

*PART III*

WOMEN IN THE  
ARMY MEDICAL SERVICES

## CHAPTER 33

### WOMEN OFFICERS IN THE A.A.M.C.

THE authority for appointment of medical officers in the A.A.M.C. described them as "persons legally qualified to practise medicine" and the word "persons" was not interpreted to include women until 1940. A precedent was given by a British War Office Order which on 17th October 1939 authorised the commissioning of women in the R.A.M.C. On this model the commissioning of women graduates in medicine in the A.A.M.C. was introduced in Australia on 10th July 1940, when the Military Board stated the terms of such appointments. These granted women medical officers equal rank on first commission, equal chance of promotion and equal rates of pay and allowances with male medical officers. The first woman commissioned in the A.A.M.C. was Captain Lady W. I. E. MacKenzie, M.B., B.S., who was appointed on 25th September 1940 after a period of six months' work in administrative duties in a voluntary capacity. After this more medical women were commissioned, mostly as specialists in general hospitals, but some for general duties and administration. As women medical officers in A.A.M.C. units increased in numbers some difficulty arose about their status. This was clarified in a memorandum by the D.G.M.S. on 9th February 1943, which informed all areas that women medical officers were to be given the privileges of officers' rank and medical status, including right of membership of the officers' mess. The D.G.M.S. pointed out that no medical officer should be placed in an invidious position.

*Assistant Pathologists.* Grouped with these were the biochemists, and all science graduates who assisted the pathologist medical officer in a general hospital. These officers were not always commissioned on first joining the army; some held the rank of sergeant and, until 1st September 1944, were A.A.M.W.S. officers on promotion. The first woman assistant pathologist was Captain M. L. Freeman, B.Sc., who, in April 1940, went to the Middle East with the 2/2nd A.G.H. as a voluntary aid. She was commissioned as a lieutenant in the A.A.M.W.S. on 20th May 1942 and appointed an assistant pathologist. Promotion among assistant pathologists, male and female, was governed by the ratio of one captain to four lieutenants.

*Pharmacists.* Pharmacists also were sometimes enlisted as N.C.O's, and promotion was made on recommendation, and when vacancies existed. Staff-Sergeant G. J. Richardson, promoted in 1944 to lieutenant in the A.A.M.C., was the first woman pharmacist appointed in the army.

*Physiotherapists.* At first female physiotherapists, then called "masseuses", were not enlisted in, but attached to the army. Though accorded the privileges of officers they were not commissioned in the A.A.M.C. as physiotherapists till early in 1942. As these appointments created an anomalous position the physiotherapists were transferred to

the A.A.M.W.S. in July 1943 but retransfer was made later to the A.A.M.C. Further particulars of these officers are given in a later chapter.

*Dietitians.* Qualified dietitians were commissioned as lieutenants, with provision for promotion, and were appointed to the large base hospitals. All commissions were at first in the A.A.M.W.S., but, after September 1944, in the A.A.M.C.

*Occupational Therapists.* The history of these women officers is given in another section; they were appointed only to static hospitals.

It may again be noted that administrative difficulties with regard to status and pay arose in respect of the appointments of all women officers in the A.A.M.C. except medical officers. The device of commissioning them in the A.A.M.W.S. proved unsatisfactory and was abandoned. The aspects of these troubles as they concerned women serving in various technical capacities are dealt with in the sections on individual services. In the main, grouping the members of such services in the A.A.M.C. was satisfactory, and ensured all of them equal rights. As they were all specialists, once they were commissioned no training problems arose except those concerned with army administration. This problem was dealt with where necessary by sending officers on appointment to the Army Women's Services Officers' School.

Women officers in the A.A.M.C. had opportunities for oversea service, and in other respects had the same conditions of service as officers in other women's services; benefits, allowances and pay were the same for all women officers except medical officers. The question of equality of pay for men and women carrying out special technical work in the armed Services is not discussed in detail here, but there was surely good reason for the resentment felt by many highly qualified women at the inflexibility of military procedures.