were sent out to them from the Records Office. By an Order in Council, which amended the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations, 1941, enrolled airwomen who failed to report for duty on call up could be treated as absentees, and in such cases the W.A.A.F. Recruits Centre was responsible for tracing them, with the help, if necessary, of the Provost Marshal and the civilian police. The object of Deferred Service was to ensure a pool of enrolled recruits in all trades from which the Air Officer in charge of Records could draw as and when vacancies occurred.

### **Registration for Employment Order, 1941**

This order required all women of specified ages to register with the Ministry of Labour for employment, including service in the forces, and it was the means of obtaining the information necessary for the implementation of the National Service Act, No. 2. Although the Ministry of Labour was at that time anxious to direct as many women as possible into the A.T.S. and the factories, those who stated that they wished to enrol in the W.A.A.F. were referred to the appropriate Recruiting Centre, where they were interviewed, and if found suitable were accepted for either immediate or deferred service. As a considerable number either expressed this preference at the time of registration, or actually enrolled in the W.A.A.F. after registering, the Order resulted in a large increase of volunteers for this service.

### **National Service Act, No. 2, 1941**

Towards the end of 1941, the public became aware that, with the coming into force of the National Service Act, No. 2, 1941, women between the ages of twenty and thirty would be liable to conscription. The result was that recruiting offices were inundated with applications for enrolment in the W.A.A.F., and just

before Christmas in one week alone over 10,000 completed application forms were received and approximately 8,000 volunteers entered the W.A.A.F. for either immediate or deferred service. The recruiting staffs were hard pressed to keep abreast with the work.

On 10 January 1942, single women born in 1920-1921 were, by Royal Proclamation, liable, with a few exceptions, to be called up under the National Service Act. National Service recruits were allowed to express a preference for service with the W.A.A.F. and the procedure adopted by the Ministry of Labour for calling up women into the W.A.A.F. was almost identical with that for calling up men into the R.A.F., except that the women were interviewed by a W.A.A.F. officer. Throughout the year, hundreds of women called up in the age groups 1918-1923 were interviewed, and this, of course, increased the work at the recruiting centres.

In the meantime volunteer recruiting continued for both immediate and deferred service, and the numbers required to fulfil the Air Ministry programme were enrolled, despite the fact that women who came within the scope of the National Service Act were no longer free to volunteer for the W.A.A.F. Increased accommodation and training facilities enabled the Deferred Service Pool to be gradually absorbed in the course of 1942, and thereafter volunteers were enrolled for immediate service only. By July 1943 their number had reached the figure given in the 1942-43 Air Ministry programme, and the Ministry of Labour decided that the National Service entry would be sufficient to meet future requirements. Volunteer recruiting accordingly closed down except for women coming from Eire, Northern Ireland and overseas, and it only re-opened in January 1944, when volunteers aged seventeen and a half to nineteen were accepted. In September 1944, recruiting again closed, to be re-opened in July 1945, for women aged seventeen and a half to forty-three years.

### **The Recruits**

At every stage of the war, the recruits were a cross-section of the community. In 1939-1940 they were mainly patriotic women imbued with a spirit of service or adventure; later they were women who realized, with the introduction of compulsory registration, that the women's services, now part of the Armed Forces of the Crown, must be brought up to strength; finally, the National Service Act, No. 2, brought in the women who were unwilling to serve, or who had been prevented from doing so by parents or employers.

All alike had to comply with the physical and educational standards laid down for each particular trade. Assessment for a trade was done by the recruiting officer, but the recruit was warned that this was only provisional and was subject to confirmation at the time of attestation. A certain amount of remustering did in fact take place at that stage, not normally through any failure on the part of the recruiting officer, but because either the selected trade had closed down in the meantime, or because psychological tests showed that the recruit was unsuitable for it, or perhaps because she had changed her mind about it after mixing with her fellows. A volunteer was allowed to elect discharge if, on being found unsuitable for the trade of her choice, she was unwilling to adopt any other. The conscript had no such privilege, and, though her suitability was taken into account, she had to join any trade in which there were vacancies. It

must be admitted that sometimes, in the urgency of current requirements, particular abilities and qualifications were ignored or overlooked, and recruits placed in trades to which they were ill-suited. Although this may have ensured the full manning of a trade, it was in the long run a loss to the service and led to some unhappiness and discontent among the recruits.

### **Recruiting Procedure**

The new recruit had to go through a long and complicated process before finally reaching the W.A.A.F. Depot as an enrolled airwoman. After completing an application form (W. 1434A) she was interviewed by a W.A.A.F. recruiting officer, who assessed her provisionally for a trade, arranged a medical examination and took action with the Ministry of Labour to ensure that she was eligible for enrolment. If the recruit fulfilled all the requirements, including medical standards, she was enrolled as an Aircraftwoman Second Class, was given her service number and was paid four shillings, two shillings for one day's pay and two shillings for one day's ration allowance. She was then given a date on which to report for drafting. She was required to serve for the 'duration of the present emergency' unless discharged or released from such service by the Air Council. A volunteer could change her mind about joining the W.A.A.F. right up to the time of enrolment, but once she had received her service number she was a member of the W.A.A.F. and the usual absentee action was taken if she failed to report for draft.

Before proceeding on draft she was given full instructions about the journey, a railway warrant and a sealed packet of personal documents to be handed in at the W.A.A.F. Depot on arrival. If, as was usual, several women were being drafted together, one was selected to be in charge and to carry the papers. If the journey was to be longer than five hours, each recruit received ration money.

### **The Recruiting Staff**

The airwomen who were posted to recruiting duties were specially selected. There was no such selection where the officers were concerned, but because the work was intensely interesting and gave scope for individual initiative, the majority of the W.A.A.F. recruiting officers enjoyed it, and if in the first place they showed signs of disappointment because they were not to work on a R.A.F. station, they were invariably sorry when the time came to be posted to other duties. At times the staff were overworked; but it was when work slackened off that complaints were made.

The recruiting units were situated in all the big cities and towns; consequently the personnel had their full share of the bombing. The behaviour of officers and airwomen during this time of trial and strain came up to the highest standards set by those on the operational stations. At Bristol the Area Headquarters and the hostel in which the airwomen lived were both hit and three airwomen were killed; Birmingham Area Headquarters received a direct hit; several Combined Recruiting Centres in the south were severely damaged. In all cases the airwomen behaved with coolness and bravery. In London, throughout the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, the London and South Eastern Area Headquarters never failed to send off the daily draft of recruits to the Recruits Centre, although the staff and the recruits were sometimes forced to spend half the day in the shelters and the railway stations were often not functioning.

The total number of recruits accepted annually during the years 1939 to 1945 are as follows:—

<i>Period</i>	<i>Volunteers</i>	<i>N.S.A.</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sept. 1939–December 1940 . . . . .	14,546	—	14,546
Jan.–Dec. 1941 . . . . .	81,928	—	81,928
Jan.–Dec. 1942 . . . . .	62,091	16,246	78,337
Jan.–Dec. 1943 . . . . .	11,144	17,192	28,336
Jan.–Sep. 1944 . . . . .	11,225	494	11,719
July–Dec. 1945 . . . . .	2,383	—	2,383
Total . . . . .	183,317	33,932	217,249

#### **Non-British Women in the W.A.A.F.**

*The Polish W.A.A.F.* When, early in 1943, it was decided to allow Polish women to join the British W.A.A.F., the Polish Minister of National Defence issued an appeal for volunteers. Thirty-six Polish women, selected to be trained as instructors for the remainder of the volunteers, were, after a course of instruction at a Polish military unit, enrolled as members of the W.A.A.F. on 17 June 1943, and then received training at R.A.F. units. In response to the appeal, on 1 November 1943, the first recruits arrived at Wilmslow for their initial training, and from then onwards recruits arrived from all parts of the world, including Europe, Palestine, Iraq, Africa, Canada, U.S.A. and China. The total number finally enrolled amounted to about 1,300. The Polish W.A.A.F. wore W.A.A.F. uniform, but were permitted to wear their own buttons and cap badges, which were similar to those of the Polish Air Force, and they were subject to the normal W.A.A.F. law and discipline. For the most part they were posted to Polish Air Force units, and were administered by a British W.A.A.F. 'G' officer with an English-speaking Polish W.A.A.F. 'G' officer working alongside. Those possessing suitable qualifications were given commissions in various branches. The airwomen were trained, the majority in the clerical and domestic trades, and a few in the technical trades, receiving promotion in the normal manner. In spite of the fact that many of these women had suffered considerably before coming to this country, and had in many cases no news of their family or friends, and could not speak our language, they soon settled down and accustomed themselves to the British service conditions, and played a successful part in the national war effort.

*Other Nationals.* There were a number of women serving in the W.A.A.F., not normally resident in the United Kingdom, who travelled from overseas on purpose to join the W.A.A.F., either individually or in small groups. They included not only women from all the Dominions and all the Colonies, but also a few Americans, Dutch, Czech, Belgians, French, Greeks, Norwegians and even South American nationals. They served in the W.A.A.F. as individuals just as British W.A.A.F. officers and airwomen did.

## CHAPTER 10

### TRAINING OF AIRWOMEN

#### Recruits

Pre-war volunteers may have had some training in their companies, but the recruits who enrolled during the first few weeks of war did not have even that. They went straight from civil life to stations and units, and picked up service procedure, rules and customs as they worked, fitting in a little drill after duty hours. As this state of affairs was unsatisfactory from the point of view of the recruits themselves, of the W.A.A.F. and of the R.A.F. with whom they worked, a conference was held in the Air Ministry in October 1939, at which it was agreed that recruits entering a fully mobilized service would need better *ab initio* training than the sketchy uneven attempts hitherto made by the individual companies, and that, in future, all recruits must be trained.

The R.A.F. station at West Drayton, then used as a Recruit Pool and Personnel Transit Centre, was inspected, and, despite disadvantages of planning and situation, D.W.A.A.F. pronounced it, with alterations to the domestic accommodation, suitable for use as a W.A.A.F. depot.<sup>1</sup> It proved, in fact, to be far from satisfactory. Planned as a transit camp, it provided virtually only sleeping and messing accommodation; recreational facilities were meagre, the

TABLE I  
Movement of W.A.A.F. Recruit Depots

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date Opened</i>	<i>Date Closed</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
West Drayton	30.10.39	17.9.40	First W.A.A.F. Recruit Depot.
Harrogate	18.9.40	30.5.41	With opening of Innsworth 30.12.40 it became No. 1 W.A.A.F. Depot. Moved to Bridgnorth and closed at Harrogate 30.5.41.
Innsworth	30.12.40	15.8.43	No. 2 W.A.A.F. Depot. Became receiving centre only 1.10.41. Became receiving and training centre for S. England 25.2.43.
Bridgnorth	30.5.41	30.9.42	No. 1 W.A.A.F. Depot from 30.5.41 when it moved from Harrogate.
Morecambe	1.10.41	25.2.43	No. 3 W.A.A.F. Depot. Training centre only.
Wilmslow	25.2.43	—	Received and trained recruits from N. England until 15.8.43 when it received and trained all W.A.A.F. recruits.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.29451/39, Encl. 9B.



surroundings were sordid and the site low-lying, liable to fog and flood. Fortunately the peak period of intake occurred during the early summer of 1940 when most of the training could take place out of doors. The staff consisted mainly of W.A.A.F. personnel, and, considering the difficulties under which they had to work and their own inexperience and lack of guidance, they achieved surprisingly good results. They were, however, inadequate in number and overworked, and had this permanent staff not been most sincere and conscientious and had the trainees not been eager volunteers who were all fit and well, the first W.A.A.F. depot at West Drayton might have had a disastrous history.

During 1940, the intake of recruits was gradually increased until the capacity of West Drayton was exceeded. This, together with continuous air raids which made training almost impossible, since the recruits spent the main part of the night in the trenches and most of the day making hurried dashes to the shelters, and the fact that West Drayton was required by the R.A.F. for radar training, made it essential that a new home be found for the W.A.A.F. depot. After various conferences and in spite of a general wish to house the depot on a R.A.F. station, it moved on 18 September 1940 to a number of hotels and schools in Harrogate. This was its first move, but during war the lower forms of training must make way for those which are considered more pressing, and this, as in the case of W.A.A.F. recruits, often involves much movement. Table I summarizes the way in which the W.A.A.F. depots crossed and re-crossed the map of England.

The depots in their wanderings experienced most types of accommodation. From the training point of view, a hutted camp on the lines of Bridgnorth or Wilmslow was the most satisfactory, since at a depot of this kind airwomen gained a very fair idea of the life they might expect at their stations. Moreover, it became apparent that a training depot should have a permanent location; it is only in such surroundings that a school can mature and the instructors give proper and undivided attention to the trainees.

Pressure from the events of war, however, often forced the Air Ministry to make arrangements for W.A.A.F. recruits which under normal conditions would not have been regarded as wholly satisfactory. In August 1941, at a time of rapidly increasing substitution of airwomen for airmen, it was announced that the weekly intake would be raised from 2,000 to 3,000 a week, and later to 4,000. To keep pace with these demands, No. 3 Depot was opened at Morecambe on 1 October 1941, and the depot at Innsworth was converted into a Receiving Centre only, to accommodate 2,700 recruits, who were enrolled and kitted and then sent to Morecambe for their training. This arrangement meant that the intake of 4,000 a week could be handled, but from no other point of view could it be regarded as satisfactory; the recruit, after a few bewildering days at Innsworth, had to leave the hut and station life into which she was just beginning to settle, and take a long journey to a depot of a very different kind. Innsworth was a camp of the normal R.A.F. pattern, but Morecambe was an ordinary north-west seaside town where the recruit was billeted on the landlady of some local boarding or apartment house, and lived a hybrid existence in which she seemed to be neither airwoman nor civilian. She and her companions were scattered in billets all over the town, and both training and discipline were very difficult. Recruits had to be marched through the streets to cinemas and halls for lectures and had to drill on the parade by the sea in the eyes of the public. To help prepare them, a lecture was given at Innsworth before they left for Morecambe, telling them what to expect and how to behave.

The Markham Report undoubtedly had Morecambe in mind when it made its recommendation No. 19:—'Consideration should be given to the possibility of securing for the W.A.A.F. combined reception and training centres for all recruits and where recourse need not be had to billeting.' The Air Ministry Directorate concerned with training seized upon the report as a means of improving matters, and a scheme was planned immediately whereby reception as well as training could be carried on at Morecambe until it became possible to secure a better location.<sup>1</sup> This, however, would have implemented only one half of the recommendation, and eventually the idea was abandoned and the depot moved to Wilmslow. Here, in a hutted camp, both reception and training could be carried out under reasonably good conditions.

In contrast to the varied geographical history, that of the actual training showed little change since the fundamental purpose remained the same throughout the war.<sup>2</sup> The course was primarily disciplinary and was planned to give recruits a general outline of the conditions of service and a knowledge of R.A.F. procedure, to accustom them to communal life and to train them physically to withstand the conditions they might have to face at their stations. In addition, it gave the airwoman a brief idea of her rights as well as her duties and what she should do if she felt these rights were being infringed. The course at first lasted for fourteen days, during which recruits were medically examined, enrolled and given their kit. The remainder of the time was spent as follows:—

Organization and Administration . . . . .	14 hours
Anti-gas and Station Defence . . . . .	15 „
Drill . . . . .	12 „
Physical Training . . . . .	6 „

The fourteen hours spent on organization and administration included four hygiene lectures. Later the number of hours spent on Anti-gas and Station Defence was reduced and lectures by the chaplain were added. Instruction was given by means of lectures, films and discussion, and was made as practical and pertinent as possible. Syllabi, précis and in some cases the complete texts of lectures were submitted to the Air Ministry for approval, and there was always close liaison between the Air Ministry and Technical Training Command under whom the training was carried on.

The course was an arduous one in which everything possible was crammed into the time available. Instructors aimed at letting these very new airwomen assimilate the strange life and knowledge gradually, but in fourteen days the introduction to service life must of necessity be largely abrupt. From time to time the length of the course varied slightly according to the war needs of the moment, and in March 1941, it was suggested that the course should be increased to three weeks, but this was not immediately practicable. The opportunity, in fact, did not come until the end of the year when intakes fell to such an extent that it was possible to increase the length of training to four weeks, excluding reception. In June 1942, the course was cut to three weeks as recruiting again increased, and, as this was considered a satisfactory length of time, it remained at three weeks during the next few years of the war.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.92745.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.65782/40.

Two factors aggravated the difficulties of recruit training: recruiting rose and fell steeply and at short notice, and the capacity of the technical training establishments fluctuated. Recruit training facilities needed to be elastic enough to accommodate the one and supply the other. Until October 1941, the depots were struggling to keep pace with the rising number of young women who were volunteering for the service. Nor was the capacity of the depots great enough to keep pace with technical training demands; and to meet these demands in February 1941, the then slightly increased length of training was cut to 'fourteen days for all purposes, i.e. including enrolment and kitting'. By the end of the year when accommodation was adequate, recruiting intakes fell; but this fall again was largely governed by the difficulties of training establishments in absorbing the output of the depots. Later still, recruits did not flow in as quickly as they were needed, and the depots were embarrassed by a large number of empty beds.

W.A.A.F. recruit training followed the pattern set by the motto of the R.A.F., and after many difficulties it did succeed in the end. The main lesson to be learned from its somewhat chequered existence is the necessity for full application of the principle 'First things first'. No measure can be made of the happiness and contentment which is assured by a careful introduction to service life, and, without this sound indoctrination, the after effects may be apparent for years after entry.

A tribute must be paid to instructor staffs; their task was far removed from the glamour and urgency of war, and the effect on their morale of many apparent inconsistencies in policy was inevitable. Furthermore, where instructors are employed on these duties for longer than a limited period, either they lose their vitality or their lectures become unrealistic. This point was not sufficiently appreciated, and good instructors were frequently retained for far too long. As in any form of training, instructor selection is of paramount importance; only by securing for recruit training the best available staff can the successful build-up of any force be achieved. Any shortcomings in this respect must have widespread repercussions, not the least being a demand for refresher or continuation training at later stages.

### **Trade Training**

Trade training of airwomen in general followed the pattern of trade training for airmen, though in a minority of trades some adjustment was necessary. The normal training facilities were used under the control of Technical Training Command and the Central Trade Test Board. Certain very specialized trades for airwomen were dealt with outside Technical Training Command, e.g. clerks S.D. by Operational Commands and balloon operators by Balloon Command. W.A.A.F. police were trained by the Provost Marshal, and training in the medical trades was controlled by the Director General of Medical Services.

Very little attention was given to the trade training of women before war was declared, partly because the R.A.F. was engrossed in trying to meet the training needs of its own expanding growth, and partly because it had not at first been intended to call up women during the first few months of the war, and at that time their employment was, in any case, confined to six trades. As a result of wartime urgency, all trade training was carried out at high pressure, and the

returns show that the results obtained by airwomen compared very favourably with those obtained by airmen. Since, however, the skilled trades were only slowly and cautiously opened to women, many W.A.A.F. recruits were at first mustered in trades less highly skilled than was warranted by their intelligence and capabilities. The results of tests introduced to assist initial selection indicated that women showed less aptitude than men for mechanical and practical trades. Training was too short to overcome any initial deficiencies, and the women, in general, had had less technical education than the men, and had in civil life fewer opportunities of acquiring mechanical skill and interests. They were less well informed on the structure and functions of an air force, and more time might well have been spent in acquainting them on entry with the nature, duties and opportunities of the various trades. Remustering, particularly from redundant trades, was less acceptable to women than to men, and here again more might have been done to assist reorientation.

As trainees, W.A.A.F. personnel showed as a group, special characteristics. They were, in general, more conscientious, inveterate note-takers, and prone to worry unduly over progress. Their special needs were met in certain trades by providing facilities for preliminary coaching in practical mathematics and simple skills; but adjustments, such as lengthening of certain courses, were solutions only of most obvious difficulties, and the whole training plan needed special study to meet this new requirement of training W.A.A.F. It must be admitted that, while women generally very quickly absorbed the requirements of the manipulative trades and did very well on the courses, the field of trades was, in the opinion of some, widened too greatly, and very often the practical performance of the W.A.A.F. did not bear out their course results. They were given a special opportunity in trades arising from new developments during the war, and, in this connection, it is interesting to note that the increased use of scientific aids in selection and human problems in training, was made possible by the creation of a special trade of Clerks Personnel Selection, which throughout the latter part of the war was manned entirely by W.A.A.F. personnel. They were responsible for the administration of psychological and educational tests and for handling the follow-up data, by means of which further improvement of methods was possible.

### **N.C.O. Training**

It was fully realized that the expansion of the W.A.A.F. would entail the early provision of a central training establishment for N.C.O.s, particularly for those in the category then known as sub-officers administrative. During the opening months of the war, the first call on available resources was to give basic training to new entrants, and the development of higher forms of training for N.C.O.s and potential N.C.O.s had of necessity to be retarded. It was, therefore, inevitable that, as expansion proceeded, numbers of airwomen were appointed as N.C.O.s mainly on their trade skill, for whom no training other than that obtainable on stations was available. Armed with first hand knowledge of the deficiencies in N.C.O.s' qualities caused by lack of training, D.W.A.A.F. pressed strongly for the institution of a central school, and, as resources became available, this school was established. The ultimate training scheme in general outlined was as follows:—

Potential N.C.O.s	Station training to a specimen syllabus issued by the Air Ministry. In some cases Group H.Q. selected one station to undertake the training for all stations in the Group.
N.C.O.s in trades for which only N.C.O. posts existed.	N.C.O. training included in the trade course, usually 40 per cent of syllabus time taken up for this purpose.
F/Sgt. and Sgts.	Training given at W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s' school. For a time also, special courses run on a station basis.
Corporals	Training given at W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s' School.

The N.C.O.s' School came into being at West Drayton with the commencement of the first N.C.O.s' course in 1940.<sup>1</sup> It lodged with the recruit depot, suffered the same inconveniences and moved with it to Harrogate; but in March 1941, it bettered itself and moved to St. Athan. This was a permanent R.A.F. station and had the right environment from the training point of view; but the N.C.O.s' course was growing and there was not enough room for it to expand, so at the end of the year the school moved once more, this time to Innsworth. Here, too, the accommodation was suitable, but it was not allowed to stay there for long, as the accommodation was needed for increasing trade training, and after twelve months the N.C.O.s' School moved to Melksham.<sup>2</sup> Here it received the name of 'The W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s' Administrative School', its function being to undertake the training of the following three courses:—

- (i) W.A.A.F. Junior N.C.O.s' Course.
- (ii) W.A.A.F. Senior N.C.O.s' Course.
- (iii) W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s' (other than Admin.) Course.

The courses are mentioned in the above order as it was in that order that they came into existence. Below are brief notes showing the beginning and purpose of each course. The further and final development of N.C.O. training is shown in the subsequent notes on the N.C.O.s' School.

### N.C.O.s' Administration Course

In February 1940, it was agreed that a course for W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s was essential. The W.A.A.F. was at that time woefully ignorant of R.A.F. procedure and etiquette; but W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s could not pass such knowledge on to the rank and file because they did not possess it themselves. One of the aims of the course therefore was to teach them how to pass their knowledge on after they had acquired it. The course dealt mainly with organization and administration; practical instruction included visits to the Orderly Room, the Unit Post Office, the clothing store, the cookhouse and airwomen's quarters, and attendance at a sick parade and kit inspection. The first course opened on 15 July 1940, at West Drayton; it lasted fourteen days and was attended by twenty administrative N.C.O.s. Later, when the school moved to Innsworth, the intake was increased to as much as 180, and the course lengthened to three weeks. In May 1943, the course was closed as administrative establishments were being cut, and it was never reopened. Administrative N.C.O.s were, however, eligible for other courses of similar nature.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.53628/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.476042/42.

### **Senior N.C.O.s' Course**

This course was introduced after the establishment in 1941 of certain posts for W.A.A.F. Administrative Warrant Officers.<sup>1</sup> It takes a considerable number of years for an airman to become a warrant officer; the W.A.A.F. who were to be promoted had, of necessity, had relatively short service and, if they were to be fully efficient, it was necessary to give them administrative training on a 'somewhat higher plane' than the normal N.C.O. course. It was planned that advancement to warrant officer rank should be conditional on satisfactory completion of this course.

The first course started on 21 January 1942, at Innsworth, and lasted for three weeks.<sup>2</sup> Just over a year after its inception, the course was expanded to include N.C.O.s of the rank of sergeant and above in trades other than administrative.<sup>3</sup> This course was planned to give these tradeswomen a basic knowledge of administration and to develop in them the powers of leadership and command necessary for promotion to warrant officer rank. It was also designed to teach them how to instruct junior and potential N.C.O.s on stations. In 1944 it became the Senior N.C.O.s' General Service Training Course.

### **N.C.O.s in Trades other than Administrative**

Up to 1942 N.C.O. training was given only to those in the administrative trade; but this state of affairs proved unsatisfactory. All N.C.O.s were expected to display certain qualities and to possess a knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of their rank; but many technical N.C.O.s had little experience of service administration except in their own trades, some of them were unwilling or unfitted to undertake responsibility, some were even unaware that there were such responsibilities. It was therefore decided that these N.C.O.s also should receive a short course of training in administration and discipline.<sup>4</sup> The first intake was on 29 April 1942, at Innsworth. The course lasted for two weeks and started off modestly with only thirty on a course. Later intakes increased considerably and the duration of the course was expanded to three weeks. In 1943 all N.C.O.s of the rank of sergeant and above were taught on the Senior N.C.O.s Course, and from that time onward the course for W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s other than administrative was confined to corporals. In 1944 it became the 'Junior N.C.O.s' General Service Course'.

When the N.C.O.s' School moved to Melksham in the winter of 1942, it received its first intakes for the three courses mentioned above at the end of December. It was not a good moment to move to such a place; the accommodation was unsatisfactory, particularly at that time of the year, but it was the only place available. The school was situated on a dispersed site, the trainees had to walk in all weathers from the widely scattered living-quarters to the parade ground and messes, and got so much exercise in this way that the time allotted to physical training was reduced. Technical Training Command recommended that the school should be moved, but this was not immediately practicable. The school endured the winter and it was agreed that during the summer months conditions would be reasonable; at the same time it was urged that they would become intolerable after October and that the school must be moved before the winter. The difficulty was solved as a result of smaller

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.334218/41.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.97/42.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.476042/42.

<sup>4</sup> A.M. File A.352816/42.

recruit intakes during the summer of 1943 which released accommodation at Wilmslow. Authority was given for the N.C.O.s' School to transfer there, and it once more became a lodger unit with the Recruit Depot. The intakes of both the Senior and Non-Administrative N.C.O.s' Courses could be increased, and the school again enjoyed conditions and environment really suitable for the training to be given.

The reduction of W.A.A.F. administrative establishments was tied to the plan whereby technical N.C.O.s were to perform more administrative duties than before. This policy was set forth in the A.M.O. A.209/43 which touched the working life of most airwomen and officers. Many of the N.C.O.s on the course for non-administrative N.C.O.s had never had any administrative training at all, and when they arrived on the course many of them were not particularly interested in the subject and took some time to settle down. Two weeks therefore did not allow much time for them to assimilate all the knowledge necessary for their new duties, and it was also difficult for the instructors to make fair or adequate assessments of the trainees' abilities. The course was accordingly extended to three weeks. Despite the fact that intakes to the course were increased to the greatest possible extent, there were still many technical N.C.O.s at stations and headquarters who had never been on an administrative course. The school at Wilmslow could not be enlarged, and the matter was further complicated by increasing operational activity which made it more and more difficult for some of these N.C.O.s to be spared from their stations, even for short periods. Other expedients were accordingly considered.

#### **Command, Group and Unit Courses**

It was finally decided that the only way to solve this problem was to establish local training courses on a Group or Station basis from existing resources. Station courses for potential N.C.O.s (both men and women) were already in existence, for it had always been realized that N.C.O. training must begin at the earliest possible stage. Centralized facilities were out of the question, and the limited amount of really effective training which could be given on busy stations was also appreciated. Nevertheless, early in 1942, the station scheme was launched and it achieved some success. The new arrangements were not intended to interfere with or supersede the arrangements for training potential N.C.O.s. They were to cover a wider field and to be of a higher standard and for W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s only. Memoranda on training methods and proposed syllabi were sent to Commands for guidance. Some form of test was to be given at the end to determine whether further instruction at Wilmslow was necessary, but no set standard was laid down. These courses continued until October 1945, when they were no longer needed.

At the beginning of 1944, Technical Training Command suggested fusing the courses of administrative and other N.C.O.s. The administrative N.C.O.s possessed more knowledge at the beginning of a course but were sometimes inclined to feel they knew enough already and were often outstripped by the N.C.O.s of other trades, who, on an average, appeared more intelligent; and it was in an attempt to remedy this discrepancy that Technical Training Command made its suggestion. In cases where the technical and administrative N.C.O.s were already combined for lectures and discussions, it had been found that the pooling of experience and resultant widening of outlook had added to the value gained from the lectures. In Technical Training Command's

opinion ' the fusion materially assists the technical N.C.O.s, does not retard the administrative N.C.O.s and promotes better mutual understanding '. The Air Ministry agreed, and this principle was put into practice. Shortly afterwards, in August 1944, L.A.C.W.s of the administrative trade who had been recommended for promotion were admitted to the Junior N.C.O.s' (other than Administration) Course. Since this name was no longer suitable the two remaining courses of the N.C.O.s' School were renamed:—

- (i) Senior N.C.O.s' General Service Training Course.
- (ii) Junior N.C.O.s' General Service Training Course.

After the end of the European War, in July 1945, as the accommodation at Wilmslow was needed for other purposes, the school moved to Stoke Orchard. Releases had begun in June, and intakes to the courses decreased because, owing to the manning situation, units found it increasingly difficult to release N.C.O.s. The school did not thrive: the environment was bad, administrative arrangements could not be improved, and the release plan aggravated the manning problems. To meet the ever diminishing requirement for N.C.O. training, one course was retained at Digby, and this proved a great success and achieved a very high standard.



## CHAPTER 11

### TRAINING OF OFFICERS

#### Officers' Cadet Training Unit

After the introduction of cadet training into the R.A.F., the practicability of a similar scheme for the W.A.A.F. was considered.<sup>1</sup> It was decided that all potential W.A.A.F. officers should attend an Officer Cadet Training Unit course before receiving their commissions and at an Air Ministry conference on 12 February 1942, it was agreed that the initial course at the W.A.A.F. Officers' School should be converted into an Officers Cadet Training course.

The hasty and large-scale commissioning of W.A.A.F. officers during 1941, the time of greatest expansion, had presented a considerable problem to the W.A.A.F. in the form of a number of immature and unsuitable officers. The main reason, therefore, for converting the initial course to an O.C.T.U. was to give longer and more thorough training to the women who were to become officers, and more opportunity for instructors to make accurate assessments of their characteristics and qualities. Another point in favour of the O.C.T.U. was that commissions would not be granted until after satisfactory completion of the O.C.T.U. course, and it was thought that this would stimulate cadets to derive all benefits possible from the course.

Although it had been planned to open the Officers Cadet Training Unit on 3 June 1942, the first cadets did not arrive until August. Since there was not enough room for all the cadets at the W.A.A.F. Officers' School at Loughborough, part of the O.C.T.U. staff was sent to Grange-over-Sands to train the overflow, but these arrangements lapsed as the courses passed out. To show their state of transition between airwoman and officer, the cadets wore white bands around their caps. They were still paid as airwomen but lived under officers' mess conditions, which they shared with their instructors; as a contribution toward mess maintenance they were required to pay 6d. a day.

During the first few months all cadets shared the same syllabus. At first, it had been proposed to give W.A.A.F. 'G' cadets an eight weeks' course and other cadets a four weeks' course, but this plan had to be modified to a four weeks' course for all cadets because of lack of accommodation. The keynote of the instruction was the changed status of the cadets—instead of looking for orders they were learning to give them. The aims of the course were set out in full several weeks before the first cadets arrived and they remained unchanged as long as training lasted:—<sup>2</sup>

- (a) To inculcate the qualities required by W.A.A.F. officers, such as loyalty to their service, a high standard of discipline and a proper sense of their responsibility for the welfare of their subordinates.
- (b) To stimulate leadership and the capacity for commanding airwomen on parade or in any other circumstances.
- (c) To impart in broad outline general service knowledge of the organization and administration of the R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. in such a manner as to provide a foundation for acquisition of further detailed knowledge as a result of other courses or experience gained.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.139491/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.422691/42.

- (d) To instil the responsibility of all W.A.A.F. officers to fit themselves for the discharge of their duties in connection with the control of airwomen and their welfare, particularly in the manner in which W.A.A.F. 'G' officers should control these matters.
- (e) To produce the well-balanced officer: one in whom technical and service knowledge go hand in hand, with depth of character and a mature sense of values.

To implement these aims the syllabus included training in drill, anti-gas training and physical training, general service knowledge required by all W.A.A.F. officers, R.A.F. organization and administration, W.A.A.F. administration and welfare, Air Force Law as applied to the W.A.A.F. Tests and examinations were held and films were exhibited.<sup>1</sup> The establishment for the O.C.T.U. was one squadron officer, four flight officers and seven section officers, and the school was staffed entirely by women instructors.

Great importance was attached to the method of assessment and the recording of results. Instructors were told that the underlying principle was that commissions should be withheld from those who were judged so deficient of officer qualities that any further training would not improve matters. On the other hand, it was in the interests of the Service to record the keenness and proficiency shown by any cadet during her initial course. The assessments were to be based on the cadets' work during the whole of the course and not governed solely by academic standards, such as could be acquired by cramming and the possession of a retentive memory. Full consideration was to be given in any assessment to the more positive qualities of a cadet such as personality, character and the capacity for leadership. During the first few months of the O.C.T.U. the high rate of failure caused alarm and concern at the Air Ministry. The cadets had already been recommended by Commands and passed by an Air Ministry board for their officer qualities and it seemed reasonable to think that their judgment could not have been so completely at fault in so many cases. It was therefore decided to institute a review panel at the Air Ministry to consider all doubtful cases. As a result, a number of cadets who had failed their course were, nevertheless, granted commissions by the Air Ministry; in others, the judgment of the O.C.T.U. was upheld; but it did on the whole appear in those early days that the assessments of the O.C.T.U. instructors were based on a high standard which did not always conform to the law of supply and demand.

By the time the Markham Report appeared, in August 1942, the recommendation that the opening of an O.C.T.U. for the W.A.A.F. should be expedited was already out of date, but the recommendation that 'officers training should be on a broader basis and the course extended by two weeks' received the approval of the Air Ministry, and, on 18 November, a meeting was held by the officer in charge of Training Administration, the Director of Educational Services and D.W.A.A.F. to discuss how it should be implemented.<sup>2</sup> The passage of the Markham Report under consideration ran as follows:—

'The success of the Service depends on the intelligence and breadth of view of the officer. If officers have a lively appreciation of the issues, national, international and civic, which underlie the war effort and which will be of importance in the future, they can in turn rouse some similar appreciation amongst the women in their charge.'

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.139491/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.422691/42.

The Director of Educational Services was asked to produce a syllabus for the O.C.T.U. to cover these aspects, though it was agreed that the teaching required was beyond the scope of the ordinary service instructors at the W.A.A.F. Officers' School. To meet this difficulty an educational section for the O.C.T.U. was instituted, which was to be responsible for the actual delivery of lectures, for the co-ordination of arrangements for visiting lecturers, and for library arrangements. This section had an establishment for one squadron officer of the W.A.A.F. 'G' branch with a civil educational background, a Grade II Education officer and an airwoman clerk G.D. It was agreed that fifty-four hours study of general educational subjects should be added to the O.C.T.U. syllabus.

In December 1942, when the W.A.A.F. Officers' School moved to Windermere, the O.C.T.U. went with it, and the revised system of training was introduced straight away. The W.A.A.F. 'G' course was lengthened to eight weeks with an entry of twenty cadets a month, and the non-'G' to six weeks with an entry of sixty cadets a fortnight. Intakes, however, fluctuated, and in January 1943, all 'G' intakes ceased for a time on account of the Air Ministry's policy of giving administrative duties to substitution officers and cutting down the number of purely administrative officers. For the same reason, the course for non-'G' cadets was increased to eight weeks. When this change took place the Air Ministry pointed out to the O.C.T.U. instructors how important it was for them to realize that the approach to the subjects which had previously been taught to W.A.A.F. 'G' cadets only must be different when they were dealing with non-'G' cadets—their interest and sympathy must be aroused by a full and clear explanation of the implications of the new policy and the consequent responsibility which would fall upon technical officers and N.C.O.s.<sup>1</sup>

When, in July 1944, the W.A.A.F. Officers' School moved to Stratford, the O.C.T.U. remained at Windermere and was given pleasanter and more spacious accommodation in the Belsfield Hotel and Old England Hotel. As a result the whole unit became more compact and had better rest rooms, library, news room and messing accommodation. The surroundings were very beautiful; but the damp and enervating climate was not conducive to hard and intelligent study. The course, however, was strenuous—cadets were under instruction from 08.30 hours to 18.00 hours for six days a week, though later this was modified to a certain extent so that cadets should have at least some time for relaxation and for keeping themselves and their kit tidy and in good order. It was also arranged that cadets should be given pre-O.C.T.U. leave so that there should be time for proper mental adjustment and also for getting their kit into a fit condition for the course.<sup>2</sup>

Early in March 1945 it was decided that no W.A.A.F. candidates for commissions were to be sent on an O.C.T.U. course unless they had applied for at least twelve months extension of service from the date of the first promulgation of release under Class 'A'.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, from this time onward intakes grew smaller and smaller, and finally, on 12 October 1945, the O.C.T.U. was closed.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.422691/42.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.1175/44.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.743674/44.

## Junior Officers

The training of W.A.A.F. officers had a chequered career. Their pre-war training was, like that of their airwomen, quite inadequate for practical purposes, but, whereas the initial training of airwomen recruits was carefully considered and already planned in October 1939, it was not found possible to give careful attention to the training of the W.A.A.F. officer until some months later. During late 1939 and early 1940 a small number of W.A.A.F. officers were admitted to the Junior Course in R.A.F. Administration at the R.A.F. School, then at Gerrard's Cross. In general, it seemed that the students showed great enthusiasm and obtained good results and were full of eagerness to learn all they could about their new life and work. This arrangement unfortunately could last only a short time. Early in 1940, when the Gerrard's Cross courses came to an end, the initial service training for the newly appointed officers began, followed soon after by the beginning of training courses for junior officers. By a combination of circumstances, however, the senior W.A.A.F. officers throughout the war received virtually no training at all.

A large number of code and cypher officers were appointed during the first winter of the war; in order to give them at least a little general service information, a course of five and a half days, to be held at Reading, was planned but proved inadequate in every respect; the training being in the hands of W.A.A.F. officers who themselves had only a sketchy background of knowledge.

The policy that the training of W.A.A.F. officers should be controlled by the W.A.A.F., which was always insisted on by D.W.A.A.F., was accepted; but an effort to overcome the obvious handicap of the lack of experience of the W.A.A.F. instructors was made by arranging for a number of them to attend a course at the R.A.F. School of Administration in October 1940.<sup>1</sup> There was a determined move both to increase the length of the code and cypher initial course and to open it to all newly appointed officers as the standard initial training.<sup>2</sup> At this point, better accommodation was found, the course was moved to Bulstrode Park, Gerrard's Cross, in December 1940, and W.A.A.F. officer training began to develop. A new unit was formed named the 'W.A.A.F. Officers' School', a W.A.A.F. commanding officer was established and R.A.F. Station, Uxbridge, became the parent unit for pay and equipment. Bulstrode Park was a country house in large grounds and formed an appropriate setting for the school, for it gave good and pleasant accommodation, and was conveniently near for visiting lecturers from London.

The code and cypher course was thereupon moved from Reading, extended to fourteen days, and in a short time became the initial course for all newly appointed W.A.A.F. officers; administrative officers reported direct from their units, cypher officers on the successful completion of their technical training. At the same time it was realized that there were many 'G' officers, commissioned in 1940, who had undergone no course of instruction at all. For their benefit, the W.A.A.F. Officers' Administrative Course was introduced. It was a fourteen days' course, but was discontinued in less than two months in order to allow for the expansion of the initial course. Indeed, within a very short time, it became clear that the demand for W.A.A.F. officers to keep pace with

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 121425/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. Files 139491/40 and A.59130.

the rapidly expanding service was outstripping the capacity of Bulstrode Park.<sup>1</sup> It was eventually decided to move the school to Loughborough Technical College which had been requisitioned by the R.A.F., and which would give a capacity of 350 as against 100 only at Bulstrode Park. The first intakes at Loughborough took place on 28 July 1941, and were to be forty each fortnight to the revived administrative course and eighty each week to the initial course, both courses lasting fourteen days. The initial course, however, was still felt to be inadequate for the newly appointed officers, many of whom had been, even as airwomen, in the service for only a few weeks. It was accordingly lengthened to three weeks in order to permit more detailed study of certain subjects, in particular, the organization and administration of the W.A.A.F.<sup>2</sup>

By this time, however, the incomplete nature of the training received by the W.A.A.F. officer was being generally appreciated; further, the size and value of the service had become impressive, it was now part of the armed forces of the Crown and its administration was taking shape. A conference was held by the Director of Personal Services to discuss on broad lines the policy of W.A.A.F. officer training, as a direct result of which the training courses at Loughborough were re-allocated as follows:—

- (a) The Initial Course of four weeks duration with a weekly intake of forty. This later became the O.C.T.U.
- (b) The Administration 'A' Course, a continuation of the old Administration Course but increased to four weeks with a monthly intake of forty; this course to be filled by officers of and up to the rank of Flight Officer.
- (c) The Administration 'B' Course, a new course for W.A.A.F. 'G' officers with between five and ten months commissioned service and still on probation; this course to be of six weeks duration, with intake of 120, and the syllabus to be so devised as to provide a reliable testing ground for use in grading the large number of supernumerary officers existing at that time.
- (d) The Refresher Course, to be of two weeks duration and designed to give refresher training in general service subjects to officers, other than W.A.A.F. 'G', for whom commanding officers considered a further course of training necessary.
- (e) The Staff Course, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Early in 1942 it was decided that Loughborough must be handed over to the medical authorities for use as a rehabilitation centre; but some months elapsed before alternative accommodation could be found for the school. The O.C.T.U. was started, split between Grange-over-Sands and Loughborough; the other courses remained at Loughborough. This location had many advantages as an officers' school: it was within easy reach of London and had good buildings, excellent lecture rooms, good facilities for games and a pleasant atmosphere; the sleeping accommodation was cramped, however, and a number of double-decker bunks had to be used. The messing was in the hands of the college civilian catering staff, and meals seemed inadequate to the trainees. By September 1942, Windermere had been selected as a suitable location for the W.A.A.F. Officers' School on its move from Loughborough, and, as the Medical

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 121425/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File 139491/40.

Branch were pressing for the release of Loughborough, plans for requisitioning the necessary accommodation were hastened. The school was to be located in the Belsfield Hotel, and other smaller establishments were to be requisitioned as administrative headquarters for the unit, which was to be known as R.A.F. Windermere. To accommodate the numbers required, double bunking was necessary throughout, otherwise the accommodation was good, and the situation of both hotels, in their own grounds at the lake side, was excellent. There was, however, inadequate lecture room accommodation, which necessitated the erection of R.A.F. huts in the Belsfield grounds. The unit began to form on 26 October 1942, and by 6 January 1943, all the courses had opened at the new location.

During the first weeks the staff position was acute, and the various courses organized shifts to help with the interior economy. Considerable inconvenience was also caused by lack of lecture room accommodation since some of the huts were extremely damp. At this time also, it was decided to hold one fourteen day course in February 1943, to train potential instructors, in order that a list of officers might be maintained to be drawn on for replacements at the Depots or Officers' and N.C.O.s' Schools. In the same month the Refresher Course closed down, to be replaced on 10 March 1943 by the Administration 'C' Course of fourteen days duration, the object of which was to provide officers serving in branches other than W.A.A.F. 'G' with a sufficient knowledge of administration to enable them to assume responsibility for the wellbeing of personnel.<sup>1</sup>

With the settling in of the W.A.A.F. Officers' School at Windermere, a happy and progressive period in W.A.A.F. officer training began. It is true that there were disadvantages in the somewhat crowded accommodation and in the distance to be travelled from London to reach the school; but these were more than offset by the excellent situation, which provided in itself a stimulating change for the student officers. For some time past the training had been progressively improved; but it was at Windermere that it first achieved popularity among W.A.A.F. officers in general. A more informal atmosphere began to prevail, and the instruction gained in quality and effectiveness by the introduction of discussions and practical sessions. At this stage, many of the W.A.A.F. officers attending the courses had considerable experience behind them, and it was found that the pooling of knowledge was of benefit to all, students and instructors alike. It was this acknowledgment of the fact that the student herself had much to contribute which went far towards 'humanising' the somewhat unbending atmosphere of the school in Bulstrode and Loughborough days. From this time the work of the school progressed steadily until the end of the summer, when the long life of the 'B' Course came to an end; 1,910 officers had been trained, the last entry being on 1 September 1943. The closing of this course, with its large intake, gave more elbow room in the Belsfield Hotel, and permitted expansion of the 'A' Course once more to an intake of forty. An instructors' course was also projected, as it had been felt for some time by D.W.A.A.F. and others that the officers on the instructional staff of the various W.A.A.F. training schools should have definite training in the technique of lecturing, and further, that all W.A.A.F. 'G' officers would benefit from a knowledge of how to address their airwomen, both during

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A. 432920/42.

general service training and at informal meetings on domestic evenings. The course was to be of two weeks' duration with a small intake of ten, to permit considerable practical work, and it began, after some delay, on 24 November 1943, in the charge of one Flight Officer W.A.A.F. 'G' with voice production and speech-training qualifications, and a Flight Lieutenant R.A.F. Education officer.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the year a further move of the school was projected. The W.A.A.F. Advisory Council had recommended, principally on account of the prevailing dampness, that, for health reasons, it should leave Windermere and Sidmouth was proposed as the new location. For some time there had been a growing belief that the principle of combining officer and cadet training was not ideal, and there had been strong pressure for a division of the Windermere organization. It was also felt that, good as Windermere undoubtedly was in many ways, the officers' school required more adequate accommodation to build it up to the required status. The decision was therefore taken to move the officers school to a more suitable location, leaving the O.C.T.U. at Windermere. Upon the division becoming effective, both units would become independent, under the command of a W.A.A.F. officer, and not under an R.A.F. officer as had hitherto been the case, and the post of Commanding Officer of the W.A.A.F. Officers' School would at the same time be upgraded to Group Officer. After much discussion, Stratford-on-Avon was selected as the most suitable location, and the move finally took place during the first week in July 1944; the first intake to the school in its new location was, however, deferred until 2 August 1944.<sup>2</sup>

Stratford-on-Avon was the best of all the homes of the W.A.A.F. Officers' School. The accommodation was good; there were many single rooms, all with fitted basins. There was good lecture room accommodation under one roof, with space for a library, information room and publications library; also adequate offices for the instructional staff. The situation of the school was ideal, being within easy reach of London and yet in the most delightful surroundings. The town with its famous theatre, and the river provided ample recreational facilities, and there was even a small chapel, the Guild Chapel, available for Parade Services and choir practice. The only real disadvantage lay in the lack of a parade ground, which necessitated drill and parades taking place in front of the theatre and public gardens, and thus attracting the sometimes embarrassing interest of the many visitors to the town. In these surroundings the school achieved much; with the right environment, training efficiency was higher than at any other period in its existence, and the student officers enjoyed the courses and their visit to Stratford. There was also much benefit in the fact that the unit, staffed almost entirely by W.A.A.F. and self-supporting in all respects, was a miniature counterpart of any R.A.F. station, and could be observed as such by the student officers as a practical example of their theoretical studies.

Apart from changes in the syllabus there were no alterations in the courses at Stratford until after V.E. Day, when the Administration 'A' Course came to an end, the last intake passing out on 20 June 1945.<sup>3</sup> During the two and a half years of its existence approximately 1,500 W.A.A.F. 'G' officers had

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.432920/42.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A.730347/44.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.O. A.794/44.

undergone the course. After the closing down of the 'A' course the 'C' course and the Instructors' course carried on together, but the size of the school, with a peak student population of fifty, was now hardly large enough to warrant the heavy overheads involved. On 3 October 1945, the Instructors' Course closed, having trained approximately 320 officers in its eighteen months of existence.<sup>1</sup> During the last few courses it had been opened to officers of all branches. The 'C' course alone obviously could not continue at Stratford on such uneconomic lines, and on 7 November 1945, the W.A.A.F. Officers' School closed down, after five years of useful life, while the 'C' course moved to Stoke Orchard, to form, with the N.C.O.s' School, part of the combined W.A.A.F. School of Administration.

Stoke Orchard was a wartime camp, and a converted airfield. The buildings were not unduly dispersed; but the outside ablutions and huddled accommodation provided an environment not conducive to training, particularly when compared with Stratford and Windermere. Staff shortage and the fact that the move took place during the winter months added to the disadvantages. For some time, intakes to the 'C' course had been well below the planned peak, and with the move to Stoke Orchard the position did not improve. Numbers declined steadily, due to the release of officers, and the consequent inability of units to spare those who remained. After six intakes in its new location the last officers' course was closed on 6 March 1946,<sup>2</sup> after running for three years, all but one week, and training approximately 2,120 officers. It should perhaps be mentioned that many officers—at one time it was estimated to be around 2,000—never attended any officers' course except their initial or O.C.T.U. training during the whole of their career.

### Senior Officers

As a result of the hasty mobilization and rapid expansion of the W.A.A.F., its senior officers lacked both experience and training, and the changing character of the Service during the first four years of war, the fluid nature of its system of administration and the fact that the scope of the service was, of necessity, not defined, all added to the difficulties of training its senior officers, yet emphasized the need for their training. In the autumn of 1940, D.W.A.A.F. asked for training in staff duties for her existing and potential staff officers. Technical Training Command and the officer commanding the R.A.F. Staff College courteously pointed out that 'the duties which W.A.A.F. staff officers fulfil were unknown to them, and a very complete knowledge of their functions either on a Group Staff or at Commands would be required for drawing up a syllabus for their instruction. The duties allocated to W.A.A.F. staff officers would appear to vary in a high degree and it would be appreciated that, until some uniform policy was laid down as to what was required of these officers, it would be impossible to formulate a syllabus of instruction.'<sup>3</sup>

Therein lay the crux of the problem; until their terms of reference were clarified, it would not be possible to train W.A.A.F. Staff Officers; a vicious circle, for the duties of a new service could hardly be defined if the abilities of its officers remained an unknown quantity. So the matter lapsed for a while, was

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 579396/43.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File 329240/45.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File A. 137850/40.



revived again by D.W.A.A.F., and eventually a so-called staff course for senior officers began. There were ten of these courses of ten working days, each with an intake of twenty, the first in August 1942, the last in January 1943. The trainees were all staff or potential staff officers, and instruction was in the hands of a squadron officer and a squadron leader, loaned from Balloon Command. Various lectures were also given by service and civilian speakers. The instruction bore little resemblance to that given at the R.A.F. Staff College, and, indeed, on the whole, the trainees felt they had gained little from the course. An interesting report, submitted by the two instructors, indicates clearly that the instructors felt that the course was inadequate; much more time and more instructors were needed, if really good results were to be obtained.<sup>1</sup>

Meantime, during the consideration of Section 19 of the Markham Report, the question of the 'broader education' of the senior officers was raised by the Air Member for Training.<sup>2</sup> A grandiose scheme of a 'feminine Imperial Defence College' for the three women's services, to 'spread the correct doctrine of woman management in war' was put forward, crushed, and followed by a discussion lasting for over a year. Everyone concerned appreciated the senior officers' need for more and better training; no-one agreed on the type of training, either in detail or in broad outline, nor whether the W.A.A.F. should have its own staff college or should be allocated places in the R.A.F. Staff College. In the end, it was agreed that suitable W.A.A.F. officers should attend the R.A.F. School of Administration at Stannington. Between August 1943 and May 1945, two Wing Officers, thirty Squadron Officers and forty-two Flight Officers attended the senior course, and nineteen Flight Officers attended the junior course. On the whole, these officers did well on the courses, and derived great benefit from them; but the senior officers, many of whom had held staff appointments for years, were still untrained. The problem was ventilated several times at the W.A.A.F. Standing Conference, and was discussed at the thirteenth meeting of the W.A.A.F. Advisory Council on 5 January 1945. D.W.A.A.F. appreciated most clearly the need of her senior officers for training in staff duties, and also the need for clarification of their terms of reference; on the recommendation of the W.A.A.F. Advisory Council in May 1945, A.M.O. A.727/45 laid down the duties and status of the W.A.A.F. Staff Officer.

D.W.A.A.F. put forward a considered request for adequate training in staff duties for her officers. The request was received with sympathy and agreed in principle; but at that stage, mid-1945, it was clearly not possible to embark on any new and lengthy training course; the future of the service was most uncertain, releases were about to start and there was doubt as to which individual officers would remain in the service. An extremely short course of five days was suggested and agreed as an interim measure during Phase II; but, with the defeat of Japan, conditions changed rapidly again, and this short course never took place owing to the shortage of officers.

### **The W.A.A.F. Instructor**

As has already been stated, the policy from the first was that W.A.A.F. training establishments should be run as far as possible by W.A.A.F. personnel. In spite of the difficulty of finding suitable instructors combining ability to instruct with knowledge of their subject, the policy was firmly followed at the

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.137850/40.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.482277/43.

Officers' and N.C.O.s' Schools, and at the Depots. N.C.O. and recruit training did not present any great difficulties concerning knowledge since the training was of an elementary nature; but officer training always offered a problem, in that the instructors might frequently be called upon to instruct officers considerably their senior, and possibly, particularly in the early days, with as much basic practical experience as themselves. In spite of the disadvantages of lack of experience, however, the schools stood on their own feet from the beginning, and as early as December 1940, it was stressed that 'there is no intention of establishing R.A.F. officer personnel at the W.A.A.F. Officers' Training School, Bulstrode Park'.<sup>1</sup>

The chief requirements in a potential instructor were stated to be:—

- (a) Lecturing ability of high standard.
- (b) Judgment and ability to assess others.
- (c) Smart appearance and ability to set an example.

The choice of staff for the schools was considered of paramount importance, because the quality of the instruction given had a strong bearing on the future of officers, N.C.O.s and recruits, and a careful watch was kept for likely material among the student officers who passed through the school. It was found that continuous lecturing was a considerable strain on personnel, and that posting away from instructional duties after a time became essential to efficiency. The period to be spent on training was, at first, normally one year, although many of the first training officers remained on these duties for a much greater time. Later, when the introduction of more frequent breaks between courses and liaison visits for refresher purposes to a certain extent relieved the strain of continuous training, the accepted 'tour' on instructional duties was increased to eighteen months. This was found to be more satisfactory from the aspect of training efficiency, since it generally took several months for an officer to become proficient as an instructor, and frequent posting was therefore uneconomic.

The policy of W.A.A.F. instructors paying liaison visits to representative units for the purpose of keeping up to date with current problems and developments, was first started in 1941.<sup>2</sup> These visits, providing an opportunity to observe all types of units at work, were of great benefit to the instructors in providing additional background when instructing courses of officers drawn from units with widely diverse functions. The scheme also provided for visits to the Air Ministry Departments where instructors could obtain the most up-to-date information on their particular subjects.

For a considerable time after the opening of the various W.A.A.F. training schools, the officers posted to the schools for instructional duties were responsible for developing their own lecture technique, and for adopting a personal system of preparing their material. Some of them had had experience of teaching or public speaking before the war, but many had not, and so the introduction, in November 1943, of an Instructors' Course was of great benefit.<sup>3</sup> The course was not confined to the Instructor Staff of the schools, nor did by any

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File 121425/40.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File 579396/43.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File 308090/41.

means all of the existing instructors attend it, but it proved a valuable training ground for new instructors, and provided all who took the course with a basic knowledge of instruction technique.

Apart from the officers and N.C.O.s employed on training at the W.A.A.F. schools, W.A.A.F. instructors, both officers and N.C.O.s, were successful in other fields of training, such as code and cypher work, parachute packing, telephone and teleprinter operating, and were employed as instructors on these courses at the R.A.F. schools concerned.

## CHAPTER 12

### SUBSTITUTION <sup>1</sup>

From one point of view, the history of substitution is the history of the W.A.A.F., since the organization and administration of the service were built up in order that substitution of women for men might take place. It was not originally intended that the W.A.A.F. should grow very large; the establishment in peace-time was about 3,000 and the strength about 2,000, but when substitution began immediately recruitment up to 10,000 was authorized, and later expansion to 20,000 was agreed. Compared with the numbers finally achieved, amounting to 182,000 or more than the whole strength of the R.A.F. at the outbreak of the war, these figures seem fantastically small; but they are also the reason for many of the difficulties which were experienced during the quick growth of the service.

Substitution began in a modest and limited way. In the summer of 1940, however, when the immensity of the war effort was becoming increasingly apparent, the question of substitution was reconsidered on a far greater scale. The Secretary of State for Air had expressed the view in May 1940,<sup>2</sup> that it was unfortunate that so small a proportion of W.A.A.F. trades had a direct relation to aircraft. If there were any method of employing women on duties directly connected with the repair and maintenance of aircraft parts, he thought it might have 'most favourable results' on the service as a whole. In August 1940, a Standing Committee to consider the substitution of W.A.A.F. for R.A.F. was set up by the Air Council.<sup>3</sup> Its duties were:—

- (a) To keep under review the general policy of substituting W.A.A.F. for R.A.F. personnel having regard to the manpower position and the war situation—and in particular
- (b) To investigate the practicability of
  - (i) Extending the substitution of airwomen for airmen in R.A.F. trades already employing W.A.A.F. personnel, and
  - (ii) Substituting airwomen for airmen in R.A.F. trades not previously open to the W.A.A.F. and to make recommendations.

The Committee held its first meeting on 20 December 1940, and began its work by examining the possibility of increased substitution in each R.A.F. trade in which airwomen were employed, and of the admission of women to those trades still closed to them. In making its decisions, the Committee's guiding principle was that no work should be done by a man if a woman could do it or be trained to do it.

On the outbreak of war, W.A.A.F. officers were appointed only for administrative duties, whilst airwomen were enrolled for administration, as cooks, mess and kitchen orderlies, clerks, equipment assistants, motor transport drivers and balloon fabric workers. By the end of 1940, however, when the Substitution Committee began its work, W.A.A.F. officers were replacing R.A.F. officers on Code and Cypher and on Photographic Interpretation duties, and the employment of women had spread to the following trades:—

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.96084/40.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File S.85564.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.70819/40.

- Group II Instrument Mechanic  
Wireless Telegraphy (Slip Reader) Operator.
- Group III Fabric Worker (Balloon).  
Fabric Worker (Balloon Rigger).
- Group IV Equipment Assistant.  
Clerk Special Duties.  
Clerk General Duties.  
Clerk Accounts.  
Administrative.  
Teleprinter Operator.  
Radio Operator.
- Group V Cook.  
Telephone Operator.  
Mess and Kitchen staff.  
Motor Transport Driver.  
Dental Surgery attendant.  
Sick Quarters attendant.  
Aircrafthand.

By the time the Committee had completed its work in October 1945, women had been substituted in 15 officer appointments and 59 airmen's trades, in addition to 17 ancillary trades established solely for W.A.A.F. and four specialist W.A.A.F. trades.

When substitution was first planned, it was assumed that in all trades three women would be required to replace two men, and the first war establishment for the W.A.A.F. was on this basis. Experience showed, however, that this assumption was incorrect, and the Committee recommended that substitution should be on the basis of one woman for one man except in the following cases:—

- M.T. drivers —three for two to allow for night duties.
- Cooks —three for two because of the heavy nature of part of the work.
- Balloon operators—sixteen for eleven.

Later the ratios for even these trades were reduced. The proportion of substitution which the Committee recommended in the various trades during its five years of work was governed at different times by certain limiting factors:—

- (a) A certain number of men had to be left in each trade to meet overseas requirements. This brake on substitution remained fairly constant throughout the war.
- (b) Lack of training facilities and accommodation often restricted substitution, particularly in the early part of the war.
- (c) Before the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations 1941, were brought into force, the W.A.A.F. was not fully subject to the Air Force Act, and substitution was accordingly limited because
  - (i) W.A.A.F. personnel had no power of command or authority to give orders to the members of the R.A.F., and could not, for disciplinary reasons, substitute in posts above the rank of corporal, and

- (ii) there was no power to hold W.A.A.F. personnel to their contract; it was consequently uneconomical to substitute women for men in trades which required extensive training, if they could 'walk out' at will.
- (d) The Air Council did not approve of having W.A.A.F. personnel on Squadron Establishments. The reason was obvious, mobility of squadrons had to be maintained, and only by employing men could the continuity of the work be safeguarded. Constant movement of squadrons overseas or to places in this country where there were no adequate facilities for women made the employment of women generally impracticable.
- (e) The Cabinet refused to change the embargo on women carrying lethal weapons.

Many of the jobs in which W.A.A.F. personnel replaced men involved work which was highly secret, e.g. 'Y' duties, radar and code and cypher, and when substitution first began to take shape a great deal of doubt was expressed as to whether women would be sufficiently discreet and refrain from talking in public about their work. It was soon quite clear, however, that these fears were without foundation. Women rarely spoke about their work outside their places of duty, and kept operational and technical secrets all through the war years.

A great deal of the substitution, particularly in the highly skilled technical trades, was undertaken only after experiment. Most of the experiments were successful, and substitution on a considerable scale usually followed. A complete list of the officer branches and airwomen trades together with a chart showing the ratios and percentages of substitution in each trade appear among the appendices.

### Technical Trades

Because of the belief that women were not mechanically minded and were therefore unable to undertake the highly skilled trades, substitution in these trades was brought about cautiously and slowly, and certain of the skilled trades were broken down, the simpler part of the trade being converted into an ancillary and purely W.A.A.F. trade, e.g. sparking plug tester, charging board operator and instrument mechanic. Thus, skilled R.A.F. fitters, who had been previously employed on such duties, were released for work where their skill was badly needed. In 1943, the trades of sparking plug tester, charging board operator and instrument mechanic were declared obsolete, as it had by that time been proved that women were quite capable of undertaking the full duties of the parent trades, i.e. flight mechanic (engine), electrician II and instrument repairer II. Before that time came, however, much experimental work had to be done. In April 1941, when the Committee consulted Commands on employing women in Group I trades, the general opinion was that it was not possible because, they said, women had no inherent mechanical instinct, nor had they the necessary mathematical education and could not be trained in the time available to reach the degree of skill required for these highly technical trades. The same principle applied to some Group II trades, but it was agreed that women might be trained in others. It was therefore decided that a certain

number of airwomen should be trained and tried out at units to see if they were a success in the following trades:—

Armourer (ground).

Electrician II.

Flight Mechanic (airframe).

Flight Mechanic (engine).

Motor Transport Mechanic.

Instrument Repairer II.

For some time these were referred to as the experimental trades, the courses were long and the success of the women could not be estimated quickly. Some time had to elapse, therefore, after the initial experiments before substitution in these trades became at all substantial. By 1942, however, it was admitted that the experiment was 'highly successful', and, after consultation with Commands, substitution was recommended, generally up to 50 per cent, but qualified where necessary by the conditions in each Command. A higher rate of substitution was not considered practicable.

In October 1943, the Committee further recommended that from that date substitution as flight mechanics (airframe) and (engine) should be confined to non-operational units, though this recommendation was not always heeded. The proportions of substitution recommended were:—

Servicing squadron headquarters	50 per cent.
Flights (except Bomber)	25 per cent.
Bomber Command Flights	Nil.

Successful as women flight mechanics were on the whole, it was found that the one for one basis of substitution broke down when the proportion of substitution was high. In March 1944, Flying Training Command, which was the largest employer of W.A.A.F. flight mechanics, reported that they were unable to work for nine hours a day, the normal working day for the R.A.F. mechanics at that time. Dilution was increasing and the Command's difficulties were increasing proportionately. Certain jobs were too heavy for women, and though, with a low rate of dilution, it was simple to allocate the relatively light tasks to the W.A.A.F., as dilution increased this became more difficult and the employment of women was less economical. To do the same amount of work in the same time it was estimated that 175 airwomen flight mechanics would be needed to replace 100 airmen. The opinion was expressed that, while W.A.A.F. flight mechanics were excellent at the work and did well in normal times, they were physically unable to stand the pressure imposed by rush conditions. In the light of this fact the Committee recommended that, in future, the ratio of substitution for flight mechanics should vary with the percentage as follows:—

Up to 25 per cent establishment W.A.A.F./R.A.F.	—1/1
From 26 to 50 per cent establishment W.A.A.F./R.A.F.	—1.1/1
From 51 to 75 per cent establishment W.A.A.F./R.A.F.	—1.2/1

In practice, however, such was the shortage of man and woman power at that time, that the W.A.A.F. strength was spread over units as evenly as possible so that the higher ratios were avoided.

Since women had shown themselves capable of substituting in some Group II trades, it was agreed that they might substitute to a limited extent in the corresponding Group I trades, the amount of substitution in these trades to be based on the target strength forecast for 1 July 1945. This allowed a basis of 1 to 6 substitution in the fitter trades and 1 to 9 in the electrical and instrument trades on all units where Group II trades were allowed, a rate which provided work which airwomen could perform without physical difficulty, and on which they could work an equal number of hours with men. The introduction of substitution in these Group I trades also gave airwomen in the technical trades a chance for promotion to N.C.O. rank. A limited number of W.A.A.F. N.C.O.s who were introduced for non-technical supervision only, were given the paid acting rank of corporal and were appointed at the rate of one N.C.O. to ten airwomen.

### **Signal Trades <sup>1</sup>**

The Signals Branch was expanded enormously immediately war broke out, and telephone and teleprinter operators were among the first women to be substituted for men. Throughout the war the proportion of substitution in these trades remained as high as 75 per cent, and in the autumn of 1943 it was suggested that it might be increased to 100 per cent, but this proposal had to be abandoned because of the necessity of keeping sufficient men in these trades to meet overseas requirements. The trades of teleprinter operator and telephonist presented few problems except those which belonged to all watch-keeping trades. Substitution was on a one to one basis, no modification in conditions was as a rule necessary, and women did well in these trades. In practice, however, it was found easier to run all W.A.A.F. or all R.A.F. crews rather than mixed crews, and this was done wherever possible.

Substitution in all other signals trades was approached with caution, since here again there was doubt as to whether women could perform the duties of the more technical trades sufficiently well for them to take the place of men without lowering the standard of work. The exception was the trade of radio-telephone operator, and in this case reluctance was due not to any doubt of women's capabilities for these duties—indeed the quality of their voices was expected to be an aid to success—but to the nature of the language passing

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#### <sup>1</sup> *Trades*

- Clerk General Duties (code and cypher).
- Radar Mechanic (air).
- Radar Mechanic (ground).
- Radar Operator.
- Radar Operator (computer).
- Radio Assistant.
- Radio-telephone Operator II.
- Radio-telephone Operator IV.
- Telegraphist.
- Telephonist.
- Teleprinter Operator.
- Wireless Mechanic.
- Wireless Operator.
- Wireless Operator Mechanic.
- Wireless Telephone Slip Reader.

#### *Officer Branches*

- Code and cypher.
- Signals 'G'.
- Signals Supervisory Radar.
- Signals Special Radar.



through. Pilots, it was thought, would lack confidence in women and mistrust their ability to understand quickly the technical terms normally used. The women, however, seem to have weathered the initial experiment successfully because, in December 1940, the Substitution Committee recommended that substitution at the rate of 50 per cent should take place in Fighter Command, and for regional control in Bomber and Coastal Commands.

When substitution in the trade of wireless operator was first suggested, it was limited to 'Y' stations. The airwomen who were employed at these stations did their very important work extremely well, though they were employed at small isolated units, sometimes under very uncomfortable conditions. Their work was largely concerned with interception, and a knowledge of certain foreign languages was essential, hence women were very carefully selected for this work. In October 1941, as it was reported that airwomen had done extremely well as wireless telegraphy operators, it was decided to employ them on all work of this kind except operational or D/F channels. In April 1943, it was agreed that this form of substitution had been so successful that it should be increased to 75 per cent in home establishments over the whole range of ground posts, including D/F. It was in these D/F posts, however, that women were least successful. In general they were considered to be temperamentally unsuited to this type of work, and they were gradually withdrawn from D/F duties and absorbed into the ordinary W/T establishments.

Despite early doubts, substitution as wireless mechanics and radar mechanics, once it started, was successful, but early in 1944 it became difficult to get enough women to maintain the proportion of substitution at  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent in both these trades, and it was decided that further training was to be confined to the trade of wireless mechanic. Women were also successful as radar operators and the Director of Signals would have filled 75 per cent of the home posts with them if it had not been for the overseas requirements for men.

Employment of women in many of the signals trades, e.g. radar and wireless mechanics, W/T and R/T operators, was limited by the undesirability of employing W.A.A.F. personnel at dispersal points and at detached or isolated units. The general rule that airwomen should not be on night duty alone was another limiting factor, though all these limitations were ignored at times. Generally speaking, airwomen were successful in the signals trades. The work was often of a repetitive nature, but the women were conscientious, careful and accurate, qualities essential in all these duties. Their work must often have been boring and monotonous; but the women put up with that cheerfully for the most part, and adapted themselves to periods of slackness as well as to times of stress and overwork.

The same remarks apply to the officers in the Signals Branches. Code and Cypher officers, the first substitution officers, began by filling most of the posts in home units early in the war. Later they went to many theatres overseas. Few would disagree with the statement that women were on the whole more successful than men at this work. They seemed to realize the importance of combining accuracy with speed, and, moreover, were able to put this into practice far more successfully than most men. At the same time, it must be admitted that few men of ability ever undertook code and cypher duties, whereas the same is certainly not true of the women. With the exception of the

senior posts in Command Headquarters and some overseas posts, code and cypher duties were carried out entirely by W.A.A.F. officers during most of the war. By October 1943, it had been decided that even the senior posts at Commands should be annotated in establishments 'may be filled by W.A.A.F. officers'. Code and Cypher officers were the first of the W.A.A.F. to go overseas, but the history of their work in overseas theatres is dealt with in Part III. Apart from W.A.A.F. 'G', Code and Cypher was by far the largest officer branch in the W.A.A.F. On 1 September 1942, there were 1,366; on 1 July 1943, there were 1,231. With practically no prospects of promotion to cheer them on during all their years of service, W.A.A.F. code and cypher officers nevertheless did a good job of work, many of them attaining a high standard of efficiency, and all of them needing to keep their wits about them if they were to keep abreast of the constantly changing methods and regulations which governed their work. Early in 1943, airwomen N.C.O.s were mustered into the trade of clerk general duties (cypher) and were employed in many cypher offices, though the scope of their work was limited.

One achievement deserves special mention, because the work performed by the W.A.A.F. officers concerned was unusual, outstanding and not in the normal line of W.A.A.F. duty; it was an assignment which was considered a great honour. In April 1942, W.A.A.F. officers were asked to be responsible for the code and cypher work of the War Cabinet. This meant not only the code and cypher work as such, but also the clerical work connected with the reproduction and circulation of signals to and from Chiefs of Staff, War Cabinet and Prime Minister. The same few officers were entrusted with the work from start to finish; they were therefore carefully selected for their secretarial as well as for their technical knowledge and ability, and, of course, for their discretion. The Air Ministry Special Signals Office, later renamed the Cabinet Offices Cypher Office, was set up in the Air Ministry, Whitehall, to deal with this high level work. The officers worked directly with the Defence Office, and in 1943 a few more W.A.A.F. code and cypher officers were sent to work in the Defence Office itself to help with distribution.

From the time of the vital Malta convoys and the assault on Madagascar, all through the planning of the North African landing and the assault on the coast of Western Europe to the eventual surrender of Germany, the atom bomb and the surrender of Japan, most of the signals between the War Cabinet and the commanders in the field and the Chiefs of Staff Mission in America passed through this office. When the Prime Minister left the country to confer with other heads of State, the signal traffic became almost too heavy to be borne; but it was borne with pride, and these overworked officers would have been the first to complain if this work had been taken away from them. When the Prime Minister went to Marrakesh in December 1943, and again, nine months later, when he went to Quebec, some of the officers went with him to handle the signals traffic. Five officers also went to Yalta, four to help with the distribution of signals in the Defence Office, and one as adviser to the forty or so W.R.N.S. who undertook the actual cypher traffic. Three officers went to the conference at Potsdam. When work became increasingly heavy at the end of 1943, and some non-Top-Secret messages were also handled, the establishment was increased to include a few airwomen. These airwomen were also employed on certain routine clerical jobs, and their care and devotion to their work should be

mentioned. By the end of the war the Cabinet Offices Cypher Office had received a number of letters which showed that the quality of their work had been recognized and appreciated in high quarters.

Substitution of Signals Officers was introduced far more slowly. It was not expected that women would be able to replace men in many signals posts, and training did not start until the latter half of 1942. This first course for twenty officers was more or less experimental, but by February 1943, the establishment for W.A.A.F. signals officers had been raised to 180. They were not required to undertake the full range of duties of a R.A.F. officer as they were not employed with aircraft, but in the particular posts in which they were employed, their technical ability was regarded as equal to that of the R.A.F. Before women could become Radar officers they were expected to have certain qualifications, such as B.Sc. degree and some suitable experience in civil life, and the numbers involved were small.

### Balloon Operators

In 1940 the Air Council investigated the possibility of replacing the R.A.F. balloon operators by airwomen. The protests of the Air Officer Commanding, Balloon Command and his W.A.A.F. Staff Officer were set aside, and the experiment of training women in balloon handling was made and deemed satisfactory by the Director, W.A.A.F. and by the Director-General of Medical Services. The Air Officer Commanding thereupon threw himself with wholehearted enthusiasm into the task and pressed for as great a degree of substitution as possible throughout his Command; the ratio was at first twenty per crew, then sixteen, then fourteen as against nine in a R.A.F. crew. By the end of 1942 there were 15,700 W.A.A.F. balloon operators replacing men in the ratio of 14 to 9. This was, in every way, the most extravagant form of substitution in the service; it implied:

- (a) More than 1.5 women to one man.
- (b) Far more extravagant accommodation, for the W.A.A.F. had two huts and an ablution hut, whereas the men had only one hut.
- (c) Extra men at Flight and Squadron Headquarters to lift the folded balloons on and off the trucks, and to assist the W.A.A.F. crews in handling the balloon in high winds and bad weather.
- (d) Extra W.A.A.F. officers at the Flight and Squadron Headquarters who had not the technical knowledge or physical strength to replace the R.A.F. officers but who were needed to supervise the airwomen.
- (e) Extra mechanical aids in the actual balloon handling equipment and the preparation of the balloon bed.
- (f) Extra mechanical aids to start up the engines of the winches.

The W.A.A.F. balloon operators were happy and liked their work and their life on a balloon site; there was surprisingly little trouble, considering that they were very young, were in small parties with a young N.C.O., and were often in or near dock areas or on lonely sites; they behaved with great gallantry under fire; but in spite of all this, the substitution was by no means a success. W.A.A.F. crews could not go overseas, nor could they man mobile balloons. When a curtain of balloons was needed to protect London from the flying bombs, Balloon Command was hard put to it to find enough R.A.F. crews to man them.

It was quite impossible to use W.A.A.F. crews, because there were no concrete balloon beds, no central anchorage, no living or cooking accommodation, and the women were unable to tackle the heavy lifting necessary under these conditions. Large numbers of the W.A.A.F. balloon operators were declared redundant in January 1943, when Balloon Command was considerably reduced in size and further substitution was stopped at that point. Large reductions were again made during the following eighteen months and the trade was finally declared obsolete in 1944.

### **Clerical Trades<sup>1</sup>**

Women substituted for men in the clerical trades easily and successfully. The work generally had few technical problems or medical drawbacks, and as soon as the general substitution basis of three to two was raised to one to one, the clerical trades were planned on that basis. Clerks general duties, who needed the ordinary but useful accomplishments of typing and shorthand and the ability to pick up office routine quickly, filled airmen vacancies immediately war was declared. The first women to do this work were usually well-trained and efficient because they had been doing responsible jobs up to the outbreak of war. Later, airwomen were trained as clerks general duties and there was never any difficulty about women filling these vacancies. In general they were more efficient than the men, and replaced them in large numbers during the whole of the war. Substitution was planned in the proportion of 75 per cent and on 1 May 1945, W.A.A.F. personnel were filling 43 per cent of the posts. In February 1941, substitution up to 100 per cent was discussed but was rejected as impracticable because of overseas requirements. In August 1942 it was decided that women could do work in the R.A.F. Post Offices, including the handling of mail bags, which meant the employment of aircrafthands as well as of clerks general duties. Experience showed that airwomen gained better results than airmen in trade tests and generally were more adept on post office duties. Women substituted on a one for one basis, 50 per cent for clerk general duties posts, and 75 per cent for aircrafthand posts, though there were certain restrictions on handling mail bags above 50 lb. in weight.

Women early replaced men in the trade of clerk accounting. At first they had no special training, but on 18 November 1940 it was agreed that they could be employed to a far greater extent as clerks pay accounting and clerks equipment accounting if they were given the same training as men. As a result, substitution was at the rate of 75 per cent in home commands, and large numbers of women were absorbed into the accounts trades, filling 38 per cent of the posts on 1 May 1945.

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#### <sup>1</sup> *Trades*

- Clerks (Personnel Selection).
- Clerks Accounting.
- Clerks Equipment Accounts.
- Clerks General Duties.
- Clerks General Duties (Maps).
- Clerks General Duties (Postal).
- Clerks General Duties (Technical).
- Clerks Provisioning.
- Embarkation Assistant.

#### *Officer Branches*

- Administration 'G.'
- Accounts.

Officers were needed as well as airwomen, and in April 1941 it was agreed that women officers should substitute in the Accounts Branch to the extent of one in three up to and including posts of the rank of Flight Lieutenant. These women were to be chosen from within the service or by direct entry providing they had suitable qualifications. They were never a very strong band numerically; on 1 September 1942 there were twelve, and by 1 July 1943 the number had only increased to sixty-three. More women could have been absorbed into this branch had it been possible to get them with the proper qualifications, but those who did become Accountant Officers worked hard and were extremely efficient at their job. Ultimately there were five squadron officer posts.

Women were also employed in the trade of clerk personnel selection, and during the latter part of the war this trade was manned entirely by women. These officers and airwomen were responsible for the administration of psychological and educational tests, and handling the follow-up data, by means of which further improvement of method was possible. Success in such varied fields as aircrew grading and classification, instructor selection, vocational advice service, normal ground selection, beside very material help given in basic research, was possible because of the efficiency and integrity of the W.A.A.F. personnel in this trade.

Various kinds of officer posts were gathered under the heading of Administration 'G'. The earliest and most important were those for Assistant Adjutants. On 18 November 1940 it was decided that W.A.A.F. officers might undertake the duties of assistant adjutant, though at that time the scope of their work was limited by the fact that the W.A.A.F. was not part of His Majesty's Forces and had no power to give orders to the R.A.F. A few months later it was decided that W.A.A.F. officers could substitute to the extent of 75 per cent in assistant adjutant posts. It was not thought desirable for them to fill Station Adjutant posts, one of the difficulties in this case being the fact that W.A.A.F. officers could not sit on Courts Martial. Some W.A.A.F. officers, however, did in fact become adjutants later, and on the whole, this was a very satisfactory form of substitution. W.A.A.F. officers also substituted to a certain extent in 'P' staff posts, but as a general rule they were only allowed to fill one post in three.

### **Driver, Motor Transport**

This was one of the pre-war trades. It had a great attraction for many women and those who became drivers could rarely be persuaded to relinquish their trade for other or more responsible work. Conditions were far from ideal in many cases, there was a great deal of black-out driving, airwomen sometimes found themselves at night many miles away from their stations faced with the problem of finding some place in which to sleep, and their hours of duty often made regular meals impossible. At the beginning of the war, substitution was in the ratio of three to two, and remained at that figure to allow for night duties. Later it was increased to four to five, and finally to the normal one to one ratio, though certain restrictions always governed the type of vehicle airwomen might drive. These restrictions grew lighter as the war lengthened, at first women were only allowed to drive vehicles up to 15 cwt., but later this was increased to 30 cwt. They were not, however, allowed to lift heavy weights, change heavy wheels or crank up engines from cold. These restrictions affected substitution in certain places, Radar stations, for instance, except in southern

England, were considered unsuitable because of the possibility of breakdown at night in isolated parts of the country. Women were also eligible to fill Motor Transport Officer posts; but there were never very many of them, nor were they particularly successful. They were required to have the same technical qualifications as the male candidates, and there were very few women who possessed them.

### **Meteorological Assistant**

At first all meteorological assistants were civilians, and the policy at the beginning of the war was to use civilians for as long as it was possible to get them. When this source of supply failed, airwomen were trained, and their work was controlled by the civilian officials, most of whom were later absorbed into the R.A.F. They worked for long hours on a watch system and made meteorological observations in all weathers and at all hours of the day and night. A certain standard of education was necessary before an airwoman was considered suitable to take the training; most of those who took it found the work interesting and worthwhile, being, as it was, in close relationship to flying operations. Substitution was at the rate of 100 per cent with the proviso that there must be sufficient men to meet overseas requirements. This trade absorbed a considerable number of women; on 1 September 1942 there were 1,013, and on 1 July 1943 there were 1,834, including those under training. To become an officer in the Meteorological Branch was more difficult. It was necessary to have a suitable university degree, though later meteorological airwomen were considered for commissions in this branch provided they had Intermediate or Higher School Certificate mathematics or physics. W.A.A.F. meteorological officers were employed mainly as forecasters at specially selected places, such as Night Fighter Sector Control stations, as it was thought they could not be employed on briefing aircrews on weather.

### **Equipment**

Substitution of airwomen in the trade of equipment assistant was in the proportion of  $66\frac{2}{3}$  per cent in June 1942; but because of the heavy stores and packages which had to be moved at Universal Equipment Depots it was reduced at these units to 20 per cent. Substitution had been agreed at the one to one ratio, with one R.A.F. aircrafthand provided for every four airwomen for heavy lifting. In October 1943 the Substitution Committee considered reports from Commands which said that the  $66\frac{2}{3}$  proportion of substitution was in many cases being exceeded, which meant a consequent reduction in the percentage of airmen retained for heavy duties, and as a result many of the airwomen had to do far too much heavy lifting. Because of this and the need for providing for overseas requirements, substitution was reduced to 50 per cent and the ratio of R.A.F. aircrafthands for heavy duties was maintained.

The employment of W.A.A.F. officers for equipment duties was first discussed in March 1941. The Director of Equipment was of the opinion that only junior posts and those only in certain Commands were suitable. He was also strongly opposed to women equipment officers being employed on operational stations because, if a squadron had to go overseas, it was essential that the equipment officer should accompany the squadron. As a result the Substitution Committee recommended that W.A.A.F. officers could replace R.A.F. equipment officers in posts up to and including those of Flight Lieutenant rank, subject to

detailed investigations of the posts. Substitution was in the proportion of 50 per cent but it could not be put into force to this extent until W.A.A.F. officers had become fully qualified by attending the explosives course. It was decided that they should be permitted to do so; but, since the course included instruction on the effect of gas and chemical weapons, all the officers had to be volunteers. Women did good work as equipment officers, in fact, the first woman Station Commander was a Squadron Officer Equipment. In 1944 she was posted to command No. 210 Maintenance Unit, and remained there until 1946, perfectly satisfactory both as a commanding officer and a technical officer. More women could have been absorbed into this branch if suitable candidates could have been found to undertake the work; but civilian foremen and labourers often objected to being controlled by women, many of whom were considerably younger than these old hands, and substitution was decreased to 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  per cent at civilian manned units. On 1 July 1943 there were 280 W.A.A.F. equipment officers.

### Domestic Trades <sup>1</sup>

Airwomen did not undertake the duties of mess steward until April 1941, when the lack of stewards was making itself seriously felt. There was discussion for some time as to whether a clerk or cook was really the best type of person for this trade, and selection at that stage was becoming difficult. Here and there individual N.C.O.s did excellent work; but on the whole the result of this substitution was disappointing, partly because it was introduced so late in the day, partly because of the indecision about the qualities and type of training required.

In the early days, W.A.A.F. cooks were employed as a rule in W.A.A.F. messes only. Early in 1940 training in service methods was inaugurated, first at Halton, and later at Melksham, and during that year they began to replace men in R.A.F. kitchens in the proportion of three to two, which was later decreased to five to four. Although substitution only began in 1940, by 1941, senior W.A.A.F. officers were already sending anxious reports to the Air Ministry that cooks were working too hard, for too long hours under difficult conditions, and were not getting adequate leave or days off, and in 1942 medical officers were reporting an increase in the incidence of sickness among cooks. An energetic recruiting drive for more women cooks was set in motion by the catering branch; working conditions were improved by the provision of adequate cloakrooms and rest-rooms attached to the cookhouses; commanding officers were asked to do all they could to relieve the pressure of work, and on most stations, messes were combined, self-service was introduced and meals simplified as far as possible. Even so, the vicious circle of shortage of staff, overwork, lack of leave, minor accidents and sickness persisted until the end of the war. The difficulty was aggravated by the serious shortage of aircraft-hands, both R.A.F. and W.A.A.F., was relieved a little by the use of Italian

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<sup>1</sup> *Trades*

Mess Steward.

Cook.

Waitress.

Batwoman.

Aircraft-hand, General Duties.

*Officer Branch*

Catering.

prisoners of war for rough work, but once more deteriorated when release started in 1945, and was so serious during that year that the standard of cooking declined sharply on many stations. The W.A.A.F. cooks did splendid work throughout the war; they accepted their hard work and unglamorous life without many complaints; they were certainly responsible, in part at any rate, for the improvement in the standard of cooking and of cleanliness in service kitchens which took place during the war; but it is noteworthy that few of them had any intention of being domestic servants or paid cooks in civilian life if they could avoid doing so.

W.A.A.F. waitresses were introduced into service messes in the very early days, rather to replace civilians than airmen. It was generally agreed that they improved the cleanliness and comfort of the messes; but they, too, were below strength during most of the war and suffered in the same way as did the cooks. Their hours of work were far too long, and, in the end, the quality of their work and the neatness of their appearance declined. This was, on the whole, a successful form of substitution.

The introduction of batwomen in officers' quarters in 1941 caused some alarm and some curiously worded instructions to R.A.F. officers. The women were to be employed in single officers' quarters only; in the few cases where officers' wives succeeded in acquiring a batwoman, there was a tendency to regard her purely as a domestic servant; the airwoman had the worst of both worlds, for she worked long hours for little pay but had none of the life of the W.A.A.F. section. During 1941 and 1942, batwomen were selected with reasonable care, and proved satisfactory; but during the next two years, the shortage became acute, selection was not possible and new recruits of all types, all very young, were mustered as batwomen. Their work was careless and inefficient, and their employment on dispersed sites in the operational commands caused much anxiety. The employment of women as batwomen was only partially successful, partly owing to the youth of the women, and partly to lack of training and insufficient care in selection.

There was, after 1942, a permanent shortage of aircrafthands, general duties, both in the R.A.F. and in the W.A.A.F. As a result, those in existence were almost always overworked, and, in any case, tended to be of the type who were incapable of learning a trade. The W.A.A.F. aircrafthand was given mainly rough work in the messes, usually unsuitable for women; most W.A.A.F. officers felt that the employment of W.A.A.F. aircrafthands in service messes and kitchens was undesirable, and could only be tolerated under stress of war.

It was decided, early in 1941, to try out twelve W.A.A.F. officers on catering duties; they were all Assistant Section Officers, carefully selected from the 'G' branch, all with good reputations in the service as well as civilian domestic science qualifications, and all were volunteers for catering duties. They had a difficult time, for many Group R.A.F. catering officers rather resented their entry into the branch, nor did they find it easy to get good co-operation from the senior R.A.F. cookhouse N.C.O.s, who were usually the type of men who objected to the presence of women in service kitchens, particularly as supervisors. The officers' promotion was extremely slow, at a time when it was rapid in other branches. Yet the experiment was a success. During 1942 and 1943 there were many direct entries as officers in this branch, for at that time the shortage of catering officers was serious. A few W.A.A.F. catering officers were posted to



the Far Eastern and Mediterranean theatres to supervise the native cooks and improve standards. On 1 July 1943 there were 252 W.A.A.F. catering officers in the service.

### Operations and Intelligence <sup>1</sup>

The first W.A.A.F. to be employed in Operations Rooms were the clerks special duties or plotters. They were among the first women to be trained in the W.A.A.F. and took up their stations in operations rooms soon after war began. They were watchkeepers and suffered from the usual watchkeeping difficulties, but in their work they were quick, calm, accurate and efficient, and were accepted immediately as a complete success. They substituted in the proportion of 75 per cent and their numbers ran into several thousands. On 1 September 1942 there were 6,228, and on 1 July 1943, 7,395, amounting to about 50 per cent of the R.A.F. strength.

The employment of W.A.A.F. officers in operations rooms was first considered by the Substitution Committee in April 1941. This was tied to the employment of women in intelligence posts, which was agreed to after consultation with the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Intelligence). In June 1941, Bomber Command proposed to employ W.A.A.F. officers in place of R.A.F. officers in certain operations and intelligence posts which were becoming interchangeable at stations, two posts out of four on each station and its satellite were to be filled by W.A.A.F. officers. At the same time the trade of clerk, special duties (watchkeeper) was introduced in Bomber Command so that W.A.A.F. sergeants could take over some of the work previously done by R.A.F. operations and intelligence officers, thus enabling these officers to devote more of their time to the interrogation of crews. Bomber Command also agreed to employ W.A.A.F. intelligence officers at Group and Command Headquarters if substitution could be carried out gradually. Other commands at that time, however, were unable to absorb any W.A.A.F. officers into their intelligence or intelligence/operations posts. From a psychological point of view it was thought that it would be inadvisable for women to brief or interrogate aircrews. In practice, however, this was not found to be the case and in later years women frequently interrogated aircrews. W.A.A.F. intelligence officers were also employed at the Air Ministry and in certain overseas theatres.

Filterer, Air Raid Warning Liaison, and Movement Control Liaison posts were also filled by W.A.A.F. officers, and substitution was in the proportion of 50 per cent. Coastal Command asked for 50 per cent substitution by W.A.A.F. officers as assistant controllers in operations rooms, i.e. W.A.A.F. officers for

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<sup>1</sup> *Trades*

Clerk Special Duties.  
Clerk Special Duties (Watchkeeper).

*Officer Branches*

Operations 'B.'  
Operations 'C.'  
Filter.  
Movements Liaison.  
Interception Controller.  
Intelligence.

two out of the four posts for Flying Officers at operational stations, and to this the Committee agreed. Altogether, the employment of women in operations rooms and on intelligence duties varied considerably in the different commands, but, taken as a whole, a considerable number of W.A.A.F. officers were absorbed in these branches. On 1 September 1942 there was a total of 286 intelligence and intelligence/operations officers, 130 operations rooms officers and eighty-nine filter and filterer officers. By 1 July 1943 the numbers were 327 intelligence and intelligence/operations, 193 operations rooms and 108 filter and filterer officers.

### **Photographic Interpretation**

The number of W.A.A.F. officers who could be employed in this branch was limited by overseas requirements, though some women went overseas in later years. The percentage of substitution was not laid down, but out of about 370 posts it had been expected that W.A.A.F. would fill 100. There were, in fact, 131 on 1 September 1942 and 127 on 1 July 1943.

### **Medical Trades**

The trade of medical orderly was introduced in the W.A.A.F. on 1 September 1939. It was devised and introduced by the W.A.A.F. Directorate which intended these airwomen to be used for nursing airwomen sick in billets, hostels or W.A.A.F. sick quarters. They were to be women of 'the motherly type' and over thirty-five years of age, to whom the airwomen would readily take their troubles, and were recruited from women who had had some previous nursing experience or who held the Red Cross Certificate. It is obvious that this allowed a wide divergence of experience, some of it decidedly meagre, and as these airwomen were selected and allocated at the W.A.A.F. depots without adequate assessment of their qualifications, and were posted to stations without any further training, it is not surprising that trouble soon followed. It is probably not unfair to say that in those days any woman who did not show aptitude for any of the other trades which were open at that time were mustered as medical orderlies. The lower age limit of thirty-five was particularly unfortunate as it ruled out all those young girls who had done perhaps a year or two of hospital training, and who would have been very good material, and it included a good many who may have been very motherly, but who were also unfortunately quite unteachable. Early in the following year, complaints began to reach the Medical Training Establishment and Depot on the unsuitability and inefficiency of these airwomen, who had been renamed sick quarter attendants, and it was decided to assess and train them all. In August 1940, the trade group M was formed to include sick quarter attendants. The lower age limit was reduced to twenty-five, with the exception of those who had previous experience who were accepted at eighteen. The Committee decided, in March 1941, in accordance with the views of the Director General of Medical Services, that airwomen could replace men up to 50 per cent in general and station hospitals and large sick quarters, and that the question of substitution on stations should be reviewed at a later date in the light of experience. The trade of sick quarter attendant was abolished, and that of nursing orderly substituted for it. This decision was first put into operation in September, when W.A.A.F.

trainees were posted to the hospitals at Morecambe, Weston, Hereford and Yatesbury, and R.A.F. nursing orderlies were withdrawn.<sup>1</sup>

After 1942 a few nursing orderlies were specially trained in burns work. The duties were arduous and rather harrowing, and the Director General of Medical Services advocated that they should be given a rest from this work after twelve months. Three or four nursing orderlies were also trained and annotated for rehabilitation duties.

In March 1942, it was decided to train W.A.A.F. nursing orderlies for duties with air ambulances. Volunteers were called for, and by June 1943, 214 nursing orderlies had been trained for these duties. At that time they were used only in the United Kingdom where they travelled with and looked after sick or injured personnel who were being taken by air to hospital or from one hospital to another, and they were particularly useful in this work between the Scottish islands and the mainland. More exciting duties were in store for them, however, for in March 1944, the Air Council approved their employment in connection with the forthcoming operations on the Continent, to escort casualties from the battle areas by aircraft to the United Kingdom. It was realized that this work would entail hardship and danger, but it was considered that the psychological effect on the wounded would be of great value, and volunteers were called for. These airwomen were included in the crews of transport aircraft, not ambulances, operating a freight shuttle service to the battle area. The aircraft took out freight and brought back wounded, and the nursing orderlies attended to them on the way. In March 1944, seventy-six nursing orderlies were posted to Casualty Air Evacuation Centres in Transport Command to undertake this work. On D-day plus 6 three of these nursing orderlies flew as members of the crews of the Dakotas which went over to France to bring back the first batch of wounded, and from that day onward, whenever the weather was favourable, this work continued. Forty trips were regarded as an operational tour.

### Medical Specialist Trades

In March 1941, the Director-General of Medical Services informed the Substitution Committee that he was prepared to accept W.A.A.F. personnel in the trades of dispenser, laboratory assistant, masseur and radiographer up to 100 per cent substitution, subject to overseas commitments being met by men. Women were accepted as dispensers provided they held one of the following civilian qualifications, Membership of the Pharmaceutical Society, the Certificate of the Society of Apothecaries of London or Dublin, or evidence of experience as a dispenser. In 1943 it was found that the lesser qualifications had not proved satisfactory, and from that time Membership of the Pharmaceutical Society was the only qualification that was accepted. There were thirty-nine W.A.A.F. dispensers serving at the end of 1944. Qualified women

<sup>1</sup> The growth of the trade can be seen from the following dates and strengths:—

1 October 1939	-	-	-	99
1 January 1940	-	-	-	220
1 January 1941	-	-	-	540
1 January 1942	.	-	-	2,500
1 January 1943	-	-	-	3,336
1 January 1944	-	-	-	3,538
1 October 1944	-	-	-	4,246

were accepted as masseuses; they were expected to be members of the Chartered Society of Massage and Medical Gymnastics, or be able to show evidence of experience as masseuses. There were fifty-one W.A.A.F. masseuses at the end of 1944, and during that year a small number of commissioned posts was established for both dispensers and masseuses. Women entering the trade of laboratory assistant were expected to hold the Certificate of the Pathological and Bacteriological Assistants Association, or show some evidence of experience as a laboratory assistant. Later, women who had passed an examination of the university entrance examination standard which included science were accepted for training. There were sixteen W.A.A.F. laboratory assistants at the end of 1944. The necessary qualification for the trade of radiographer was the Certificate of the Society of Radiographers or proof of civilian experience as a radiographer, but some women were trained in the service. Other medical trades opened to women during 1941 were those of chiropodist and operating room assistant. Chiropodists were expected to be members of one of the bodies incorporated in the Board of Registration of Medical Auxiliaries, while operating room assistants were asked for a reference signed by a surgeon of a civilian hospital or similar institution to the effect that they had been employed in this capacity in civil life. At the end of 1944 there were twenty-two chiropodists and forty-five operating room assistants.

### **Dental Hygienist**

Dental clerk orderlies were introduced early in 1941, and were so much more satisfactory than the type of airman available that Dental Officers tried to get 100 per cent substitution in this trade. This was prevented by the need for retaining airmen for overseas postings, and also by the W.A.A.F. regulations, which prohibited one airwoman from being posted to a station where there were no other members of the W.A.A.F., and would not allow one or even two airwomen to travel around in a mobile surgery. The regulation concerning mobile surgeries was, however, disregarded in some cases, notably in No. 60 Group. Many of the orderlies later became dental hygienists and did valuable work, justifying the extra training they received. They saved much of the dental officers' time, an important factor, for the service was short of dental officers. This trade attracted the clean, careful and intelligent type of airwoman who saw a chance of training herself for civilian life; she proved to be very satisfactory.

### **Safety Equipment Worker**

Parachute packers were first introduced in 1941 after some hesitation, for it was felt that young women, new to the service, might be a little careless and not realize that men's lives would literally hang on their work. In this trade, the use of women was completely justified; they were neat, careful, quick and thoroughly reliable. The same is true of the allied trades of parachute repairer, fabric worker, dinghy packer and repairer. In the end, there was a total of some 2,719 airwomen in these trades. Their hours were long and their chance of promotion slight; but they worked under pleasant conditions in warm packing rooms: more important still, they were working directly for the aircrews, an important factor for women, and sometimes they were even thanked personally by members of those crews whose lives had been saved by carefully packed parachutes. They were a contented body of women.

## Photographer

From the early days, efforts were made by R.A.F. officers concerned to recruit women into this trade; but, although a very large percentage of the people employed in the civilian photographic trade are women, for some reason substitution in this trade never went as far as might have been expected, amounting to only some 383 on 1 July 1943. Their employment was always limited by various restrictions, the most difficult to overcome being that they were not allowed to lift heavy cameras and fit them into aircraft.

## Miscellaneous Trades

There are a number of other trades which do not fit easily into any broad category and in which substitution never went very far. Acetylene welders only numbered eleven on 1 July 1943, and were all women with civilian experience in their trade. Armourers were always cramped by physical limitations, and by the fact that women were not allowed to handle lethal weapons; the W.A.A.F. armourers hardly ever did any more interesting work than that of filling ammunition belts. There were forty-six shoe repairers in July 1943, but much of the work of a cobbler, notably stripping off soles, is too hard for a woman's hands. Tailoresses on 1 July 1943, numbered just over 1,000, and replaced men in the proportion of one for one; naturally, one male tailor had to be retained in each tailor's shop to fit airmen's garments. Although the trade of pigeon keeper was opened to the W.A.A.F., no one was ever mustered into it. Cine-projectionists amounted to 504 on 1 July 1943. Their work was satisfactory, but, in the end, they found it monotonous. Hairdressers were introduced in 1942, mainly to help in the drive to combat head infection. They worked with the W.A.A.F. only, and their work was excellent; their little salons were usually bright and attractive, and they did much to help both the hygiene and the appearance of the W.A.A.F. Bomb plotters and drogue packers were sub-trades, introduced into Flying Training Command during 1942. The airwomen in these trades remained aircrafthands, general duties, but had a more interesting occupation than the average aircrafthand. W.A.A.F. police came into existence in 1941, and produced a high standard of efficiency. By 1945 there were forty-nine officers and 334 airwomen in the Provost Branch.



**PART III**

**OVERSEAS SERVICE**





## CHAPTER 13

### OVERSEAS SERVICE, GENERAL

Of the total number of women who served in the W.A.A.F., less than 9,000 or 4.5 per cent, proceeded overseas, all volunteers. The smallness of this percentage was not due to any lack of willingness, but rather to the reluctance of those in authority in the R.A.F. to agree to send women abroad. D.W.A.A.F. never pressed for such agreement; she felt that officers and airwomen should only be employed where they could be most useful and where they could with advantage replace men. Women cannot be sent overseas so readily as can men; the possible effect of climatic conditions, the concern of parents for their daughters, their security, both physical and psychological, the provision of special kit, of suitable accommodation in troopships, of medical arrangements and of living conditions—all these factors must be most carefully considered before the decision is taken. Accordingly, the posting of women to the various overseas theatres proceeded slowly; each request from overseas was carefully weighed in all its implications and due attention was given to the repeated plea that the presence of officers and airwomen would raise the morale of the R.A.F. in certain places. The posting of W.A.A.F. personnel was, however, only agreed when the shortage of manpower in certain trades or branches made it virtually essential; for example, urgent appeals for W.A.A.F. for Iceland and for certain small units in the West Indies were rejected because it was felt that the small amount of substitution which could be achieved would not justify all the difficulties which would have to be overcome.

Briefly, the first overseas posting was that of a few cypher officers to Washington, U.S.A., in June 1940. During 1941, officers were sent to serve both in Canada and in Egypt; in 1943 to North Africa, whence they followed the progress of the campaign to Tunis and Italy. In 1944 a few officers went to Gibraltar, and others, in 1945, proceeded for a short time to Denmark, Greece, Holland, Sweden and a few other countries, even to Moscow, with R.A.F. exhibitions, intended to make known the war effort of the R.A.F. Airwomen did not go overseas at all until May 1944, when the first draft sailed for the Mediterranean, to be followed by several others during the next eighteen months; in October 1944, the first draft left for the Far East, again followed by several others. In August 1944, a few officers and airwomen proceeded with Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force and 2nd Tactical Air Force to France; their numbers increased continually and they followed the move of the R.A.F. through France and Belgium into Germany, and eventually became part of the British Air Forces of Occupation. A few airwomen and one officer served for a few months in Norway in 1945, and some airwomen served for a short time with the Allied Control Commission in Austria. Three Code and Cypher officers went to Australia in October 1944, with the R.A.F. Mission, and, with two airwomen who joined them late in 1945, they remained there till 1946. When, in 1941, the Dominion of Canada, having decided to recruit Canadian women for service with the R.C.A.F., requested the loan of one or two W.A.A.F. officers, two senior and two junior officers went over. They remained with the R.C.A.F. for a year, and were able to give the new Women's Division considerable help in its initial stages.

## **Selection of Personnel**

No airwoman was ever detailed to serve outside the United Kingdom during the war. The same is technically true of W.A.A.F. officers; but when, in 1944, the number of volunteers was insufficient to meet commitments, the Air Ministry called for a list of suitable officers from Groups, in the categories required. All these officers were interviewed by an Air Ministry Selection Board, and those who had strong reasons for not wishing to go overseas were not so posted.<sup>1</sup> In practice it was found that many liked to have their minds made up for them, or were at any rate willing to go where their services were urgently needed.

## **Tropical Kit**

From the time when W.A.A.F. personnel first went overseas until after the end of the war, the question of tropical kit, its style, quantity and quality was under discussion. With this question were inevitably tied other queries, the amount of allowance to be paid to officers for the purchase of such kit, the relaxation or otherwise of the rules about the wearing of plain clothes, which, of course, also brought up the problems of security and discipline. The officers who went to the U.S.A. in 1940 did not need tropical kit until the spring of 1942, for they wore plain clothes until America entered the war. They then had khaki gabardine tunics and skirts made locally, to the existing sealed pattern; later arrivals in both the U.S.A. and Canada followed their example, for the khaki drill which they brought from the United Kingdom looked shabby and untidy beside the smart summer uniform of the American and Canadian women. Those who went to Egypt in 1941 also tended to buy their uniform locally and to make their own regulations about the wearing of such uniform. The sealed pattern originally agreed in 1940 was, however, reviewed by the Air Ministry in 1942. It was suggested and finally agreed that a summer dress would be an improvement, and the khaki tunic was superseded by a loose bush jacket. While the officers in North America continued to wear the gabardine tunic and skirt, with silk stockings and R.A.F. fore-and-aft cap, those in Egypt wore silk stockings, fore-and-aft cap and a variety of uniform; they were inclined to wear plain clothes as much as possible. The uniform dress was purchased by few officers; it was unpopular and fell entirely out of use.

During 1943, airwomen who were enrolled locally in the Middle East were locally equipped; but when, in January 1944, it was decided to post 2,000 airwomen from the United Kingdom to the Middle East, the matter of airwomen's tropical kit was for the first time seriously considered. Since the R.A.F. wore khaki drill overseas, and contracts for their kit were placed with Army contractors, it seemed logical to the equipment branch that airwomen also should wear khaki drill overseas, and that their kit should as far as possible be similar to that of the A.T.S. Part of D.W.A.A.F.'s difficulty in obtaining a really satisfactory outfit for the airwomen lay in this factor, that the tropical kit for W.A.A.F. personnel was expected to consist of 'common user' items with the A.T.S. The fact that the W.A.A.F., being accustomed to blue, disliked wearing khaki, and that it is a difficult colour for women and has a depressing effect on them, were of little interest to the hard-pressed authorities, and in any case, by 1944 the stocks of cotton goods of any kind were so low in this country that the official view was that whatever supplies could be

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.322715/41.

obtained should be accepted without making too many complications. Since the early policy confined W.A.A.F. overseas service to officers only, the large scale preparation of tropical clothing for airwomen was considered inadvisable, and no provisioning in quantity had been made. The first drafts sent to the Middle East had blue-grey clothing only; their tropical kit was to be obtained locally on arrival. When it was agreed that some 2,000 airwomen should be sent to serve in the Far East, the question of the scale of tropical kit was again raised. A different scale was requested for these airwomen because both climate and conditions in the Far East differed from those in the Middle East. Here another difficulty arose, for it seemed obvious to the W.A.A.F. that a different scale of kit was required in each theatre, whereas the official view was that one scale should be suitable for all places where tropical kit was needed, Canada, Washington, Delhi, Naples, Cairo, Gibraltar. Throughout the winter of 1944 and the spring of 1945 the discussions continued at the Air Ministry, and Air Command South East Asia put forward considered proposals for the scale of kit required, notably for the addition to scale of a tropical kit off-duty dress. It was felt essential that, in this theatre, officers and airwomen should, for security reasons, wear uniform at all times; but it was also felt that even an open-necked shirt and a khaki skirt were neither cool nor pleasant enough for the hot season. It was not until the autumn of 1945, however, that it was finally agreed that a dress (two per airwoman) should be made locally of airmen's shirting, and that silk stockings and neat black sandals should be added to the scale. These additions were limited to South East Asia and Aden; the Middle East was not to be included.<sup>1</sup>

#### Officers' Kit Allowance

The allowance for the purchase of kit was originally £5, which was hardly sufficient for the tin trunk which was needed. The amount was increased to £10 in 1943; but a request for an increase to £26 submitted by the Admiralty in November 1943, was rejected. Early in 1944, during consideration of the scale of tropical kit for airwomen, the scale for officers also came under review.<sup>2</sup> As it was noted that the khaki tunic had been dropped from the scale and the summer dress ignored, the official attire for officers on all occasions, formal or not, was khaki bush jacket and skirt. D.W.A.A.F. and D.A.T.S. discussed and agreed a tailored tunic and skirt for a uniform off-duty dress, and together with D.W.R.N.S. they again approached the Treasury to request a substantial increase in the allowance. At a meeting between the Directors of the three services and a Treasury representative on 26 February 1945, the services succeeded in convincing the Treasury that there was a genuine case for a good increase in the amount of the allowance; but much time elapsed before the details of the scale required and the exact amount of the increase could be approved. Miss Irene Ward, M.P. raised the matter in the House,<sup>3</sup> and continued to raise it until eventually, on 25 May 1945, an increase in the allowance to £22 10s. 0d. was announced and made retrospective to 1 October 1944.<sup>4</sup> Later, on 8 September 1945, the concession was extended to officers proceeding on a second tour overseas, and to those who had gone overseas before 1 October 1944, and were still out of the country.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. Files S.75875, H.564135/41, S.96071, S.76800/4/E1, HS.72504, C.86743/WAAF, A.109850, S.76199/E1.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. File A.734244/44.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, 3 Nov. 1944 and 21 March 1945.

<sup>4</sup> A.M. File A.734244/44/F.2 (d).

### Trooping Arrangements

Until early in 1944, no large drafts of airwomen proceeded overseas. W.A.A.F. officers travelled first-class on board troopships; so also, for convenience, did the small parties of airwomen who went abroad during 1943. When it became apparent, towards the end of that year, that all three services intended to send sizeable drafts of women to overseas theatres of war, the question of troopship accommodation for women other ranks was seriously considered. At a meeting on 28 January 1944, attended by the Navy, Army and R.A.F. Directors of Movements, the Directors of the three women's services and representatives of the Ministry of War Transport, the shortage of shipping space and the need for filling every ship to capacity was stressed; but the three women Directors would not accept actual troopship conditions for their women. In the end, a minimum scale for all women other ranks, to apply during hostilities only, was agreed as follows:—

1. Not more than a total of 250 of the women's services, exclusive of those normally entitled to first- and second-class passages, were to be embarked in any one ship.
2. The Ministry of Transport was to examine ships in British ports to ascertain whether suitable troopdeck accommodation could be made available for women. This would entail the selection of suitable troopdecks, and the fitting of tier berths, not more than three tiers high, and of racks to store kit. Curtaining as necessary to divide off this section was to be provided. (This would probably mean a reduction in the carrying capacity of this portion of the ship by 50 per cent. If practicable without a serious loss of accommodation, 20 square feet per person was to be allowed.) A portion of the troopdeck was to be made available for recreation and messing where impracticable in the Warrant Officers' Mess.

This scale was accepted by all concerned for the Mediterranean up to Suez; east of Suez, cabins were to be allotted whenever possible. When other ranks of women's services had to be accommodated in cabins either because troopdeck accommodation was unsuitable or because they were going east of Suez, numbers would have to be adjusted to ensure that no officer of the Navy, Army or Air Force above the rank of captain or the equivalent had to be accommodated in troopdecks.

3. A minimum of 8 per cent lavatories and 4 per cent baths and showers combined was to be provided, adjacent to the accommodation reserved for women.
4. When considered necessary a twenty-four-hour guard was to be mounted to ensure privacy of the women's quarters.
5. Second-class messing was to be provided, and meals were to be served at an additional sitting in the Warrant Officers' mess. This mess was to be made available to the women's services for recreational purposes when possible after the last meal of the day had been served.
6. The Ministry of War Transport agreed to provide:—
  - (a) stepladders for tier berths;
  - (b) sheets, pillow-cases and mattresses;

- (c) mirrors;
  - (d) ironing facilities;
  - (e) a few folding chairs, if possible.
7. Arrangements were to be made to provide a separate portion of hospital accommodation for women's services.
  8. Nursing sisters proceeding as passengers in the convoy were to be embarked in the ships carrying servicewomen. When there were no nursing sisters travelling as passengers, Commands overseas were to arrange for nursing sisters to accompany drafts of servicewomen moving between overseas commands or homeward bound.<sup>1</sup>

The Director of Movements, R.A.F. and his staff collaborated in the carrying out of these agreed conditions, and D.W.A.A.F. sent a senior officer to look over the allotted quarters in each troopship which was to take a draft of airwomen. After the establishment of W.A.A.F. draft-conducting officers in each ship (one officer to fifty airwomen, one squadron officer if the draft numbered more than 200), their reports were useful in correcting mistakes and in making minor amendments to the scale, the conditions of which were throughout carried out, not only to the letter but also in the best possible spirit. Airwomen gained a good reputation on board troopships; ship's officers and officers commanding troops on board all spoke highly of their good discipline, neatness and exemplary behaviour. They assisted, where possible and appropriate, in duties on board ship, as clerks, nursing orderlies and so on, and they were particularly useful when they chanced to travel on board ships which were transporting service wives and children.

#### **Medical Arrangements Overseas**

It was not found necessary to make any special medical arrangements for W.A.A.F. personnel overseas. Apart from the fact that women medical officers were posted according to the strength of W.A.A.F. serving in any area, that sick quarters were adapted for their use, hospital beds made available and convalescent depots provided, the normal R.A.F. arrangements applied to the W.A.A.F. Medical examination at the Personnel Despatch Centre was of the first importance, and it was decided to post a woman medical officer for this duty, to give the necessary inoculation and vaccination and to carry out Mass Radiography. Airwomen were also given a medical lecture on the care of their health in the tropics.

#### **Pregnancy Overseas**

It was decided that, in all cases of unmarried pregnancy, the officer or airwoman should be returned to the United Kingdom as soon as possible, those from the Middle East travelling by sea up to the fourth and by air up to the sixth month of pregnancy; welfare arrangements were made by the officer in charge of the Holding Section in the United Kingdom. If an airwoman concealed her condition until it was too late to send her home, then she was to be cared for overseas, returning with her baby as soon as both were fit to travel. In no case was a woman to be allowed to part with her baby overseas, either for

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S. 96071.

its adoption or for any other reason. The same regulations applied to Europe; but in India, where the problem was complicated by the greater distance from the United Kingdom, careful arrangements were made with the local Red Cross and welfare societies to deal with cases where concealment made confinement in India unavoidable. The airwoman was to continue to receive pay until discharged, with no deduction for hospital charges. All these arrangements were most comprehensive; in fact, however, no airwoman gave birth to a child overseas during the war. Married women could obtain release locally, if consent were given by the commanding officer. In these cases, if they were women who wished to remain and return with their husbands, it was made clear to them that they could not, after release, claim to be sent back to England by the W.A.A.F. authorities, but must take their turn on the list of service wives.<sup>1</sup>

### **Field, Mission and Colonial Allowances**

*North America.* When the first seven W.A.A.F. officers went to the U.S.A. they received a mission allowance of \$10 per day for the first twenty-eight days and \$8 per day thereafter. A grant of £15 was issued by the Air Ministry out of Extra Regulations Expenditure to assist in the purchase of civilian clothing. When a further twenty-two W.A.A.F. officers were posted to the U.S.A. in June 1941, the Air Ministry considered that it would not be possible to continue to authorize the payment of clothing grants out of Extra Regulations Expenditure, and the matter was referred to the Treasury who authorized a grant of £10 to all W.A.A.F. officers proceeding to the U.S.A.; this was cancelled in February 1942, after the officers had reverted to the wearing of uniform. Before the opening of the three British Service Delegations in Washington in June 1941, the whole question of allowances for personnel based in the U.S.A. was reviewed by the services and the Treasury.<sup>2</sup> The Admiralty and the War Office inclined to the Treasury view that women officers did not need such high allowances as male officers, bearing in mind that women received a lower ration allowance in the United Kingdom, and that their expenses on entertainment and social activities were less than those of men; but the Air Ministry contested this point strongly, at the instigation of A.M.P., who maintained that W.A.A.F. officers should receive the same allowances as R.A.F. officers.<sup>3</sup> In June 1941, since the W.R.N.S. and A.T.S. officers in Washington were found to be receiving a mission allowance of \$8 per day, falling to \$6 after the first twenty-eight days, the R.A.F. Delegation authorized the same allowance for the W.A.A.F.; but in July this fell to \$7 and \$6 per day, one dollar less than the rate paid to male officers of equivalent rank. In September 1942, the Treasury authorized an increase of half a dollar per day in the allowance paid to the senior woman officer with each service delegation to Washington, and when, in February 1944, the question of allowances was again reviewed, the mission allowance for women was raised to \$9 for the senior officer falling to \$7 after twenty-eight days, and \$8 for other women officers, falling to \$6.<sup>4</sup> In August 1944, the Under-Secretary of State (C), after a visit to Canada, urged a review of the allowances paid to W.A.A.F. officers in North America, with a view to equating them to those paid to R.A.F. officers. Discussions and correspondence continued between the R.A.F. Delegation, Headquarters No. 45 Group, Montreal, the Air Ministry and the Treasury; but the war ended before any decision was made.

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<sup>1</sup> D.W.A.A.F. Confidential Memoranda, Nos. 19 and 20.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File S.62175.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. File L.9732/43.

<sup>4</sup> A.M. File L.19051/44.

Women officers of the rank of squadron officer and above on short visits to the U.S.A. received a mission allowance of \$8 per day, falling to \$7 after twenty-eight days; but this rate was revised in February 1944, to \$10 per day, falling to \$8. A special rate of \$10.50, falling to \$9 was authorized for D.W.A.A.F. and D.A.T.S. on their visits to North America. A travelling allowance of \$6 per day in addition to normal mission allowance was paid to all W.A.A.F. officers when travelling on duty. The higher rate of mission allowance authorized for Washington was at first applicable only for personnel stationed in Washington, New York and Ottawa. In provincial cities a 10 per cent cut was imposed. Later, the higher rate was extended to cover nineteen of the larger cities, and in 1944 it was further extended to cover forty-three cities in the U.S.A.<sup>1</sup>

*Middle East.* In 1940 the Air Ministry proposed to the Treasury that field allowance should be paid to W.A.A.F. officers under the same conditions as to R.A.F. but at 2/3 the rate, a proposal which met with no success. The Air Ministry, however, requested permission to pay colonial allowance, field allowance and servant allowance at full R.A.F. rates to W.A.A.F. officers. The Treasury, on 22 September 1941, agreed to colonial allowance at single R.A.F. rates, retained the 1s. flat rate field allowance, but rejected the servant allowance absolutely. Again the Middle East Command, supported by the Air Ministry, appealed for field allowance and servant allowance at R.A.F. rates. This time the Treasury agreed to servant allowance for woman officers serving abroad at stations where a white woman of standing normally employs a servant; but the field allowance remained at 1s.<sup>2</sup>

*Western Europe.* In March 1945, and again in July of the same year, the question of field allowance for W.A.A.F. officers serving in Western Europe was raised, since there was a number living at that time in unfurnished accommodation, receiving only the flat rate of 1s. per day; but no change was ever made.

*Far East.* The rate of pay for W.A.A.F. in India was not an easy matter to settle, and many meetings took place before agreement was reached. The R.A.F. view, in which D.W.A.A.F. concurred, was that the W.A.A.F. rate of pay should be allied, as it always had been, to the R.A.F. rate; the Government of India wished to align it with that of the W.A.C.(I), whose officers received less, but other ranks more, than the equivalent W.A.A.F. rates. The result would have been that many airwomen would have received more pay than the airmen whom they replaced. The War Office, who had sent some A.T.S. officers out to serve with and help to train the W.A.C.(I) agreed with the Government of India, and raised the matter again when they found it necessary to send drafts of A.T.S. auxiliaries to India. However, the Air Ministry persisted, and in December 1944, it was agreed that W.A.A.F. personnel should be placed on the Indian Pay Code, and that their rates should be two-thirds of the R.A.F. rates, plus full allowances.

On 14 August 1945, the Secretary of State for India received a cable which he referred to the Air Ministry, that the Indian Government proposed to pay W.A.A.F. officers on Indian rates of pay, field allowance at the same rates as R.A.F. officers, viz. R.30 per month. The Finance Branch in the Air Ministry passed the question to the Treasury, and the matter was ultimately settled in the W.A.A.F. officers' favour on 18 May 1946. This rate applied to all W.A.A.F. officers in receipt of Indian rates of pay, and it was made retrospective to 1 November 1945.

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File L.9732/43.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.39762/39.

## CHAPTER 14

### WESTERN HEMISPHERE

#### R.A.F. Delegation, Washington

In July 1940, one R.A.F. flying officer and three W.A.A.F. assistant section officers (code and cypher) were posted at the request of the Ministry of Aircraft Production to the office of the Consul-General in New York to handle the typex cypher traffic for the British Air Commission, New York. These, the first members of the W.A.A.F. to be posted overseas, were followed in March 1941, by one flight officer and three assistant section officers, who were posted to New York for similar duties with the British Purchasing Commission, a mission of the Ministry of Supply based in the U.S.A. Both these sections later moved to Washington, the British Air Commission in March 1941, and the British Purchasing Commission in May of that year. In June 1941, the R.A.F. Delegation, Washington, was formed, and a large cypher section consisting of one squadron officer, five flight officers, seven section officers and sixteen assistant section officers was established as part of the Delegation. The cypher sections of the British Air Commission and the British Purchasing Commission, which until this time had worked quite independently of each other, were combined with the R.A.F. Delegation cypher section. During 1942, the Delegation cypher commitments increased, and the traffic of the British Air Commission, British Purchasing Commission, British Food Mission, Treasury Delegation, British Supply Council, the Air Attaché, the Dominions Office, the Combined Production and Resources Board, the Royal Australian Air Force Mission and the Royal New Zealand Air Force Mission was all taken over by the W.A.A.F. officers at the R.A.F. Delegation. In July the Directorate of Equipment at the Delegation moved to Dayton, Ohio, and a cypher section of one flight officer, one section officer and two assistant section officers was established there. A new cypher section was also opened at the Royal Australian Air Force Mission, Washington, and one section officer and one assistant section officer were lent to the Australians to open up this office, but later members of the Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division) took over the Australian office from the W.A.A.F. One flight officer and one assistant section officer also proceeded to New York to open up a new cypher section in the combined office of the British Air Commission, the British Purchasing Commission and the Ministry of War Transport and Shipping.<sup>1</sup> With the opening of these new sections, the Delegation office became very under-staffed, and the Director of Signals at the Delegation arranged that six Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division) officers should be attached to the Delegation to assist in the cypher work.<sup>2</sup> These six officers were trained by the Delegation cypher staff, and in January 1943, one W.A.A.F. officer and one Canadian officer were detached from Washington to Ottawa to instruct at the newly opened Royal Canadian Air Force Cypher School. Five Canadian officers continued to work at the Delegation until March 1944, when they were recalled to Canada by the Canadian Government. The Delegation cypher office establishment was gradually increased to meet the growing cypher traffic, which averaged about 60,000 groups per day, with peaks of 90,000 groups in the Delegation office

<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.62175.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.730457/44.



alone, and by February 1944, the total establishment covering all the cypher sections controlled by the R.A.F. Delegation was one squadron officer, seven flight officers and forty-seven section officers.

Whilst serving in the U.S.A. seven officers married American citizens and a further six married Canadians, but in October 1944 it was ruled that W.A.A.F. officers married to American citizens could no longer continue to carry out cypher duties. Such officers were either repatriated to the United Kingdom or more often were allowed to take local release in the U.S.A.

After V.E. Day, the work of the cypher section decreased, and redundant officers were gradually returned to the United Kingdom. With V.J. Day the traffic dropped to about 20,000 groups per day, and the cypher section establishment was again decreased accordingly. With the end of Lend-Lease in August 1945 and the consequent shortage of dollars, the British Missions in Washington were instructed to make every possible reduction in staff. The three British Services set up a combined communications centre in October 1945, the New York, Dayton and Nassau sections were closed down, and by May 1946 only fourteen W.A.A.F. cypher officers remained in the U.S.A.

During the second half of 1943 and throughout 1944 and 1945, W.A.A.F. officers of branches other than the code and cypher branch were gradually posted to Washington to fill newly created establishments,<sup>1</sup> and in August 1945, the total strength of W.A.A.F. officers in the U.S.A., other than code and cypher officers, comprised:—

Administration . . .	1 flight officer, 1 section officer.
Intelligence . . .	1 squadron officer, 6 flight officers, 1 section officer.
Photographic Interpretation.	3 flight officers, 10 section officers.
Radar . . .	1 squadron officer, 3 flight officers.
Equipment . . .	1 section officer.

These officers were widely dispersed in the various Government buildings in Washington, the intelligence and photographic interpretation officers working mainly in the Combined Chiefs of Staff Building or in the United States War Department. The main intelligence centre for the Japanese war was located in Washington, and the services of a trained team of British photographic interpreters had early been requested by the United States War Department. A few officers arrived for these duties in the autumn of 1944, but it was not possible to provide a full team until the end of the European war. In July 1945, twenty-eight posts for R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. P.I. officers were established in the War Department, and eleven W.A.A.F. officers arrived for these duties in August. Their stay was short, since V.J. Day occurred so soon after they took up their duties, and the majority returned to the United Kingdom after only three weeks. Three W.A.A.F. officers were posted to Washington in December 1945, for Japanese translation work with the U.S. Intelligence Corps at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. By May 1946, the total W.A.A.F. strength in the U.S.A. was:—

Code and Cypher . . .	14 officers.
Intelligence . . .	5 officers.
Administration . . .	1 officer.
Photographic Interpretation.	1 officer.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.93014.

Airwomen were never posted to the U.S.A., though the question of posting W.A.A.F. teleprinter operators and clerks, general duties, was raised by the R.A.F. Delegation from time to time.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the war accommodation in New York and Washington was difficult to obtain, and the majority of hotels in Washington would accept visitors for a period of five days only. Officers arriving there were accommodated at an hotel for the first five days, during which time they were expected to find their own permanent accommodation. The majority shared apartments or houses, though some few lived in furnished rooms or with American families. Finding a suitable apartment was a matter of time, patience, persistence and good luck, but those occupied by W.A.A.F. officers were on the whole of a high standard. The average rent paid was about \$50 to \$60 per month. Officers returning to the United Kingdom always endeavoured to retain their accommodation for their incoming reliefs. Several apartments were occupied by a succession of W.A.A.F. officers for anything up to five years. Officers stationed in New York and Dayton lived in accommodation similar to that in Washington.

The normal tour of duty in the U.S.A. was two years. After the summer of 1942, the code and cypher officers spent five months of their tour at one of the out-stations, either New York, Dayton or Nassau. Postings to the out-stations were strictly by roster, but officers balloted for the stations to which they were to be posted, Nassau and New York always being a more popular posting than Dayton. By this means it was possible to give the officers a rest from the strain of work in the Delegation, for the out-station cypher sections, though busy, never had to contend with such a high pressure of priority traffic as the Washington office, nor did they hold so many different types of cypher.

The first W.A.A.F. officers posted to the U.S.A. experienced difficulties in that they were working as civilians among civil service personnel engaged on similar duties but receiving less pay and allowances than the W.A.A.F. personnel. Moreover, the W.A.A.F. officers were 'nobody's children' and at first met few people and received little hospitality. It was not until the formation of the R.A.F. Delegation that they became part of a properly organized R.A.F. Headquarters, and a squadron officer was posted to the Delegation as Senior Cypher Officer and assumed responsibility for the welfare of the W.A.A.F. The U.S.A. seemed far removed from the war, and during 1940 and 1941 W.A.A.F. officers were often worried about the conditions under which their families were living in England, since German propaganda in the U.S.A. was strong and highly exaggerated reports of the effects of air raids on Great Britain appeared in the press and over the radio. Their work was arduous and fourteen days' leave was granted only about once every nine months, with the result that officers became overtired and nervy. It was not until the end of 1943 that a proper leave roster was introduced for the cypher officers and fourteen days' leave every six months was ensured for them all. Relations with the American women's services were at all times very friendly.

#### **No. 111 O.T.U., Nassau, Bahamas**

In March 1943, three section officers of the code and cypher branch were posted from the R.A.F. Delegation for duty with the newly opened No. 111 O.T.U. at Nassau, which was administered by the Delegation. Though No. 111

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.748788/45.

O.T.U. had its own establishment, the cypher office was unofficially regarded as an extension of the Delegation cypher section, and the cypher officers at Nassau were changed every five months to allow as many W.A.A.F. officers as possible to benefit by a rest and change away from the tension of the Delegation office. These three officers received a living-out allowance, and rented and shared a house on the shore a few miles away from the R.A.F. station. The island afforded excellent opportunities for sailing and swimming, the social life was gay and full, and W.A.A.F. officers received many invitations. They invariably enjoyed their tour at Nassau.

#### **Canada—No. 45 Group**

In 1941, the Headquarters of Ferry Command was formed in Montreal, and a few R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. officers were employed on code and cypher duties. On the transfer of the Command to the United Kingdom in 1943, No. 45 Group was formed, based in Montreal, and by the middle of 1945 seventy W.A.A.F. officers were serving in the Group. After V.J. Day stations began to close down, and the W.A.A.F. officers were all withdrawn early in 1946. No. 45 Group was most widely scattered; within this group W.A.A.F. officers served at Montreal and its airport, Dorval, in Bermuda, at Gander and Botwood in Newfoundland, at Elizabeth City in North Carolina, at Goose Bay in Labrador, at Nassau in the Bahamas, at San Diego in California, U.S.A. and for a short time in Trinidad. The tour of duty was two to three years, and during this period the officers were based at Dorval for nine to twelve months, and spent the remainder of the time at outstations, moving on at six monthly intervals. Conditions varied widely between one station and another. The officers might be enduring the complete isolation, bitter cold, wild weather and dehydrated food of Gander or Goose Bay, or they might be in the glamour of Bermuda or the Bahamas.<sup>1</sup>

Gander was the second outstation to have W.A.A.F. personnel, the first six officers arriving in May 1942, and despite the hard living conditions it remained one of the most popular stations. The temperature ranges from 50° to 65° in the very short summer to 10° in winter, when there are blizzards with driving snow and winds reaching 80 to 90 m.p.h. At such times the sense of isolation is complete since all travel ceases, there is no post and even radio fades out. The officers lived in an old Newfoundland Rangers hut, which was later transported bodily on to a brick foundation. It had one of the only two baths in Gander and was equipped with a refrigerator, electric cooker and central heating, which, however, frequently failed when temperatures were low and had to be supplemented by a stove fire. The domestic staff were inexperienced local men, and for the first two years the food was of poor quality and badly cooked. Later the quality was improved by the institution of a weekly air service carrying fresh foods, and a civilian Swedish-Canadian chef raised the standard of cooking. The W.A.A.F. officers were called upon to entertain the many distinguished travellers who arrived almost daily from transatlantic flights. Officers received a special allowance of one Canadian dollar per day; but the cost of living was practically nil, since food was free, cigarettes were cheap, and the lumberjacks' store, whose main commodities were lumber jackets and fishing boots, provided no incentive for spending money.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.730455/44.

Nassau was a complete contrast. Here the airfield site, which was swampy and infested with mosquitoes, was not considered suitable for W.A.A.F. officers. They accordingly rented a house on the sea-shore, large, airy and well furnished. At first officers received a special allowance of seven Canadian dollars per day which enabled them to live reasonably. In 1944, however, this was replaced by a colonial allowance which proved quite inadequate, and later a servant allowance of two shillings per day was granted, on which they could live, though with no margin. The town of Nassau provided reasonable entertainment, the local white people were extremely hospitable and a United Nations club provided meals and facilities for dancing. Golf, swimming and sailing were available all the year round.

Officers found their pay and allowances adequate, except in the two U.S.A. stations; but clothing was a problem. In addition to the difficulties encountered by the R.A.F. Delegation officers, they needed everything from tropical kit to sub-arctic clothing, with which they had to equip themselves locally.

The work these officers did was excellent throughout their years in No. 45 Group; they worked hard and showed resource and initiative, and in April 1945, they numbered sixty-five in a total cypher staff of ninety. They helped to maintain a high standard of morale on isolated stations, and there was great reluctance to release them when, after V.J. Day, the time came for their departure. They also proved good ambassadors, for they were generally liked and accepted by the American and Canadian families whom they met, and with whom in many cases they formed real and lasting friendships.

## CHAPTER 15

### MIDDLE EAST AND MEDITERRANEAN THEATRES

#### Middle East

As in England, all cypher work in the Middle East was undertaken at the beginning of the war by civilian women, mostly officers' wives, and the first suggestion that W.A.A.F. personnel should be employed was made in the latter part of 1940. The W.A.A.F. 'G' Staff Officer attached to the Directorate of Signals in the Air Ministry made an extensive tour of the Middle East countries to assess and report on the practicability or otherwise of this scheme, and as a result of her favourable report a general call for a small number of volunteers was sent out to units in the United Kingdom employing W.A.A.F. cypher officers. After technical and personnel selection boards had been held, approximately thirty officers were selected, including two or three flight officers. The draft sailed from England at the end of July 1941, and arrived in Cairo in early September, having made their difficult and lengthy journey by sea to Freetown and Lagos, and thence by air to Cairo. After attending a short refresher course at the Middle East Cypher School, they were posted for duty to certain units in Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Ismailia. As a secondary duty they were to guide and train locally commissioned W.A.A.F. cypher officers who were to be drawn from the existing civilian cypher officers and a few additional, specially selected, British women, mostly officers' wives. The first few of these civilians were commissioned on 1 October 1941, and at first found it a little difficult to assume their new responsibilities without any form of basic training. As further and larger drafts arrived from England, however, the contingent became a more compact and disciplined force. The numbers gradually rose to approximately 200 officers by the end of 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Officers posted to the various R.A.F. stations were fortunate in having mess accommodation provided for them; but the majority, who were posted to the Group and Air Headquarters, were expected to find their own accommodation; for those posted to Cairo this presented particular difficulties.

R.A.F. units to employ W.A.A.F. officers from the start were No. 276 Wing and No. 206 Group, Heliopolis, Air Headquarters, Egypt, Cairo, No. 201 Group, Alexandria, R.A.F. Ismailia, Headquarters Middle East, Air Headquarters Palestine and Transjordan; within a few months also the R.A.F. stations at Aboukir, Haifa and Ramleh, and Air Headquarters, East Africa. The hours of duty were trying at first, watches were changed at 19.30, 01.30, 07.30 and 13.30. Transport called at the various pensions and flats to collect the officers going on watch.

No record of the work of W.A.A.F. cypher officers in the Middle East Command would be complete without some reference to Telecommunications, Middle East. It was built in the desert, just beyond Heliopolis, to accommodate the signals and cypher sections of Headquarters, R.A.F. Middle East, to receive and dispatch all traffic for the Middle East Headquarters, and to act as a link in the world-wide network of wireless communications. In theory, the idea of accommodating signals and cyphers, both essentially 'round the clock' services, under one roof, specifically designed for the purpose, served by messes which revolved round the watchkeepers, was a sound one. In practice it had many

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.730456/44.

things to commend it, and the job done at T.M.E. as it was called, is one of which the service can be proud; but the conditions for the employment of women were far from satisfactory. The W.T. station itself, with its traffic office, high speed and teleprinter rooms, and cypher department was specifically designed for its function, and yet, being underground and fitted with an air-conditioning plant that was more often out of order than serviceable, it was stuffy and sometimes appallingly hot. The noise of the machines was deafening, and after six hours of it, officers emerged feeling mentally and physically depleted. Every effort was made to improve conditions, and there was no lack of experiment both in watch hours and in many other ways. That the work and the place took their toll was obvious in the appearance of the personnel, the incidence of sickness, and the fact that a high percentage of officers employed there were ultimately transferred to other branches in which the hours and conditions of work were less strenuous. After running the cypher side of this unit for eighteen months, the W.A.A.F. handed over to the R.A.F.

Repeated attempts had been made to obtain Air Ministry sanction to the employment of airwomen in the Middle East, but without success.<sup>1</sup> In the early part of 1942, however, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief instructed his staff to explore the possibility of raising a locally enlisted force composed of Palestinians, Greeks and other allied nationals, on the lines already successfully adopted by the A.T.S. The Air Ministry approved the suggestion in principle and a detailed scheme was drawn up, consisting, in the main, of a fairly extensive recruiting campaign in Egypt and Palestine, and the setting up of a recruits' training depot at Lydda in Palestine. It was also decided to include Cyprus and Kenya in the recruiting area, but owing to the great distances involved, recruits from Kenya were to be locally trained and not sent to Lydda. Owing to climatic and other factors, which had to be taken into account, it was decided to limit the trades to those of a sedentary or clerical nature, such as clerks, nursing orderlies, dental clerk orderlies, etc. The trade of equipment assistant was included, however, owing to the serious shortage of airmen in this trade.

The implementation of such a scheme was, of course, conditional upon the arrival of trained recruiting and training staff from the United Kingdom, as there were only three administrative officers in the Middle East at that time. Recruiting was rather slow, and it was soon evident that the vast bulk of the local volunteers for the women's services had already joined the A.T.S. However, the numbers gradually increased, although the Depot, which had been planned for a maximum fortnightly intake of 100, was never filled to capacity. The recruits spent a month at the Depot, and their training was on the same lines as that given in the United Kingdom. Although the numbers were much smaller, the training staff at the Middle East Depot were faced with many obstacles which were not present in England, the chief of which was the language difficulty. An important part of the recruits' training was, in fact, instruction in English, for which special R.A.F. instructors with educational qualifications were provided. This difficulty had necessarily a great bearing on trade selection, making it almost impossible at times to choose a suitable trade from the small number open to recruiting. Wastage, too, was considerable, as many recruits were found to be temperamentally unsuitable. The quality of the material available could, in fact, be summed up as either very good or quite useless.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File S.76800.

After completing their training, these recruits were posted for duty, and the greatest problem confronting the administrative staff at this period was to find sufficient accommodation when and where it was required. This applied particularly to towns such as Cairo or Alexandria where the vacancies at Command and Group Headquarters were the most numerous. For some trades, such as nursing orderly, additional technical training was required, and the problem of centralizing the personnel and thus reducing the number of administrative staff became increasingly difficult. In many cases it was found necessary to set up a W.A.A.F. section on one unit and to transport the airwomen to and from their places of duty at other units in the vicinity. This system, though partially successful, caused a certain amount of friction between different formations, and, of course, added to the wear and tear of the personnel themselves, particularly in the hot weather. The experiment of employing locally enlisted airwomen having proved only fairly successful with the enrolment of some 800, it was obvious that the deficiencies in many trades in the Middle East Command could be made good only by substituting a considerable number of United Kingdom airwomen for tour-expired airmen. The basic principle on which this substitution was to be worked was to employ airwomen in base areas on static units, thus releasing the available airmen for the more remote and forward areas. Substitution tables were worked out in considerable detail, and eventually the Air Ministry agreed to send 2,000 airwomen in four drafts of 500 each.

As it was impossible to obtain financial approval for any building programme before the drafting was authorized, there was very little time to complete arrangements before they arrived. A complete tented wing for W.A.A.F. personnel had to be constructed at No. 22 Personnel Transit Centre, sufficient accommodation to scale built at various units to which the airwomen were to be posted, and barrack equipment and tropical clothing had to be made available. At that time, with a great shortage of furniture and little wood with which to make it, much enthusiasm and ingenuity was required. It is a great tribute to the R.A.F. that the airwomen's quarters were so adequately and comfortably equipped. The welfare authorities, too, worked wonders in furnishing rest and games rooms.

There was no lack of volunteers for this first call for overseas service, and much heartburning was felt among those who hastened to volunteer but had to wait months before being drafted.<sup>1</sup> The first draft of 250 airwomen sailed for Egypt in March 1944, and was followed quickly by two more drafts. Others left in the autumn of the year.

Welfare arrangements, throughout, were excellent and most comprehensive; care was taken to make certain that both officers and airwomen had really pleasant places in which to spend their local leave, that their journeys were comfortable and safe; that their quarters were well-equipped and well-tended. Every effort was made to encourage games, sports and P.T. Further, the W.A.A.F. took part in the General Education Scheme, and later, special plans were made for them in the E.V.T. Scheme; they shared these special courses with the A.T.S. and the W.R.N.S. Mention must be made of the work of the Y.W.C.A. in providing hostels in Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Ismailia and

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<sup>1</sup> The conditions under which airwomen might volunteer for service overseas are set out in Record Office Memorandum 80/44, as amended by 155/44 and 151/45.

other places. These provided valuable havens for women on leave or in transit, and officers and airwomen alike were endlessly grateful for them.

Women were sent to the Middle East for the definite purpose of filling gaps in the establishment and allowing the release of airmen for duties in forward areas. They were employed mainly on clerical, equipment and signals duties; their work was successful, and their presence was particularly helpful during the difficult period after V.J. Day. Drafts continued to go to the Middle East to replace airmen and airwomen due for release, and there were at the end of 1945, 179 officers and 3,447 airwomen employed in the Middle East theatre, in Egypt, Levant, Cyprus, East Africa, Aden, Syria and Iraq.

### **Mediterranean Area**

In June 1943 it was found necessary to post W.A.A.F. cypher officers in a hurry to Headquarters Mediterranean Air Command, Algiers, where the cypher traffic was becoming too heavy for the R.A.F. officers to deal with.<sup>1</sup> Urgent as the need for these officers undoubtedly was, they had, at first, to put up with most trying conditions. Their villa, a mile and a half from Headquarters, had no telephone, was surrounded by troops of every nationality except British, was virtually unfurnished, with no glass in the windows and no hot water supply. They had no mess, but took meals in the Junior American Officers' Mess. In short, they had a most difficult time; but, by the autumn of the year they had their own kitchen and a little furniture, and conditions gradually improved.

In February 1944, all the W.A.A.F. officers moved up to Tunis, where for a month they enjoyed good quarters and pleasant conditions, and at the end of March, the first contingent went by air to Italy with M.A.A.F. Headquarters. Pressure of work was heavy enough to make the move of W.A.A.F. cypher officers with the Headquarters essential; but the conditions under which they lived for the next year were extremely difficult. They were housed in a big Italian villa and were very crowded, cold, and short of hot water; the messing conditions were not good; laundry, hairdressing and replacement of kit were awkward problems; but they were only thirty miles behind the front line, morale was high, and bad conditions and lack of sleep and of leave were accepted cheerfully. The war gradually moved north; Caserta became a Rear Headquarters, and, in December 1944, the W.A.A.F. moved into Nissen huts in the R.A.F. officers' tented camps where the normal amenities were provided.

In the spring of 1945 the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief asked for 150 airwomen in the domestic and clerical trades for his Headquarters. Good accommodation was found for them and the airwomen proceeded to Caserta in May 1945. They were followed later by a number of clerks, personnel selection. At the same period about 1,000 airwomen were requested for service in Algiers, where they were urgently required to accelerate the return of tour-expired airmen. Although D.W.A.A.F. was uneasy about conditions in Algiers, about 800 airwomen proceeded during the summer of 1945, but after about six months they were gradually withdrawn and absorbed into sections in the Middle East.

The total number serving with M.A.A.F. on V.J. Day was 84 officers and 1,004 airwomen, all of whom were volunteers, selected under the same regulations as those governing the posting to Egypt and the Mediterranean theatre generally.

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.730452/44.



## CHAPTER 16

### THE FAR EAST

During 1943, when the shortage of manpower in the Air Command of South East Asia was becoming serious, it was decided to review the possibility of employing women with the R.A.F. in India and Ceylon. The R.A.F. authorities in India at first thought that it might be possible to recruit suitable women locally; but the Government of India was opposed to this suggestion, and offered to form a R.A.F. wing of the Women's Army Corps (India), a locally raised corps of women already in existence in India. The R.A.F. was not satisfied with this proposal, feeling that, as the G.H.Q. (India) would exercise control over all major policy, the needs of the R.A.F. would not be appreciated. In order to make a thorough investigation on the spot, a mission, consisting of three representatives of the W.A.A.F., was sent to India in mid-February 1944, and, after conferring with the Air Commander-in-Chief, A.C.S.E.A., the Air Officer Commanding, Air Headquarters, India, and their staffs, and with the Adjutant General, G.H.Q. (India), visits were paid to R.A.F. stations at Karachi, Bombay, Peshawar, Imphal and many other stations in India and Ceylon, as well as to units of the W.A.C.(I). At a meeting held in mid-June with the representatives of G.H.Q. it was made clear that G.H.Q. still wished the R.A.F. to take a wing of the W.A.C.(I); but this was unacceptable to A.C.S.E.A.

By that time the Air Commander-in-Chief was convinced that really effective help for the R.A.F. could not be made available locally, and, since the shortage of manpower in certain trades was becoming so acute as actually to imperil future operations, he asked the Air Ministry on 29 June 1944, for 185 officers and 1,375 airwomen to be employed in Delhi, Bombay and units in Ceylon. He felt that the arrival of airwomen would have a good effect on the morale of his airmen, and emphasized that he did not wish officers to be drafted unless airwomen also were sent. The officers were to be W.A.A.F. 'G', Code and Cypher, Intelligence, Photographic Interpretation, Operations 'G', Filter, Administrative 'G', Catering, Equipment, Accounts and Signals, with a few women Medical Officers. Airwomen were to be in the trades of equipment assistant, hairdresser, nursing orderly, radio-telephone operator, telephone operator, teleprinter operator, wireless operator, administrative and all the clerical trades. In August the drafting of the required numbers was finally authorized, but on the condition that volunteers only should be sent.

In November 1944, A.C.S.E.A. moved from Delhi to Kandy in Ceylon, leaving a new Headquarters, B.A.F.S.E.A. in Delhi. The difficulties of planning for the women's accommodation now began, for G.H.Q. (India) exercised ultimate control over all building and requisitioning, and it was not possible to obtain permission to prepare quarters until the numbers of volunteers and dates of arrival were known. The W.A.A.F. Staff Officer, A.C.S.E.A., who had gone out with the mission, visited the United Kingdom to settle several important points still outstanding, e.g. the rate of pay and the scale of tropical kit, and she returned to India by air in November 1944, with a small party of W.A.A.F. officers and one N.C.O., having cleared up most points.

The first draft of 250 arrived in Bombay on 9 November 1944 by sea; two special military trains conveyed them, in great comfort, to Delhi, where they were taken to a camp, completed for their reception only twenty-four hours before. The second draft of 250 arrived in Colombo on 11 January 1945, some for service in Ceylon, others for Bombay: small drafts varying from twenty to eighty in number, continued to arrive in Bombay up to the month of May. A number of officers and a few airwomen were sent out by air during this period. As by that time A.C.S.E.A. had become convinced that the employment of women in the Command was likely to be very successful, particularly in the clerical and signals trades, the Command W.A.A.F. Staff Officer surveyed the whole Command, to decide how far substitution could be carried, and found that, whilst working conditions were reasonably good, in most cases the provision of suitable living quarters would present great difficulty. However, in March 1945, a W.A.A.F. section, consisting mainly of nursing orderlies for No. 10 R.A.F. Hospital was opened in Karachi; but, though nursing orderlies were urgently required for No. 9 Hospital at Calcutta, suitable quarters for them could not be found. A W.A.A.F. section, hurriedly opened in January 1945, at Trincomalee to assist operation 'Dracula', the assault on Rangoon, did excellent work, and was closed in June, after the operation was completed. In July it was decided to ask the Air Ministry to draft 129 officers and 1,365 airwomen for employment in Bangalore, Lahore, Calcutta and Mauripur; but, in fact, W.A.A.F. sections were never formed at these places.

It was during this period that the question of employing W.A.A.F. personnel still further east came under consideration; Headquarters A.C.S.E.A. was to move to Singapore as soon as possible after the assault on Malaya had been successful, and as a large percentage of the clerical and signals personnel in A.C.S.E.A. was now W.A.A.F., it would be desirable for these officers and airwomen to move with the Headquarters. In July 1945, the Command W.A.A.F. Staff Officer again visited the United Kingdom to discuss both this question and that of increased substitution generally, and on 22 August 1945, the Secretary of State for Air agreed that W.A.A.F. personnel might be employed anywhere in South East Asia, provided that:—

- (a) They volunteered to go to the area in question.
- (b) The R.A.F. medical authorities and Command W.A.A.F. Staff Officer were fully satisfied with the living conditions and amenities provided.

The situation was, however, considerably altered by the surrender of Japan. D.W.A.A.F. went out to A.C.S.E.A. in September and October of 1945, visiting every W.A.A.F. section in the Command and speaking with nearly every officer and airwoman; she also visited various places to which it was proposed to send airwomen. As the Air Commander-in-Chief decided in October to employ W.A.A.F. in Hong Kong as soon as possible, the section, of 20 officers and 150 airwomen, arrived there early in February 1946, and in the meantime, the move of Headquarters, A.C.S.E.A., including the W.A.A.F. section, from Ceylon to Singapore, was completed by mid-December. Throughout these months it was becoming obvious that the political situation in India was deteriorating, and A.C.S.E.A. began to consider withdrawing all W.A.A.F. personnel from India, to concentrate them in Ceylon, Singapore and Hong Kong. The Air Member for Supply and Organisation, who was visiting India in December, agreed that this was a desirable move; but it was not until the

end of March 1946 that the authority of the Air Ministry was obtained. The withdrawal was begun at once, but was not completed until mid-June, the airwomen who volunteered for the Far East being drafted thither, the remainder returning to the United Kingdom. During 1946 small numbers of airwomen and officers continued to arrive in A.C.S.E.A. both by sea and air; they included Orthoptists, Intelligence, Provost and E.V.T. officers, and airwomen police, wireless-telegraphy slip readers, dental clerk orderlies, clerks personnel selection, and clerks general duties, maps.

Personnel were accommodated in service camps, requisitioned houses or on hospital premises; in Ceylon, they were for a time in bamboo huts on a concrete base, which were cool and pleasant. It can be said that the airwomen in A.C.S.E.A. were well and comfortably housed. Their quarters were, of course, cleaned and tended by native servants. The officers in many places, notably in Delhi, lived in the R.A.F. officers' messes. Welfare arrangements were carefully thought out; two excellent leave centres, one at Conoor in Southern India, and one at Lower Topa in the Himalayas, were open to W.A.A.F. and to R.A.F. personnel, and were entirely satisfactory. There were other leave hostels for both officers and airwomen, and every care was taken to supervise the travelling arrangements of all personnel whether on or off duty. Tennis, hockey, riding, golf and other games were available at most units and were well used by the airwoman; there was naturally a very full and varied social life. The discipline and general morale of both officers and airwomen were affected by climatic conditions, the heat with its attendant irritations of sleeplessness, minor ailments and flies and insects of all kinds, by the distance from home, the large preponderance of men, and the restless and artificial life: but their work was undoubtedly good, as the continual requests for more W.A.A.F. personnel proved. As the result of experience in the Middle East, all possible arrangements were made in advance, a W.A.A.F. Staff Officer was posted to A.C.S.E.A. long before drafting began, reports were called for and carefully studied, suitable trades were chosen, quarters were pleasant, medical arrangements satisfactory, and leave facilities good.

## CHAPTER 17

### WESTERN EUROPE

#### France, Belgium, Germany

The advisability of W.A.A.F. personnel serving on the Continent was the subject of discussion long before D-Day. In December 1943 the Air Ministry ruled that none should go to the Continent until conditions there could be investigated, and that, in consequence, no officers or airwomen should remain with the Second Tactical Air Force or the Allied Expeditionary Air Force Headquarters which were preparing in the United Kingdom. In January 1944, however, A.E.A.F. succeeded in getting Air Ministry authority to form a W.A.A.F. section and again asked for permission to take the section when the Headquarters moved overseas, and, in March 1944, one officer and nine airwomen were still with 2nd T.A.F., screened for special duties until the Headquarters should move. Late in May the Air Ministry finally agreed that W.A.A.F. personnel might proceed across the Channel under certain conditions, viz., all were to be volunteers, officers to be of twenty-three years or over and without domestic ties, airwomen to be single, married without children or married with children over fourteen, to be themselves over twenty-one years old and recommended by their commanding officers in every respect. On 3 August the W.A.A.F. Staff Officer at Headquarters, Air Defence of Great Britain, paid a brief visit to Le Touquet, and, since she was able to find suitable accommodation, one officer and four airwomen went to France two days later. They were followed by small parties in the next few weeks, amounting to about 100 by mid-September.

Up to that time, posting or attaching across the Channel was controlled by the Allied Expeditionary Air Force and by Air Defence of Great Britain, who were responsible for kitting, inoculations, documents and the general preparation and transport of the airwomen; but when, in September, W.A.A.F. substitution in No. 85 Group was agreed, it was decided that the normal channel, via the Personnel Despatch Centre, should be used. On 2 October, the Air Ministry agreed that officers and airwomen might be employed in the back areas in units other than Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Air Force and No. 85 Group on condition that:—

- (a) The posts were established for W.A.A.F. personnel through normal establishment machinery.
- (b) Accommodation and amenities were approved by a responsible W.A.A.F. Staff officer.
- (c) That all airwomen were drafted in accordance with the procedure laid down for selection and drafting.<sup>1</sup>

A wing officer had been posted in July to Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Air Force; the group officer from Balloon Command was now attached, pending posting, to Headquarters 2nd Tactical Air Force, and the wing officer was transferred to Headquarters No. 85 Group. It was decided that volunteering for the Continent should be open to airwomen in all commands, and that posting must in future be done by the Air Officer in charge of Records only.

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<sup>1</sup> Record Office Memorandum No. 124/44.

In short, a serious effort was made to lay down a clear and comprehensive policy which should govern the conditions under which officers and airwomen were posted to the Continent and employed on arrival there. Special scales of administrative staff were drawn up and approved, and a scale of kit and method of preparation agreed.

Drafting to the Continent proceeded slowly; by the end of the year, only about 260 airwomen were in France, not for any lack of volunteers, but because, after plans to substitute up to about 1,500 had been approved, the German break-through in the Ardennes put a stop to further posting for the time being. During January and February, however, 500 more airwomen proceeded, and by March officers and airwomen were serving in twenty-five units in France and Belgium. On 6 April, two officers and eight airwomen, the first to be stationed in Germany, moved up to Suchteln from Brussels with Headquarters, 2nd Tactical Air Force, and before hostilities ended rather more than 100 officers and 1,500 airwomen were serving in Western Europe.

Plans for more extended substitution had been agreed, but were held in abeyance during June and July, for, with the defeat of Germany, many R.A.F. units began to disband, and airwomen were unemployed or under-employed. On 15 July 1945 the 2nd Tactical Air Force was disbanded and reformed as Air Headquarters, British Air Force of Occupation. After this date, W.A.A.F. substitution was gradually increased, always in accordance with the rule that W.A.A.F. personnel were to be employed in transportable but not in mobile formations. In March 1946 the total number of W.A.A.F. in Western Europe was 129 officers and 1,507 airwomen serving at the following places:—

<i>Germany.</i>	Bad Eilsen.	Frankfurt.
	Bad Oeynhausen.	Gutersloh.
	Berlin.	Hamburg.
	Bonn.	Lübbecke.
	Buckeberg.	Osdorf.
	Celle.	Rinteln.
	Detmold.	Sylt.
<i>Belgium.</i>	Brussels.	
	Evere.	
<i>Denmark.</i>	Copenhagen.	
<i>France.</i>	Paris.	
<i>Holland.</i>	Amsterdam.	

At first all drafts, whether large or small, went by air; but, after a few months, this arrangement was found to be impracticable, and from December 1944, all drafts, other than individual postings, went by sea, at first from Folkestone, and later through a Holding Unit at Hornchurch via Tilbury and Ostend to the Personnel Despatch Centre at Blankenburg. Until the procedure became a matter of routine, there were difficult trips and slight confusion; but later the drafts proceeded quite smoothly.

Every type of accommodation was used, from tents and barracks to luxury hotels and beautiful houses. The standard was good throughout; the German barrack blocks were, for example, far more comfortable than a hutted R.A.F. station in England. Naturally there were at times unavoidable disadvantages,

such as the lack of hot water in Belgium during the winters of 1944 and 1945, but, on the whole, the W.A.A.F. in Western Europe were far better housed than those in the United Kingdom.

Every effort was made to select officers and airwomen, particularly N.C.O.s, with the greatest care; some mistakes were made, but discipline in general was good. In the few cases of indiscipline which did occur, the worst punishment which could be inflicted was to return the offender back to the United Kingdom; the fact that this was done in a few cases acted as a marked deterrent to others.

When the W.A.A.F. moved into Germany, security was naturally one of the first problems to be considered. At the outset it was laid down that no airwomen were to move outside their working area without armed escort, and this rule obtained with certain local modifications until April 1946, when it was decided that, within certain overriding limits, local commanders, in consultation with their Deputy Assistant Provost Marshals should lay down their own rules in accordance with local conditions. In point of fact, no trouble did arise from the German people in this respect. Much stricter rules were, however, maintained in the Berlin area than elsewhere, because of the devastation of the area and the presence of large numbers of allied troops of all nationalities.

Before the move into Germany, airwomen of the following trades were employed in Western Europe:—

Clerk, general duties.	Wireless operator.
Clerk, special duties.	Radar operator.
Clerk, pay accounting.	Driver, motor transport.
Clerk, equipment accounting.	Cook.
Equipment assistant.	Mess steward.
Safety equipment worker.	Waitress.
Telephonist.	Orderly.
Teleprinter operator.	Aircraft hand.
Radio-telephone operator.	Administrative.
Nursing orderly.	Photographer.
Hairdresser.	Safety Equipment Assistant.
Chiropodist.	Tailoress.
Electrician I.	Clerk, accounting.
Electrician II.	Clerk, general duties (cypher).
Instrument repairer I.	Clerk, general duties (maps).
Instrument repairer II.	Clerk, general duties (postal).
Meteorologist.	Clerk, provisioning.
Cine-projectionist.	W.A.A.F. police.
Maintenance assistant.	Dental clerk orderly.

In Germany itself, however, W.A.A.F. substitution was mainly limited to the clerical and signals trades. Substitution in the domestic trades was limited to those units on which they were established whilst still in Belgium, because it was thought undesirable to employ British women on menial tasks alongside German civilians, and because German labour was available for these trades which had been so much below strength in the United Kingdom. The rule was, of course, not a hard and fast one, and in several instances N.C.O. cooks were employed as supervisors.

Extra blankets and other items of protective clothing were issued to all airwomen proceeding to the Continent; but the two winters of 1944 and 1945 were less severe than usual, and in many cases these items were hardly necessary. During the summer of 1945, however, the need for some kind of summer uniform was felt; tentative requests to the Air Ministry brought a discouraging reply, for cotton goods of all kinds were in extremely short supply. A compromise was thereupon agreed whereby airwomen were permitted to sew collars to two of their shirts and wear them open at the neck.

Personnel were entitled to home leave every 130 days, and from the end of March 1945, a small but steady stream was going on leave daily. Although in the early days the serious dislocation of the Continental railway systems made short local leave difficult, every effort was made to provide accommodation, and gradually conditions improved. Clubs and rest centres, usually run on inter-service lines, were good, and much appreciated. Airwomen had opportunities to take part in swimming, sailing, riding, tennis and ski-ing; but their participation in gliding was forbidden after a number of accidents had occurred. When E.N.S.A. came to an end, the command had to be self-supporting for entertainment, and as a result, live shows of all kinds, in which both officers and airwomen took part, were formed and made most successful tours in the British Zone.

### Gibraltar

Discussions on the posting of W.A.A.F. officers to Gibraltar began in 1943; but the posting was not effected until 1944, because of the difficulty of finding suitable accommodation for women officers in the crowded peninsula. Early in 1944 a good house was found; but it seemed impossible to find staff to look after it. The W.A.A.F. Staff Officer, Coastal Command, submitted an urgent request to the Air Ministry for permission to post six airwomen as domestic staff for the W.A.A.F. officers' mess. This special request was agreed, contrary to the accepted policy, which did not allow the posting of airwomen in such small numbers. So there were twenty-four officers in Gibraltar, with five airwomen and one 'G' officer, established in the rank of squadron officer. This posting came to an end in August 1945, when the pressure of work decreased, and the officers were returned to the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

### Norway

In June 1945 Fighter Command asked for permission to post a small number of airwomen to Norway, for special duties as clerks, telephonists and teleprinter operators with No. 88 Group. This was agreed, volunteers were called for, and forty-seven airwomen, under the command of a 'G' officer who spoke fluent Norwegian, served in Oslo from July to November 1945.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. File A.73045/44.

<sup>2</sup> A.M. File A.804535/45

## CONCLUSION

The fundamental object of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force was to keep the aircraft of the Royal Air Force flying, by ensuring that no machine was ever grounded because the men, who should have formed its crew or maintenance party, were employed elsewhere on duties which could be performed by women. The facts recorded in the preceding pages provide not only proof that this object was successfully achieved, but also ample vindication of the faith and foresight of those responsible for the formation of the W.A.A.F.

At the outbreak of war it numbered less than 2,000 women, in six trades and one officer branch, virtually untrained and wholly inexperienced in the customs and procedure of the R.A.F., but full of zeal and the spirit of service. Although, often faced with many physical discomforts, they applied themselves eagerly to learn their duties. Gradually their high morale, tenacity and determination won for them respect and approbation, and enabled them to overcome all obstacles. They set themselves to train later recruits and to infuse them with their own spirit, and the *esprit de corps* which prevailed throughout the service is a tribute to their success.

The service increased in numbers and in efficiency, and, as the manpower situation deteriorated, the field of employment steadily expanded, until, at the peak in mid-1943, there were nearly 182,000 women, serving in twenty-two officer branches and seventy-five trades. Except for a comparatively small number who were concerned with the welfare of W.A.A.F. personnel, all these were releasing men for essential duties. It has been estimated that, without the support of the W.A.A.F. the R.A.F. would have required 150,000 extra men, who could only have been obtained at the expense of the other services or of industry, with disastrous results.

These figures demonstrate the value of the services rendered by the members of the W.A.A.F. They worked side by side with the R.A.F. in nearly every part of the United Kingdom as well as in many overseas theatres, and, though there were occasional friction and clashes of personality inherent in communal life, on the whole they worked harmoniously together, realizing that each had a contribution to make towards the war effort.

The work done by the W.A.A.F. was recognized by the granting of a number of honours and awards, and thousands were mentioned in despatches. The great majority, however, worked unstintingly with no reward other than the knowledge that they had done their duty to the best of their ability; their hours were long, their life usually dull, and their duties far removed from the urgency of operations and the glamour of publicity. The real success of the service can be measured by the fine tradition they built up, providing a solid foundation for a permanent service and an example and inspiration to its members.



## **APPENDIX 1**

(a)

### **ROYAL WARRANT**

#### **WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE**

WHEREAS by Our Warrant dated the 9th day of September, 1938, we were pleased to provide an Organisation, to be designated the Auxiliary Territorial Service, whereby certain non-combatant duties in connection with Our Military and Air Forces may from time to time be performed by women;

OUR WILL AND PLEASURE is that so much of Our said Warrant as relates to the formation of the said Organisation with respect to Our Air Forces and the enrolment of women therein shall be revoked and that there shall be formed a separate Organisation to be designated the Women's Auxiliary Air Force;

OUR FURTHER WILL AND PLEASURE is that women may be enrolled in this Force under such conditions and subject to such qualifications as may from time to time be laid down by Our Air Council.

Given at Our Court at St. James's, this 28th day of  
June, 1939, in the 3rd year of Our Reign.

**BY HIS MAJESTY'S COMMAND.**

Kingsley Wood.

(b)

### **STATUTORY RULES AND ORDERS**

**1941 No. 581**

#### **EMERGENCY POWERS (DEFENCE)**

##### **Women's Forces**

#### **THE DEFENCE (WOMEN'S FORCES) REGULATIONS, 1941**

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At the Court at Buckingham Palace, the 25th day of April, 1941.

**PRESENT,**

**The King's Most Excellent Majesty in Council.**

His Majesty, in pursuance of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Acts, 1939 and 1940, and of all other powers enabling Him in that behalf, is pleased, by and with the advice of His Privy Council, to order, and it is hereby ordered that the following Regulations shall have effect:—

1. These Regulations may be cited as the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations, 1941.
2. The Interpretation Act, 1889, shall apply to the interpretation of these Regulations as it applies to the interpretation of an Act of Parliament.
3. (Refers to women serving with the Army and is omitted.)

4. All women who—

- (a) are employed with the Medical Branch of the Royal Air Force with relative rank as officers; or
- (b) are enrolled in Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service or the reserve thereof; or
- (c) are enrolled in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force;

not being, in any of the said cases, women serving part time or without remuneration, are hereby declared (whether their enrolment or other undertaking to serve was before or at or after the date of the making of these Regulations) to be members of the armed forces of the Crown.

5. During the continuance in force of the two last preceding Regulations, such of the women therein specified as are selected by His Majesty to serve as officers may be granted, and may hold, commissions.

6. Until such dates as may be specified in instructions of the Army Council or the Air Council, as the case may be, the Army Act and the Air Force Act shall apply in relation to women who are members of the armed forces of the Crown as they applied before the making of these Regulations: and on or after the dates so specified, the said Acts shall respectively apply in relation to them in such manner, to such extent and subject to such adaptations and modifications as may be specified in those or any subsequent instructions of the Army Council or the Air Council as the case may be.

7. Subject to the provisions of the last preceding Regulation,—

- (a) in relation to the women members of the armed forces of the Crown specified in Regulation three of these Regulations, His Majesty and the Army Council; and
- (b) in relation to the women members of the armed forces of the Crown specified in Regulation four of these Regulations, His Majesty and the Air Council,

shall have the same powers respectively of making orders and regulations as they have in relation to the Army and the Royal Air Force.

8. Subject to the provisions of the two last preceding Regulations, so much of any enactment as relates or refers to any of the armed forces of the Crown or any of the members thereof, shall apply in relation to women who are members of the armed forces to such extent and in the same manner only as it would have applied if these Regulations had not been made.

*Rupert B. Howorth.*

## APPENDIX 2

### STRENGTH

Date	Officers	Airwomen	Total
1939, 3 September . . .	234	1,500	1,734
1940, 1 January . . .	359	8,403	8,762
1 April . . .	520	8,420	8,940
1 July . . .	687	11,170	11,857
1 October . . .	1,170	16,194	17,364
1941, 1 January . . .	1,368	19,121	20,489
1 April . . .	1,547	25,497	27,044
1 July . . .	1,891	35,493	37,384
1 October . . .	3,012	61,297	64,309
1942, 1 January . . .	4,001	94,410	98,411
1 April . . .	4,041	106,787	110,828
1 July . . .	4,695	120,961	125,656
1 October . . .	5,379	136,088	141,467
1943, 1 January . . .	5,796	160,173	165,969
1 April . . .	5,940	174,119	180,059
1 July . . .	5,974	175,861	181,835
1 October . . .	5,880	174,459	180,339
1944, 1 January . . .	6,040	170,780	176,820
1 April . . .	6,090	169,578	175,668
1 July . . .	6,199	168,207	174,406
1 October . . .	6,276	164,968	171,244
1945, 1 January . . .	6,355	159,810	166,165
1 April . . .	6,316	153,306	159,622
1 May . . .	6,278	151,008	157,286
1 July . . .	6,233	146,719	152,952
1 September . . .	5,638	130,253	135,891
1 October . . .	5,256	119,193	124,449
1946, 1 January . . .	4,373	93,371	97,744
1 April . . .	2,973	66,128	69,101

Reference:—R.A.F. Personnel Statistics (A.D.M. (Stats.) ).

## APPENDIX 3

### BRANCHES AND TRADES

#### Officer Branches

Administrative	Orthoptist.
Signals Supervisory Radar.	Code and Cypher.
Signals, Special Radar.	Personnel Selection.
Intelligence.	Meteorological.
Photographic Interpretation.	Catering.
Operations ' B '.	Signals ' G '.
Operations ' C '.	Accountant.
Filter.	Equipment.
Movements Liaison.	Motor Transport.
Interception Controller.	Provost Marshal.
Medical and Psychological Assistant.	W.A.A.F. ' G '.

#### Airwomen Trades

##### (a) *W.A.A.F. only:*

Administrative.	Hairdresser.
Armament Assistant.	Instrument Mechanic.
Balloon Parachute Hand.	Orderly.
Charging Board Operator.	Radio Assistant.
Clerk, Personnel Selection.	Sparking Plug Tester.
Clerk, Special Duties, Watch-keeping.	Tracer.
Dental Hygienist.	W.A.A.F. Physical Training Instructor.
Droge Packer and Repairer.	W.A.A.F. Police.
Fabric Worker (Balloon).	Wireless Telegraphy Slip Reader.
Fabric Worker, Rigger (Balloon).	

##### (b) *Trades Common to R.A.F. and W.A.A.F.*

Acetylene Welder.	Clerk, Accounting.
Air Movement Assistant.	Clerk, Equipment Accounts.
Aircraft Finisher.	Clerk, general duties.
Armourer (Guns).	Clerk, general duties (cypher).
Balloon Operator.	Clerk, general duties (maps).
Batwoman.	Clerk, general duties (postal).
Carpenter, II.	Clerk, general duties (technical).
Chiropodist.	Clerk, general duties (provisioning).
Cine Projectionist.	Clerk (movement control).
Clerk, special duties.	Clerk (signals).

Cook.  
Dental clerk orderly.  
Dispenser.  
Draughtsman Cartographer.  
Driver, Motor Transport.  
Electrician I.  
Electrician II.  
Embarkation Assistant.  
Equipment Assistant.  
Fabric Worker.  
Fitter II Aircraft.  
Fitter II Engine.  
Flight Mechanic (Engine).  
Flight Mechanic (Aircraft).  
Instrument Repairer, I.  
Instrument Repairer, II.  
Interpreter.  
Interpreter, Technical.  
Laboratory Assistant.  
Maintenance Assistant.  
Masseuse.  
Mess Steward.  
Meteorologist.  
Model Maker.  
Motor Transport Mechanic.

Nursing Orderly.  
Operating Room Assistant.  
Optician Orderly.  
Parachute Packer.  
Parachute Repairer.  
Photographer.  
Pigeon Keeper.  
Radiographer.  
Radar Mechanic (Air).  
Radar Mechanic (Ground).  
Radar Operator.  
Radar Operator (Computer).  
Radio-telephone Operator, II.  
Radio-telephone Operator, IV.  
Safety Equipment Worker.  
Safety Equipment Assistant.  
Shoe Repairer.  
Tailor.  
Telegraphist.  
Telephonist.  
Teleprinter Operator.  
Waitress.  
Wireless Mechanic.  
Wireless Operator.  
Wireless Operator Mechanic.

## APPENDIX 4

### SCALE OF SUBSTITUTION

Classification.	Degree of Substitution	Basis	Remarks
<i>Officers</i>			
Admin. 'G' (Assistant Adjutant)	75 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Admin. 'G'	As necessary.	1 for 1	—
Accountant	33½ per cent.	1 for 1	Up to Flight Lieutenant.
Air Raid Warning Liaison	As necessary.	1 for 1	Specially assessed—A.D.G.B.
Balloon	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Home only.
Code and Cypher	100 per cent.	1 for 1	Home only. Specially assessed overseas.
Catering (Unit and Hospital)	33½ per cent.	1 for 1	Up to Flight Lieutenants.
Dental	As necessary.	—	—
Equipment	33½ per cent.	1 for 1	Headquarters Establishments and Civilian manned units in Maintenance Command.
134 Equipment	50 per cent.	1 for 1	All other Units in Home Commands up to and including Squadron Leader. Senior post to be R.A.F.
Filterer	Approximately 50 per cent.	—	S/O.s.
Intelligence	As necessary (through A.C.A.S.).	—	—
M.T.	—	—	To the extent that they possess the same qualifications as male candidates.
Medical.	As necessary.	—	To the extent that suitably qualified women are available.
Meteorological	As necessary.	—	To the extent that suitably qualified women are available.
Ops. room (A.D.G.B.)	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Ops. room (Coastal Command)	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Home only.
Orthoptist	100 per cent.	1 for 1	Commissioning of civilian women.
Photographic	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed.
Photographic interpretation	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed.
P. Staff	1 (Junior Officer).	—	At T.T., Mtce. and Balloon Commands.
P.M. and A.P.M.	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed.
R.T. Speech Instructor	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Signals B.	—	—	180 posts for W.A.A.F. Signals officers.
Signals Intelligence	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed.
Signals, Radar	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed according to type of unit.
Signals, Radar Supervisory	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed according to type of unit.
Signals, Special Radar	As necessary.	—	Specially assessed according to type of unit.

Classification	Degree of Substitution	Basis	Remarks
<i>Other Ranks</i>			
Acetylene Welders . . . .	Up to 75 per cent.	1 for 1	Repair depots only.
Aircraft finisher . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	In non-operational units at home—i.e. O.T.U.s, Flying Training Schools, Heavy Conversion Units, Service Repair Depots, Aircraft Stores Units and other non-operational units.
Aircraft-hand (G.D.) . . . .	Institutes, 100 per cent.	1 for 1	2 for each unit irrespective of size.
	Dining halls and Cookhouses, 50 per cent.	1 for 1	—
	Drogue Targets.	1 for 1	6 in lieu of 6 airmen at all bombing and gunnery schools.
	Nurse, Domestic, 100 per cent.	1 for 1	No mixed staffs—i.e. civilians.
	Cleaners, Sgts. Messes } 50	1 for 1	—
	Cleaners, Officers } per		
	Messes. } cent.		
	G.O.R. and Local Controller.	1 for 1	—
	Bomb plotters, 100 per cent.	1 for 1	Not to be employed on bombing ranges except in A.D.G.B. where suitable accommodation exists.
	Cleaners, S.H.Q., 50 per cent.	1 for 1	—
	Runners, 50 per cent.	1 for 1	W.A.A.F. trade—Orderly.
Armament assistants for duty on	75 per cent. (2 Cpls. within the	1 for 1	Excluding Squadrons and/or Echelons.
Ammunition Belts.	scale in each party).		
	66½ per cent.	1 for 1	In Torpedo Sections.
Batwomen . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	To be employed at all stations including operational stations in single officers quarters only.
Balloon operators . . . .	—	12 for 9	W.A.A.F. crew = 1 Sgt., 1 Cpl. 10 ACW.s.
Chiropractors . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Cine Projectionists . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	R.A.F. trade—ACH (G.D.).
Cine film assessor . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	1 per assessor.
Clerks, Accounting . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	R.A.F. must always be senior.
Clerks, Equip., Accounting . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Exclusively at Station H.Q. Accounts section.
Clerks, Equip., Accounting . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	In Squadrons.
Clerks, Pay Accounting . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Exclusively at Station H.Q. Accounts section.
Clerks, G.D. . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Up to Sergeant.
Clerks, G.D. . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	In Squadrons.
Clerks, G.D. (Maps) . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Clerks G.D. (Postal) . . . .	90 per cent.	1 for 1	R.A.F. ACH.s to help with heavy lifting.
Clerks G.D. (Personnel Selection) . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Clerks (Provisioning) . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Clerks (Signals) . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Clerks (S.D.). . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Except in special cases.

Classification	Degree of Substitution	Basis	Remarks																	
Clerks (Watchkeeper)	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—																	
Cooks	66⅔ per cent.	5 for 4	—																	
Cooks, W.O.s	50 per cent.	1 for 1	—																	
Cooks, N.C.O.s	90 per cent.	1 for 1	—																	
Draughtsmen (Cartographical)	25 per cent.	1 for 1	—																	
Drivers, M.T.	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Subject to special restrictions.																	
		on light vehicles up to 15 cwt.																		
		5 for 4																		
		for vehicles above 15 cwt. but excluding certain types.																		
Electricians II (Group II)	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Except in Squadrons and Servicing Echelons.																	
	66⅔ per cent.	1 for 1	In Torpedo Units, static and O.T.U. Torpedo Sections.																	
Equipment Assistant	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Station Warden, Asst. Station Warden and the senior N.C.O. post should always be R.A.F. posts, plus 1 AC, ACH (G.D.) for every four W.A.A.F. equipment assts. (Cpls. and ACW.s).																	
			A.E.D.s only—no additional AC.s, ACH (G.D.).																	
Equipment Assistant	20 per cent.	1 for 1	In Torpedo Units, Static and O.T.U. Torpedo Stations.																	
Equipment Assistant	66⅔ per cent.	1 for 1	In Squadrons (Cpls. and ACW.s).																	
Equipment Assistant.	33⅓ per cent.	1 for 1	—																	
Fabric Workers	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—																	
Flight Mechanics A. and E.	Up to 50 per cent., dependent on type of Unit.	1 for 1 up to 25 per cent.	(a) Except in Squadron and Servicing Echelons. Special substitution in certain types of units.																	
		1.1 for 1 above 25 per cent.	(b) Maintenance Wings at O.T.U.s (including heavy conversion units in Bomber Command) and Flying Training Schools.																	
			<table><tr><th rowspan="2">Command</th><th colspan="2">Percentage of Substitution</th></tr><tr><th>Servicing Sqdn. H.Q.</th><th>Flights</th></tr><tr><td>Bomber . . . . .</td><td>50 per cent.</td><td>Nil.</td></tr><tr><td>Coastal . . . . .</td><td>50 per cent.</td><td>25 per cent.</td></tr><tr><td>A.D.G.B. . . . .</td><td>50 per cent.</td><td>25 per cent.</td></tr><tr><td>Flying Training . . . . .</td><td>50 per cent.</td><td>25 per cent.</td></tr></table>	Command	Percentage of Substitution		Servicing Sqdn. H.Q.	Flights	Bomber . . . . .	50 per cent.	Nil.	Coastal . . . . .	50 per cent.	25 per cent.	A.D.G.B. . . . .	50 per cent.	25 per cent.	Flying Training . . . . .	50 per cent.	25 per cent.
Command	Percentage of Substitution																			
	Servicing Sqdn. H.Q.	Flights																		
Bomber . . . . .	50 per cent.	Nil.																		
Coastal . . . . .	50 per cent.	25 per cent.																		
A.D.G.B. . . . .	50 per cent.	25 per cent.																		
Flying Training . . . . .	50 per cent.	25 per cent.																		
			(c) May be employed at dispersal sites where conditions are suitable.																	



Classification	Degree of Substitution	Basis	Remarks
Instrument Repairers, II . . . .	66½ per cent.	1 for 1	In Torpedo Units, Static and Torpedo Sections.
	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Except in Squadrons and servicing echelons.
Maintenance Assistants . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	Maintenance Squadrons } Flying Training Command only.
			Servicing Squadrons }
Masseurs . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	Holding reserve of posts for R.A.F. equal to 200 per cent. of overseas commitments.
Mess Stewards . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Messing N.C.O.s . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	To be drawn from the basic trades of cook and to have sound clerical and elementary arithmetical ability.
M.T. Mechanics . . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Except operational squadrons and servicing echelons.
	25 per cent.—30 per cent. F.T. Cd.	1 for 1	—
	50 per cent. Balloon Cd.	1 for 1	At Centres.
	25 per cent. Balloon Cd.	1 for 1	At Flights.
Nursing Orderlies . . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	General and Station Hospitals.
Optician Orderly . . . . .	80 per cent.	1 for 1	As and when skilled women are available.
Orderlies . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	R.A.F. trade A.C.H. (G.D.).
Orderlies, Pneumatic Tube Oprs.	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Orderlies, Messenger Ops. Room and Sigs. Section.	100 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Orderlies, Timekeeping duties)			—
Patternmaker (Architectural) . .	25 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Photographers:			
A.D.G.B. . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	All Units (ACW).
Bomber Command . . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Operational Stations (ACW).
	50 per cent.	1 for 1	O.T.U.s (Cpls. and ACW.s). No substitution allowed in operational squadrons.
C.I.U. . . . .	80 per cent.	1 for 1	Up to and including rank of Sgt.
Coastal Command . . . . .	—		No substitution allowed for operational stations and operational squadrons.
	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Benson (up to and including rank of Sgt.).
	50 per cent.	1 for 1	Training units, including No. 8 O.T.U. (up to and including rank of Cpl.).
Flying Training Command . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	A.F.U. and A.O. Schools and all other units except No. 1 E.A.N.S. (up to and including rank of Cpl.).
Maintenance Command . . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	All Units (ACW).
Transport Command . . . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	All Units (ACW).
Technical Training Command . . .	50 per cent.	1 for 1	General Section No. 1. School of Photography (up to and including rank of Corporal). No substitution allowed for training instructors.

Classification	Degree of Substitution	Basis	Remarks
Radar mechanics (Air) . . . . .	33½ per cent.	1 for 1	Including N.C.O.s up to Cpls. all stations, excluding operational squadrons and isolated W/T sections and outstations at home.
Radar mechanics (G) . . . . .			
Radar operators . . . . .			
R/T operators (II) . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	At Homer Stations certain Fighter Fixer Stations and aircraft watches, Fighter Command only.
R/T operators (IV) . . . . .	65 per cent.	1 for 1	Darky Service.
Safety Equipment Assistants . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	50 per cent. engaged on multi-Seater Dinghy Packing and Repairing.
	50 per cent, and 100 per cent.	1 for 1	100 per cent. on Parachute 'K' type Dinghy Packing and Repairing.
Safety Equipment Worker . . . . .	50 per cent. and 100 per cent.	1 for 1	Not to be employed on the stowage of dinghies in aircraft.
Tailoresses . . . . .	—	—	—
Shoe repairers . . . . .	—	1 for 1	R.A.F. to be retained for stripping.
Telephonists . . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Stations will be established on an all R.A.F. or all W.A.A.F. basis. No mixed staff will be allowed.
Teleprinter Operators . . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Waitresses . . . . .	90 per cent.	1 for 1	—
Wireless Mechanics . . . . .	33½ per cent.	1 for 1	Including up to Corporal except at Operational Squadrons and isolated W/T Stations and outstations at Home.
Wireless Operators . . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Up to and including Sergeant.
Wireless Operators (DF) . . . . .	75 per cent.	1 for 1	Up to and including Sergeant.
Wireless Operators (Slip Reader) . . . . .	100 per cent.	1 for 1	Excluding mobile stations.

*Note:* Full substitution on a 1 for 1 basis is effected in the Medical trades of dispensers, operating room assistants and radiographers at home but reserving R.A.F. posts to cover 200 per cent. of overseas commitments.

**RESTRICTED**

**APPENDIX 5**

**STRENGTH OVERSEAS**

		1940, July	1940, Dec.	1941, July	1941, Dec.	1942, July	1942, Dec.	1943, July	1943, Dec.	1944, July	1944, Dec.	1945, July	1945, Dec.
U.S.A. . . .	Officers	3	3	7	29	35	40	48	52	62	69	82	26
Bermuda . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	4	4	4	4	4	3	2
Canada . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	13	22	26	27	26	28	28	24
Bahamas . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	7	9	9	5	—
Labrador . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	4	6	4	7	—
Newfoundland .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	4	4	4	—
India . . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	88	86
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	250	705	581
Ceylon . . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	26	11
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	479	195
Singapore . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	33
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	167
Middle East Area.	Officers	—	—	—	—	149	200	237	233	178	208	175	179
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	750	1,571	2,393	3,365	3,447
Mediterranean Area.	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	28	121	122	113	84
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	13	1,004
France . . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3*	—	29	16
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10*	—	194	236
Belgium . . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12	17	11
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	77	1,185	208
Holland . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Germany . . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	101
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	72	1,063
Denmark . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Norway . . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12	47
Melbourne . . .	Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	3
	Airwomen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2

Note :—\* September 1944.