



HATTIE B. HARRIS

Prior to enlisting in the WAAC, I experienced a happy and productive life. I am a native of Paris, MO. And the daughter of the late Grimsley and Susie Bell. Attended Chrispus Attucks School thru the 10th grade. (that was as far as the grades went for the colored students at that time. I graduated Garfield High in Mexico, MO in 1938.

The day Pearl Harbor was attacked, I was attending Western University in Quindro, KS. Later moving to Jacksonville, IL I secured employment with a defense plant in Springfield, IL and moved there. After reading about the WAAC's and being very adventurous, I decided to join. My family and friends were not very receptive to the idea.

I signed up in Springfield, IL. When I received my Orders to report to Ft. Sheradon, IL. I was very excited. I met a group of ladies from Chicago and we traveled to Boston by train from there by bus to Ft Devens, Mass for Basic Training. On arrival at Ft. Devens we were greeted by Officers, shown our barracks, then to the GI issues, some that fit and some that did not.

The most outstanding memories of Basic Training were lining up alphabetically each Saturday for a series of shots. I was third on line. (Being afraid of needles, it was an unforgettable experience.) I was resentful of doing KP in the white mess hall and they didn't come to us.

I had no problems learning to do things the Army way.

The 47th MP Batillion was stationed near by. A few of the soldiers and I were classmates in high school. As our barracks was near the services club, we would we would meet enjoy conversations and dancing. This made Basic more tolerable/enjoyable.

Growing up on a farm, I liked the outdoors, so I signed up for the Motor Transport School. After Basic Training several of us were transferred to Ft. Des Moines, Iowa there I was assigned to Motor Transport School.

Some of the girls were sorta resented us because we often related to them the fun we had at Basic Training.

After completion of Motor Transport School, two of us were transferred to Ft. Dix, New Jersey. We traveled by segregated train some passengers felt sorry for us carrying the heavy Gas Masks.

At Ft. Dix's I drove an ambulance for a short time, then the two of us were transferred to Hollorand Hospital on Staten Island, NY. Upon arrival at Hollorand we were greeted and assigned to the Motor Pool. We lived in barracks heated by coal burning stoves. German prisoners of War took care of the stoves. When they would enter the barracks they would yell "A MAN IN THE HOUSE." Our barracks were like a large happy family. I can't remember if there ever was a misunderstanding among any of us girls.

During the European Invasion of 1944 WW11, I drove ambulance. When ships arrived to NY Habor with wounded Soldiers, we would begin early evacuating soldiers from Hollorand to the surrounding airports.

Some went home others returned to their units in Europe. At the same time we were picking up our war wounded from the ships. We transported the mentally wounded to Brentwood Hospital in Queens, NY and the medically wounded to Hollorand on Staten Island.

In between ship arrivals, I drove a linen truck. Picked linen from the hospitals wards with German prisoners of War loading the truck. I would then take the linen to Manhatten to the laundry.

I also worked as a gas attendant at the gas station.

I later was assigned to Western Union Hollorand as a teletype operator.

When my tour of duty was complete and I received an Honorable Discharge, rank of Corporal on 21 January 1946 at Ft. Sheridan, IL. I relocated to Jefferson City, MO. My mom family and friends were happy to have me back with them.

I enrolled at Lincoln University using the GI Bill. Later I returned to Springfield, IL was employed by Illinois Commission on Children as the Office Manager. (First and only Black in the office at the time).

My experience as a WAAC-WAC kindled my courage, gave support and strength to survive all sorts of events in my life.

I often communicate and relate to some of my comrades I met during my tour of duty in WAAC-WAC. 1942 to 1946