

# HERSTORIES

A TRIBUTE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN  
WHO SERVED IN THE U.S. MILITARY SERVICES  
DURING WORLD WAR TWO

A DIRECTORY  
& PERSONAL "HER"STORIES

COMPILED AND EDITED BY  
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## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The mission of the National Association of Black Military Women (NABMW) is to preserve the history and maintain the heritage of African American Women in the military. It has become a custom at our meetings for women to relate to their personal "herstory's" orally; sometimes up in front as a "speaker" and at other times sitting in a group with other military women sharing stories and memories. We have spoken many times of getting these "herstory's" written down and preserved. Some of this has been done by individuals, and many of our women have been invited by various groups to talk about their military experiences at special events. Members have been interviewed for newspaper articles, books, and documentaries, but we have not had the opportunity to organize these stories in a way that they could be preserved for the future.

When I found that the World War Two women were going to be recognized and honored at our next reunion being held in conjunction with the dedication of a museum and memorial park at Fort Des Moines, I volunteered to prepare a booklet containing some of these "herstory's" in time for the reunion. My thinking was that many of the women of our era have passed on and we do not have their stories. Those of us still living are in our eighties and of course not all are members of our association.

In our NABMW Newsletter sent out to the membership, a request was made for World War Two Women to contact me. My home phone, address and e-mail were listed. I prepared materials to send out to women who contacted me. The materials contained a Profile sheet to gather identification information to be used in a "directory"; a form detailing some of the things the "herstory" might contain with suggested questions to "jog memories"; and a request for two pictures, one in uniform and one civilian.

I gathered some names from "ads" in former Souvenir Journals in which women indicated they were in World War Two; I received phone calls. Some ladies gave me the names of others they knew, and I was aware personally of women who had served at Fort Des Moines with me. In my first mailing, I sent out sixty letters. Others were sent out later. I talked with a number of women on the phone. I found some were interested in telling their stories, some thought they couldn't remember enough, and others were disinclined to write at all. I gave a deadline of March fifteenth in order for me to have the time to prepare the booklet to take to the printers by the end of May. I would be away during June and I wanted everything ready by our reunion in July.

I received two stories right away and others came in slowly. Some folks lost their materials and asked for more, others called to say they would be late, and I extended the deadline to March 31<sup>st</sup>, but continued to receive in April. This was a personal project and "labor of love" for me. My typing is not that fast, my computer has a mind of its own, my printer "went stupid" two or three times during the endeavor and my attempts at "cropping" pictures on the scanner were laughable. I had failed to tell the ladies how much material I was looking for, so some ladies wrote ten or twelve pages and others wrote two paragraphs. I wanted to end up with a front and back page including the pictures. Much editing had to be done to try to stay within these bounds.

This booklet contains the "herstory's" of a very limited number of women. I wish there were more. It is my hope that it will be the "beginning" and "first edition" of many such books to follow. It is my intention to make the forms I used available and that the NABMW take over this project and continue to gather the "herstory's" of our ladies.

There is a fair amount of repetition since we had similar experiences, however each lady had her individual response, and I think this shows up in her story, My personal thanks to all who took the time and effort to contribute to this booklet. I am so grateful.

Gladys S. Carter  
"HERSTORY" PROJECT



## ***THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK MILITARY WOMEN***

*Formerly known as the Black WAAC, WAC, Women In Service)*

I must thank Gladys Carter first and foremost for gathering all this information and putting it together in this booklet. It was quite an undertaking. As a World War II (WWII) veteran herself, she took the time and effort to contact women, collect, edit and prepare the materials for printing. This is most remarkable and greatly appreciated. Thank you again and again.

Thank all of you so much for submitting your stories. Our theme for the Reunion this year is: **STANDING ON THEIR SHOULDERS, We could not have, would not have done it without them.** This literally means all of you who were in WW II.

Those of us who entered into the military post that time; the Korean War, Viet Nam, Desert Storm, peacekeeping endeavors in other countries such as Bosnia and even to the present conflict have benefited from those who came before us. I, personally, do not know of anyone who was in World War I, but I have met many of **you**, and I am proud to be, along with you, a member of the National Association of Black Military Women (NABMW). Our Association realizes that we would not have gotten to the ranks many of us now hold, nor been given the responsibilities we now assume, had it not been for **your** volunteering during WW Two when the rules and roles of women and Blacks were being experimentally changed.

Now by your example, we should continue your efforts and goals by insuring that this type of historical information is available, by mentoring, motivating, and supporting the youth of our communities in the attainment of greater achievements by identifying Black military women role models throughout our history by writing our own stories. I thank you and salute you.

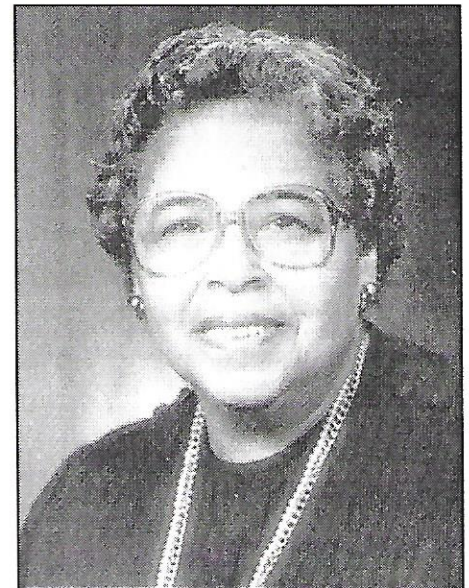
Rosetta Y. Burke  
President

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(Current name; Name in Service; Branch; Date entered/left; Basic Training Site; Commissioned/Enlisted; Rank; Duty Stations; Address/Tel/email \*Member NABMW)

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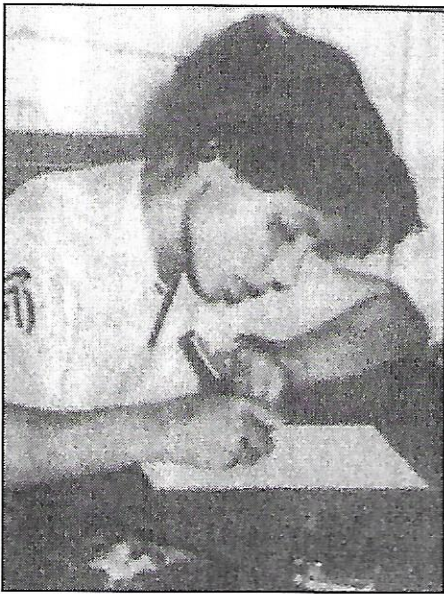
\* **WOODS, ESSIE** (Essie Dell O'Bryant) WAC/Army; 3/43-2/46; Basic/Fort Des Moines, Iowa; Enlisted/Staff Sergeant; Administrative School, Des Moines, Iowa; Administrative School, Des Moines, Iowa; Administrative Records, Station Hospital, Camp Forrest, Tennessee; Overseas Training, Fort Oglethorpe, GA; 688<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory, Birmingham, England; Rouen and Paris, France; 3125 Liddesdale, Detroit, Michigan 48217-1114 (313) 382-5252

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These are the memories of a group of World War Two African American Women who volunteered to serve their country in the military during a period when it was necessary to confront both gender and racial bias in order to perform their duties. They served this nation with courage, determination, dignity, and pride.

*These are . . .*

# HERSTORIES



## HARRIETT B. ADAMS

I joined the Women's Army Corps and entered Basic Training at Fort Des Moines in 1944. During my service I became a Bandsman. I played the clarinet in the 404<sup>th</sup> ASF Band and I was also a saxophonist in the 404<sup>th</sup> Dance Band. I achieved the rank of Tech/Five prior to my discharge in 1945. I did further service with the Women's Army Air Force from 1947-1948, and the Women's Air Force from 1948-1950. Following my discharge, my most notable civilian employment was with the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Southern Leadership Conference with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee as an Adjunct Volunteer. I am very interested in African American History and in the Arts. I like to write poetry and participate in collecting materials of interest and color. I have been an active member of the NABMW and was instrumental in helping to plan the first Atlanta Reunion. I planned and prepared a book on African American Military History focusing on the role of women that I presented to the NABMW. I enjoy the relationship I have established with the members of our association and make an effort to support any projects, which are undertaken to tell the history of Black Military Women.



## GLADYS O. ANDERSON

I wanted to join the Service, especially after my brother volunteered, but I was too young and my parents and my brother told me "NO". Later on, I was with five girl friends, including a WAAC, and we decided to join the Army and serve our country. I was the only one that ended up at the training center at Fort Des Moines. My mother helped me pack and she was proud of her daughter.

I had hoped for a change in careers, but I was classified as a clerk as I was a stenographer. Travel, learning the Army way, marching, parades, inspections, the variety of women you lived with, placing your clothes in the proper places and in the footlocker was all an experience. We were segregated but I gave it no thought and did as I was told, just as I had done as a child riding trains in the south. What I didn't like was everyone being punished for what someone else had done. I wanted to be assigned to California and New York but I got overseas, which was actually a pleasant surprise. My friend was amazed throughout our assignments when I would know someone from Detroit.

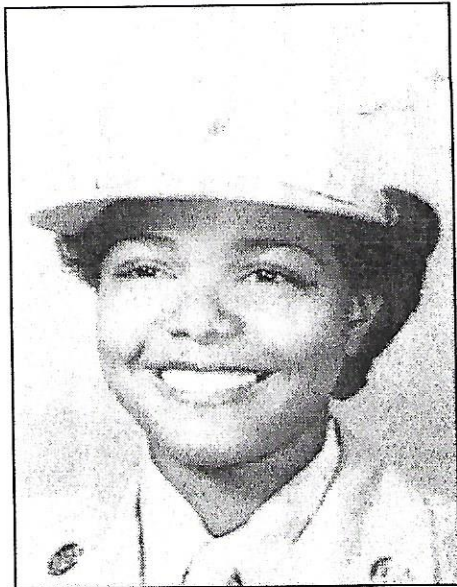
There were times when I was disgusted and wished I had stayed at home, but I was cheered up by my friends, dancing, and playing sports. Then came my overseas assignment. We traveled on the Ile de France, a famous sailing ship. We saw the Cliffs of Dover. Our destination was Birmingham, England. We were a postal unit, about eight hundred, and our job was to forward mail to our soldiers.

In England, I was introduced to Fish and Chips sprinkled with vinegar and wrapped in the newspaper. Our next stop was Rouen, France, a bombed out city. Bricks were really stacked up everywhere. There was a church that had stood from World War One. When off duty, we went to the Red Cross for recreation, dancing, coffee and doughnuts. Some of us met under the oldest clock in the city. I don't know how old it was, but it was old!!

We then went to Paris where we were housed in the Lafayette. Years later I returned to Rouen and it was still there. We went to see the Versailles Palace and other historical places, some fabulous nightclubs and shows. We won a basketball tournament and received ten days R and R. We left Paris on a Victory ship with bunks of canvas held with ropes. I had the one nearest the floor. Woe was me.

My last assignment was in New York where I was sent to Holloran General Hospital on Staten Island, where I worked as a clerk keeping records on officer signing in. A rumor floated that the 6888<sup>th</sup> was going to be reunited; some of them were in California. I guess I got tired of waiting and I didn't believe I would get my old job back, so I decided to go home. My brother had been released from the service. My friends and family were glad to see me. I went to college for two years and married a fellow who had served in Rouen. We bought a home.

I earned four medals: European African, Middle East Theater Victory Medal, Good Conduct, and Army of Occupation Medal. I didn't get the change of occupations. I would have preferred an Air Force job. The Army offered me an opportunity to see countries and famous sites that I would never have seen as a civilian.



## MABEL B. ANDERSON

Before the war, I was living in Detroit, Michigan and working as a window trimmer at "Sally's Frocks". A close male cousin of mine was drafted and I said I was going to volunteer. I thought it would be a good chance to do something different and get to do some traveling. Although I kept saying I was going to volunteer, I kept putting it off for one reason or another. My friends began to tease me and said I was never going to join. One day, I was standing on the corner waiting for a bus. I noticed a big recruiting poster in the window, "Uncle Sam needs you". I went into the office and signed up.

Not long after, I traveled to Fort Des Moines, Iowa for Basic Training. When I completed that, I attended administrative school in the city of Des Moines. My first assignment was to a Calvary post, Fort Clark, Texas where I became the company mail clerk. There was a girl in the company who was not receiving any mail. So I wrote her a letter and sent it to her. Up until today, that same girl, Myrtle Jackson never fails to remind me of that fact when we meet at our NABMW reunions. We always enjoy reminiscing about that.

I was next assigned to Camp Atterbury, Indiana where I studied to be a medical technician. We were being trained to replace nurses who were going overseas. I was then sent to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana where I worked in the station hospital. Claiborne was very segregated. There were white soldiers, black soldiers, and our unit of Black WACs. There were no white WACs stationed there at the time. We all ate in a large mess hall. The black soldiers sat in the back, the WACs were at the middle tables, and the white soldiers sat in the front. The tables were labeled to make sure we were separated. One evening, I went to eat in the mess hall. I was alone because I had worked late. When I reached the mess hall, most of the tables in the front were empty. There were a few white soldiers sitting at the tables across the room. Being alone, and there being all the empty tables, I sat at one of the front tables distant from the white soldiers. A mess attendant on duty told me I could not sit there to eat because that was the white section. I told him I didn't see why I couldn't eat there. There were no white soldiers sitting there and tables were empty. He insisted on my moving, so I walked out without eating. The next morning, I received an order to report to the head of the Mess Hall. He stood over me and said in a loud voice, "I understand you don't like the way I run my mess hall!" He banged his hand on the table. I was frightened and scared and shaking, I managed to get out, "I didn't say I didn't like the way you ran your mess hall, I said I didn't see why I couldn't sit at the table up front where there wasn't anyone sitting there". He then proceeded to "educate" me on the way things were done in the south and how there were rules to follow. I was able to work up enough nerve to say that if we black WACs were good enough to take care of the soldiers in the hospital, we ought to be good enough to eat near them. I was then dismissed. The next day when we went to the mess, there was a different set up. The WAC sign was on the first tables, the white soldiers were to sit in the middle section and the black soldiers were still at the tables in the rear.

I next went to Fort Dix where I was assigned duty in the hospital. I had always liked to entertain. Some of the other women and I formed a chorus line where we performed at company parties. I liked to sign and tap dance. While I was stationed earlier at Fort Des Moines, Count Basie came to town with his orchestra and some other entertainers. When he came to the base to perform, the black WACs were seated in the balcony while the white WACs sat downstairs. After the concert was over, Basie invited everyone to push back the chairs for dancing and then he invited all the WACs to come and dance to his music. We came downstairs and at least on the occasion white and black WACs danced at the same time on the same floor.

I was discharged at Jefferson Barracks, in St. Louis, Missouri. I returned to Detroit. Based on my Army and experience and training, I was qualified to be a Practical Nurse. I really wanted to be an interior decorator but was turned down as the big companies were not hiring any "colored" people. I used the GI Bill to attend Lewis Business College where I studied clerical subjects and medical shorthand. I was employed as a doctor's assistant in a Pediatrician's office for six years. I later worked as a secretary to a Director of Nursing, and at a law firm. For twenty years, I worked for the Fire Department from which I retired in 1986. In 1949, I married Adolph Anderson whom I had met while in the Army. We had exchanged addresses, and later found each other again in Detroit. Our son is now forty six years old.

I have had the opportunity to travel extensively and have been a community volunteer and tutor with the school system. I am active with the Wolverine Chapter of the National WAC Association which participates in many activities with the Veterans Hospital. A charter member of the NABMW, I enjoy attending our reunions, renewing old acquaintances, and sharing proud memories of my days in the WAC.





## MARGARET BARBOUR

3/44-4//72; USAF; Enlististed. SMSgt (E-8); Basic/Fort Des Moines,Iowa; Maxton AFB , NC Records Clerk, Flight Pilots; 6888th Central Postal Directory, England and France; Lockbourne AFB NCOIC HQ. MSG. CTR; NCOIC, Repairs and Utilities; Wright-Patterson AFB, NCOIC; Repairs and Utilities; Hill AFB Training Instructor; Pepperell AFB NCOIC Management and Procedures; Training Instructor; Fort Snelling, Stock Control; Andrews AFB, (15 years) Training Instructor, Funds Manager Vehicle Control, Management and Parcedures; Boiling AFB, Stock Control, Supply Management, Funds Control; 1771 South Genesee Avenue, Los Angeles, CA, 90019-5030; (323) 939 7049



## EDNA E. BROWN

In the small community of Pachuta, Mississippi where I lived, there was no high school. I traveled to Meridian, Mississippi to attend Harris High School from which I graduated in 1941. I remember Pearl Harbor Day well not only because of the attack, but I was also discharged from the Hospital in Hattisburg, Mississippi where I had an operation on my sinus. I had gone to Hattisburg seeking employment in the clerical field. In high school I had studied typing and shorthand and was rather skilled in those subjects. While looking for a job, I came across a list of jobs for the federal government. At the interview, I met a lady who was in the waiting room with me. She told me she had joined the WAAC. I asked her what that was. She told me where to pick up an application. Her name was Dorothy Hill.

In Pachuca, there were only two jobs available. If you were qualified, you could teach school, if not, there was domestic work. I had much higher expectations for myself and made the decision to join the military. My mother was not happy, as she had been a young adult when World War One broke out. Soldiers to her were bad people and they would do bad thing to other people. I was determined and when in about six months, I reported to Fort Des Moines for Basic Training, there was Dorothy Hill assigned to the same barracks.

The trip to Des Moines had been eventful. I had signed up in New Orleans, LA and when I arrived at the New Orleans train station, there were ten or twelve other ladies with orders to report as well. It was about 6:00 AM and very cold in that December 1942. It took two days to reach Iowa. On the first day, lunch was being served in the Diner. The lady in charge of us had meal tickets for the entire group. When she showed them to the Dining Car Attendant, she was told we could not eat in the Dining Car. She told him our tickets were government tickets. The Dining Car Supervisor went to the Sleeping Car, got some sheets and hung them in the Diner to separate us from the white passengers. We ate seated in the back of the Dining Car behind white sheets hanging from the ceiling. When we finally arrived in Des Moines, two canvas-covered trucks awaited us. One truck was for the white women and one for the Negro women. The greater shock was that the ground was covered with snow, only the second time I had seen snow in my life.

Coats for WAACs were not available, so we were issued men's overcoats till ours arrived. Basic Training was very demanding. Calisthenics, KP, Marching were the most difficult. Housing with many people in an open Barrack was unusual. For me, mealtime was the hardest. I have an allergy to certain foods; therefore I was always picking over my food. KP was very tiring. Those pots and pans were very heavy. Wearing the uniform was a joy. One did not have to decide what you were going to wear each day. Learning to do things the army way was a major part of the training. I still do many things the military way, as it is quicker and more efficient. In Basic Training, I learned that everything had to be done by rules and regulations.

I was assigned to Fort Huachuca in Arizona. I was placed in the Receiving Office of the Station Hospital, where my job was to type up admission for patients admitted to the hospital and any other typing the doctors needed me to do.

The saddest day of my military service occurred when one of the male units stationed at the fort went out on the training field. In those days, soldiers trained with live ammunition. About 10:00 AM on the first day of practice, the ambulances began to bring in the wounded. One man was brought into the Receiving Office. His left leg was injured between the knee and hip. He was still alive. The commander that came to the hospital said the soldier was just twenty years old. He asked the soldier "where do you hurt?" The soldier said, "I hurt all over." At that moment he closed his eyes and drew in his last breath. I was still holding his arm as the Nurse was trying to find a vein to insert the needle. I have never forgotten that day.

After my discharge from the Army, I returned to my parents' home for about a month. I then returned to the base and married a soldier I had been dating. After about a year I decided to apply for colleges using the G.I. Bill. I was accepted as a freshman at City College in Sacramento. I continued in the upper division of California State University and received my Teaching Certificate. I became a schoolteacher. I feel the military gave me the chance to complete my education and achieve my goals as an educator. I have been active with the WAC Association and served as a member of the Color Guard. I am a charter member of the NABMW, and have enjoyed my association with other military women. My husband, Roy Brown, is now deceased. I am blessed with a son and three grandchildren.



## PRUDENCE BURNS BURRELL

Prior to World War Two, I was a visiting nurse in Kansas City, Missouri. I enrolled at the University of Minnesota to be working towards a degree in Public Health Nursing. While there, I met Sister Kiney (Wet Pack treatment for Polio). I was a member of the Red Cross in Kansas City. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, instead of remaining a visiting nurse, I decided to join the Army Nurse Corps. SO SEGREGATED!!! My family and friends in Mounds, Illinois my hometown were happy for me. I enlisted at Fort Huachuca, Arizona in 1942.

The 268<sup>th</sup> Station Hospital developed at Fort Huachuca had ten doctors, fourteen nurses, five hundred enlisted men with ten officers in charge of the enlisted men, and one Health Administrator.

In 1945, President Truman ordered the drop of the bomb on Japan. General McArthur signed a Treaty and rescinded our promotions to Captain and I went back to a first lieutenant, ANC.

I served in the South Pacific Theater of Operations, in Australia, New Guinea, and the Philippines. Lt. Lowell H. Burrell, Medical Administrator, and I decided to marry in the Philippines before I left for home in America. My wedding dress was made from a parachute, and has been displayed all over the United States throughout the years and in Germany where my husband (regular Army) and I were stationed.

I have kept in touch with a number of WACs and Nurses I served with over the years until this day. Remaining active, I have written articles, been interviewed, and given speeches at various events dealing with military history. I was awarded the President's Certificate of Appreciation during the 50<sup>th</sup> year Commemoration of WW Two. My autobiography, untitled HATHAWAY, published by Harlo Press, Detroit, Michigan in 1997, goes into much greater detail about my life in the military as an Army Nurse.



## DOROTHY C. CANN

Several years after graduating from High School, I was able to go to college. I worked as a waitress while attending Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO. During the school year, I worked at the College Inn, which was located at the foot of the historic 52 steps that still remain as a landmark of the campus. During the summer I worked at the well-known Smalls Café in Kansas City, MO. The news about Pearl Harbor was disturbing, as many members in the University Pilot Training School were on draft status. After graduation I worked in a small post office, awaiting assignment to a teaching position. When a recruiter came to the USA service hall to speak about the WAAC, I enlisted.

On December 18, 1942, I traveled by train to Des Moines with other inductees from my area, where we settled in. We soon became accustomed to reveille, close order drill, and KP. Our group was assigned to the Cooks and Bakers unit, and I was sent to the Officer's Mess as a pastry cook.

After six weeks we were transferred to the 1550 Service Hospital Unit in Fort Knox, Kentucky. I remained there until assigned to the 6888 Central Postal Battalion and shipped overseas.

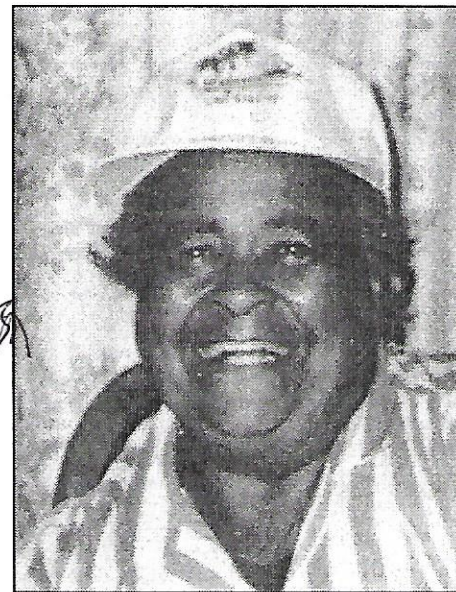
We were lodged in the buildings of the King Edwards School in Birmingham, England. Our assignment was to process the backed up mail that almost filled the large gymnasium. When that mail was cleared we were sent to Rouen, France and continued rerouting mail.

In November of 1945 I signed out, and returned to Fort Dix where I was discharged. I married and moved to New York. After my son was born, I went back to school. I took courses at Columbia using the G.I. Bill, until I was assigned a Scholarship in a Math Retraining Program, at Rutgers. I began teaching at a Junior High School in September 1963, and retired in 1978.

In August 1993, I moved to California to be near my son and his family.



*Gladys S. Carter*



## GLADYS S. CARTER

I was in my junior year at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia when Pearl Harbor was attacked. I remember the students, all in shock, gathering in small groups on the main campus, each telling how they had heard about it. I am sure many of us had never heard of Pearl Harbor, nor had we known its location. We soon found out as days passed and our country was at war. We were furious with what had happened and it was like “how dare they attack our country”!!! “State” was an all black college and we were very much involved with the “race issue”, discrimination, and segregation policies, but we responded to the crisis much the same as other Americans with indignation, patriotism, and determination to do our part in the war.

I do not know exactly when or where I heard that women were being sought to serve in the Army. I know that I immediately wanted to go. I found I had to wait until I was twenty-one to join, so on my birthday in February 1943, I traveled the twenty-two miles to Richmond to volunteer. I did not consult my parents in New York, because I knew they would have encouraged me (or insisted) that I complete college first. I waited until I received my orders to report for Basic Training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. I then sent them a telegram saying that I would be home for a few days leave before I reported for duty in the Woman’s Army Auxiliary Corps. There was no room for debate. By this time we were on a full time war basis. Almost every home had a star in the window to designate a family member was in the service. Before I left, my dad put a star in the window for me. He was very proud.

Basic Training was fascinating to me. Living with a large diversified group of women was great. You soon became acquainted with the women in your barracks, and friendships were developed quickly. I remember that Company Eight had a black commanding officer named Charity Adams. I would have preferred to be in her company because my officers were white; however I soon become very “unit proud” and Company Six became quite competitive with Company Eight in the weekly parades. We were each all black companies and we were determined to be the best soldiers on post. We brought from our family and cultural pasts the theory that in order to succeed we couldn’t be “just as good as”; we had to be “better than”. So we were going to be “spit and polish” sharp in our uniforms; and we were going to march better, salute smarter, train harder, and soldier better than anyone else on Fort Des Moines. We loved to salute so much; we would go across the street to pass an officer.

At the end of Basic, I was sent to Army Clerical School, which was housed in the Hotel Chamberlain in the city of Des Moines. During this period we got around the city a little and we were always a curiosity to the locals—Black Women Soldiers!! While there, a treat was to have my then boyfriend and future husband, Tank, visit me from his post at Camp Atterbury in Indiana. That six foot six, two hundred and twenty pound “hunk” looked real good to me after living with all those women all that time.

My next station was Fort Riley, Kansas. We soon found that we had Black commissioned and non-commissioned officers, and we were pleased and happy about that. I was assigned to work in the X-Ray Lab of the station hospital. I made friends with a white WAC who was assigned with me in the X-Ray Lab. We worked together fine, but our barracks were separate and we never visited or saw each other when we were off duty. It was like there were four separate armies: Black Male, White Male, Black Female, and White Female.

Fort Riley was dusty and hot in summer and fiercely cold in the winter. We lived in barracks, which had two coal stoves; one at either end. We were assigned to "coal duty" periodically. You stayed home from your regular job and you had to go outside of the barracks to a coal bin, fill a container, and keep the fires going in each of the stoves. Fun, Fun, UGH!!! Our company cooks slept in rooms at one end of the barracks. At five thirty in the mornings as they were leaving for work they would sing out "better get up and see, you might have to pee". We were always ready and on time for breakfast. While at Riley, I took a leave and traveled to Washington, DC, where I met up with "Tank" who was on pass from AP Hill, Virginia. We were married in Fredrick, Maryland. Both of us were in uniform.

I transferred then to Walla Walla Air Force Base in the state of Washington. At Walla Walla, I was assistant director of the service club for black enlisted personnel. During the war, gender bias was a big problem. When, because of the war situation, it was necessary to bring in women, many of the old guard fought hard to restrict their duties to what they felt were "feminine" jobs. Some felt that black women should only be cooks, cleaners, and perform other such menial tasks. They soon found that women were adept at almost all jobs formerly performed by male soldiers. The motto was "use a woman to free a man for combat". Slowly WACs were assigned more diversified duties and overseas generals began to request their service. Black newspapers demanded that black soldiers be assigned to combat units and black WACS be allowed to serve overseas.

In early 1945, black WACS drawn from many units throughout the service were assigned to Fort Oglethorpe, GA to receive overseas training. I was very happy to receive orders for this duty. Upon completion of training, we traveled to New York, where we boarded a troop ship. Our living quarters were small converted cabins where three chain bunks with mattresses were hung, one above the other along each side of the wall. There was a single bathroom with commode, sink and shower. The window in the cabin was painted black. Because of the cramped conditions in the cabin, we tried to spend most of the time on deck in the designated area for our group. While at sea, we learned we would land in Scotland and take land transportation from there to our station in Birmingham, England. We were quartered in a former boy's school named for King Edward. The quarters were cold, damp and dingy. Our assignment was to redirect a huge backlog of mail, which had accumulated over the Christmas holiday, and had not reached the soldiers they were intended. Our Commanding Officer was Major Charity Adams. Our Executive Officer was Capt. Abby Campbell. We were designated the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory,

We were well received by the locals in Birmingham who were very curious about the Black WACS and we got to travel on leave to London, and surrounding sites. We did a spectacular job of clearing out the mail in England and soon were transferred to Rouen, France to clear out the backlog there caused by the rapidly advancing American troops across Europe. While there, I took a leave to Paris where I met Tank who came up from Italy. On a pass to Brussels, Belgium, a group of us were introduced for the first time to the Bidet. Cool!!

My most memorable experiences of military services are connected with the "Six Triple Eight" as our battalion was known. Lifelong friendships were established and patterns of self-discipline, and integrity ingrained. I have traveled widely. I enjoyed a marriage of fifty-eight years, have two wonderful sons, three lovely granddaughters and a great-grandson. Using the GI Bill, I earned a Masters Degree in Education and retired as the Principal of a NYS Division for Youth School in upstate New York.

My passion has been the NABMW and I was proud to serve as Chairperson of the Organizational Structure Committee, which guided the transition of the Black WAAC, WAC, WIS to the organization we have today. At eighty-two, I am "hanging in there".



## THELMA COLE-REID

After boarding a train in New York with my childhood friend Carmela bound for Georgia, Carmela was put into another car because she was white. I had lived in a neighborhood of mixed races and had attended school with many different nationalities. When I asked where Carmela was, I was told that we had crossed the Mason-Dixon line and that whites and Negroes could not ride in the same cars. I was given five minutes to go and see Carmela and say good-bye to my friend from first grade. Carmela was crying and so happy to see me. We decided the Army was not for us and we told the Sergeant in charge that we had changed our minds. We would like to get off at the next stop and Carmela would call her father to come pick us up. The sergeant looked at us like we were nuts and began to tell us about rules and regulations. She asked us if we had raised our hands and promised to uphold the Constitution and so forth. When we answered "Yes", she told us to return to the cars we had been assigned. The United States Army taught me how segregation works.

After Basic Training at Fort Oglethorpe, I was sent to Atlantic City, New Jersey to the Thomas England Hospital, which is now Griffin Casino. I also served at Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island, New York. Fort Ord, California was my longest assignment, then I was off to Germany. My last tour was in Fairbank, Alaska. I was at other camps and forts, too numerous to mention at this time.

While I was at Fort Ord, a new Commanding Officer arrived while I was First Sergeant. Rather than become a Barracks Sergeant, I put in for transfer to Germany. My Army career spanned WWII, Korea and Vietnam eras. I moved up the ranks to Sergeant Major at the 238<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Company in Alaska.

After my discharge from the Army, I attended Brooklyn College in New York. I have done a lot of volunteer work at the Northport Veterans Medical Center in New York and have received recognition and awards for my services there. I am glad that I joined the military. I met many wonderful women along the way, who like me, did their best to serve our country during its times of need.

As one of the "founding members" of our association, I have received recognition by the NABMW for being a participant in the establishment of the Black WAAC/WAC Association at Hampton, Virginia in 1976. For many years, I was the "Keeper of the Directory" which kept the names and addresses and other information on my sister soldiers.



## MILDRED F. DOZIER

Before the war, I was attending Junior College and working as a sales clerk in a five and ten cents store. I had two brothers in the service, so I decided to join the Army. I felt the more people they had, the sooner the war would be over and everyone would be home. After receiving orders, I reported to the Chicago Train Station where I met a number of other inductees, some from Chicago and others who came from other areas of the state. My father was employed as a Fireman on the railroad, so having heard his stories and having made short trips, I was quite familiar with the schedules, Pullman cars, dining cars, and the like. I was very surprised when I found that some of the women were unaware, and this was their first experience on the railroad.

During my Basic Training at Fort Des Moines, we had male soldiers supervising us. They trained us during close order drill, calisthenics and Army classes. During this time, we also went through a gas mask drill. In the barracks, several women were appointed to be in charge. After this basic training, I was sent to Motor School.

I was next transferred to Fort Huachuca, Arizona where I was assigned duty as a truck driver. In 1943, the WAC became a part of the regular Army and women were given the choice to stay or go home on leave. I chose discharge in October of that year.

After my service, I attended Post Graduate School of Nursing in Chicago and received my LPN. I also completed Beauty School and became a licensed beautician. Married in 1949, I have two wonderful sons. I have been a Den Mother for the Boy Scouts, volunteered with the PTA, and served as President of the Region PTA of Chicago. I am active with the National WAC Association and served in the Honor Guard. I enjoy my membership in the NABMW and my association with my fellow veterans. I like to make pound cakes and would give them as gifts to friends and family. While my son was abroad and while he traveled, I would ship cakes to him for him and his friends. This grew and I have shipped my "Auntie Cakes" all over the world.



## MARJORIE RANDOLPH EDWARDS

I was born in Passaic, New Jersey, a small town of approximately 9000 people, located about eighteen miles across the Hudson River from New York City. In the early 1900's many immigrants arrived in the United States at Ellis Island. My grandmother was brought here with her mom from Havana, Cuba. Some years later, my mother was born in Brooklyn, New York. Her father was a native of Kingston, Jamaica. My mother grew up in Brooklyn where she met and married my father, John Henry Randolph, a Native American, Shinecock Tribe.

Passaic was an industrial town. Many jobs were available and immigrants flocked there. Many ghettos sprung up. Color was unimportant, but nationalities moved together. Language and culture were more important. Schools were unsegregated as were churches. We were poor so we were spared being refused in restaurants or theaters. We had no money to go to these places anyways so we were spared the humiliations. I did not make it past high school. The depression years made it necessary for my older sister and me to get small jobs to help the family out financially. Having a knack for placing furniture, making window coverings, etc., I looked for jobs in fabric stores, furniture and wall paper coverings stores. I found I had a talent for interior decorating.

Then came Pearl Harbor, and the war reared its ugly head. A poster saying, "Uncle Sam Needs You" started at me and so without telling my mom, I went to Newark, New Jersey to the induction center to see if I qualified. The exam took two and a half day, including mental, physical, and aptitude tests. I had already worked awhile in a defense plant so I was ready. When the examining officer told me I was ten pounds overweight and had to lose it and come back to be reconsidered, I was indignant. I told him that I didn't know it was a beauty contest and if ten pounds were going to keep me from serving my country, I'd find another way. He looked at me and with a chuckle stamped my chart, "not obese, hefty". I was sworn in the Army that day.

The next job was to inform my mom. She was in shock but my Gram was more accepting. She was used to my surprises. At age sixteen, I insisted that I was in love and married foolishly. A year later, I walked out and joined the Army. Lots of negative things were being said about women joining the military. Either you were joining to service men, or you would make it possible for a man to be sent overseas and killed. Nothing changed my mind.

When I was sent to Basic Training, my biggest surprise was that my entire company was comprised of "Colored girls". I learned soon. In travel from Illinois to Texas, I really saw my brown skin and got used to it. I liked the strictness of training, and liked respecting and saluting the officers and the marching everywhere and in parades. Having responsibil-

ity made me feel so proud, especially when I was chosen to be responsible for eighty three women being transported as our company was moved from Fort Sheridan, Illinois to Houston, Texas. Some women were much older than I was.

My jobs in the military included Personnel Headquarters, filing, mimeographing, processing, and other clerical tasks. I was then sent to Special Services School at Washington and Lee University. There I learned to run card tournaments, arrange dances, plays and other programs. I learned to run bus tours, to operate projectors to show training films, to supervise exercise programs and MC other events. My next job was in the Motor Pool and I operated a two and a half ton truck. I was the only female. I drove from points of embarkation picking up supplies. I was responsible for the maintenance and appearance of my truck. When I made Sergeant, I became a Drill Sergeant and responsible for the decorum of the ladies on the post. This did not make me popular, but did earn respect.

Needless to say, I missed it all after my discharge in 1945. I still had a passion and interest in Interior Decorating, so I attended the School for Fashion and Design in New York City. After several years, I bought a building in Passaic and opened a shop called "The Little Shop". It was successful. I used the GI Bill of Rights. Soon after, I heard from a sailor I met in Illinois. He had been stationed at Great Lakes and then sent to Guam. We renewed our romance. Our marriage lasted forty seven years. Luther died in 1992.

Now that I am an older lady, revising the past and it feels good. I made many friends and had many rewarding experiences. I missed going overseas by a hair. I had been given a furlough and was scheduled to leave. For some reason, the final orders came when I was away. The group could not wait. I cried for days, because I had really wanted to go. When the war was over, I took my discharge. It was a good run, and I was ready to go home.

## DOROTHY ELLIS

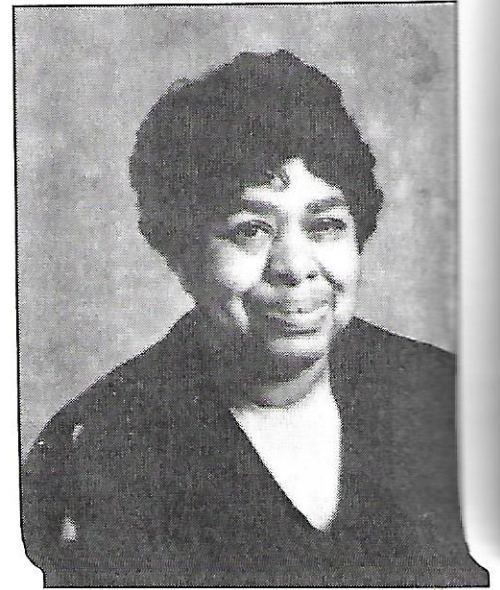
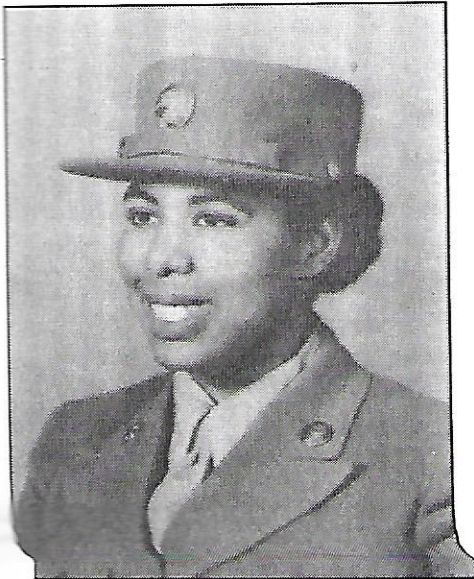
Prior to Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war, I was living in Chicago. Like most people, I wanted to do my part. There were posters all around urging you to join up and when I saw one asking women to join the WAAC, I decided to join. I tried my best to get my girlfriend to join with me, but she wouldn't. I was determined and went and enlisted alone. A number of us traveled together by train to Des Moines, Iowa. We were met at the station by Army personnel and transported to Fort Des Moines for Basic Training.

Basic was enjoyable for me. I enjoyed meeting so many different women from so many different places. We shared many stories and experiences. I enjoyed drilling, and participating in all of the training classes and activities. I enjoyed sports as well. While at Des Moines, I learned to drive a truck, but did not complete the training to be assigned. I was transferred to Fort Sheridan, Illinois and later to Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

I enjoyed my assignment overseas where I was a member of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory. We routed mail for soldiers in the ETO. While at my first post in Birmingham, England, my brother came to visit me. We were sent to Rouen, France next and cleaned out the mail there. Some of our members had accumulated enough points to leave for home from Rouen. I was sent on to Paris. I enjoyed seeing all of the famous sights there. The Six Triple Eight also had a baseball team. We were very good and traveled to play other WAC units throughout the area. We won several tournaments and trophies. We were very proud because we were the only African American WACs overseas at that time.

Following my discharge from the Army, I attended Tailoring School under the GI Bill and went to work at Montgomery Ward as a sales clerk. I was employed at Wards for thirty-five years before I retired. My daughter lives in California, and I feel blessed and GOD has been good to me. I have many pleasurable memories of my days in the military service and I am proud that I was able to serve my country.

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CHICAGO, IL 60620



## BURNADINE FRASER FLANAGAN

I was born in Key West, Florida and raised in New London, Connecticut. When I finished high school, I went to work in a printing office where we assembled materials for print. One of the books I worked on was written by Mrs. Chase Going Woodhouse. There was no chance for advancement on the job and I wanted to do something different. I decided to join the WAAC. It would give me a chance to experience some new things and see something of the world. I signed in Hartford, Connecticut and not long after received my orders to report to Fort Des Moines, Iowa...six of us left New London together. There were three white and three black women. When we reached Des Moines, we were greeted by officers and assigned to separate companies.

During Basic, we learned lots of things and how to do them the "Army" way. I enjoyed learning about how to identify various and different kinds of aircraft. We had an excellent marching company and had to participate in frequent parades. We were able to visit in Des Moines and attended church there. We found the people to be very friendly.

When I completed basic training, I was sent to Fort Brackville, Texas where I worked as a clerk typist in the station hospital. Following that, I was assigned to Camp Claibourne, Louisiana where I worked a librarian in the Post Library. I really experienced overt segregation for the first time while serving in the Army. I learned to cope with it.

I was glad to receive orders to go for overseas training, but did not like Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. We were not allowed to leave the post while we were there partly because we were in such intense training, but also because it was said our safety could not be guaranteed in town.

We soon left and traveled to New York to board the Ile de France for Europe. Becoming a part of and serving with the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory has always made me proud. We handled thousands of pieces of mail for soldiers stationed in the ETO in record time. I was stationed in Birmingham, England and Rouen, France. We were all very proud of being the first African American Army women to serve overseas and we made sure that we carried ourselves with dignity wherever we traveled. We admired all of our officers, particularly, our Commanding Officer, Charity Adams. She was our role model and an inspiration to us all. We were proud of the Six Triple Eight and we made sure that we did not let her down. She fought for many opportunities for us and we supported her in her efforts.

I returned to the states from Rouen while some of the outfit remained and later moved to Paris. Upon my discharge I attended Mitchell College in New London, Connecticut. Later, I returned to school and attended the William Backus Estlin Nursing School in Norwich, Connecticut where I received a certificate as a LPN. I was employed at the Naval Submarine Base and Hospital in Groton, Connecticut. After fifteen years, I retired. I married and raised four children. About seven years ago, I moved to Houston, Texas in order to be nearer to family.

I enjoy writing poetry and have had a number of poems published. I wrote a poem in tribute to Women in the Military Services. Copies were sent to the archives at WIMSA and to the NABMW. I am very active in the New Providence Baptist Church in Houston. The NABMW is one of my greatest interests and I attend all of our reunions. It is always a pleasure to sit down and reminisce about my military experiences with my fellow BMW's.



## RUBY L. FRY

Prior to the beginning of World War Two in 1941, I was attending Texas College and working part-time as a clerk in an insurance company. I entered the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps under my maiden name, Ruby L. McClung. Following my basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. I was assigned to Administrative Specialist School in downtown Des Moines. I was then sent to Ft. McClellan, Alabama where I was assigned the duty of postal clerk. I remained at Ft. McClellan until I was ordered to report to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for overseas training.

My first assignment in the European Theater of Operations was in Birmingham, England where I was a postal clerk. While in Birmingham, I was able to see the beautiful countryside; visit Liverpool, London, where I observed the "Changing of the Guard" at Buckingham Palace; London Bridge; and Westminster Abby. I was in London when the blackout ended and the "Lights came on again."

Our battalion, the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory was next transferred to Rouen, France. While in France, I visited Paris; saw the Eiffel Tower; the Josephine Baker Review, and several museums. I visited Lucerne, and Bern, the capital of Switzerland; and the Alps. I remained in France till the war ended. I was discharged from the Army at Fort Des Moines in November of 1945.

Following my discharge, I moved to Los Angeles, California and used the GI Bill to attend the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) where I received my Bachelor of Science Degree and teaching credentials in Secondary Education. I taught high school for the Los Angeles United School District for thirty years prior to retiring.

I currently remain busy as a volunteer for the Neighborhood Community Council. I am an active member of the First Bethany Missionary Baptist Church of Los Angeles and served as superintendent of the Sunday School for twenty-six years. Additional church involvement includes participation in the Los Angeles District Association; the Western Baptist State Convention and the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc. I enjoy my association with the NABMW and remain in touch with my sister veterans.



## HATTIE B. HARRIS

Prior to enlisting in the WAAC, I experienced a happy and productive life. A native of Paris, Missouri, I was the daughter of the late Grimsley and Susie Bell. I attended the Crispus Attucks School through the tenth grade. That was as far as the grades went for the "colored" students at that time. I graduated from Garfield High School in Mexico, Missouri.

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

I signed up in Springfield. When my orders to report to Fort Sheridan, Illinois arrived, I was very excited. I met a group of ladies in Chicago and we traveled together to Boston, Massachusetts by train, and from the station by bus to Fort Devens. Upon arrival we were greeted by officers, shown our barracks, issued G.I. clothing; some of which fit, and some of which did not.

An outstanding memory of basic training was lining up in alphabetical order for a series of shots. I was third in line. Being afraid of needles, it was an unforgettable experience. I was resentful of doing KP in the white mess hall, when they did not come to us. I had no problem learning to do things the Army way. The 47<sup>th</sup> M.P. Battalion was stationed nearby. A few of the soldiers stationed there were classmates from high school. As our barracks were near the Service Club, we were able to meet, enjoy conversation and dance. This made basic training much more enjoyable.

Being a country girl, I signed up for Motor Transport School. After Basic, I was transferred to Fort Des Moines, Iowa where I was assigned to training in Motor Transport School. Following this training, I was assigned to Fort Dix, New Jersey for a short period where I drove an ambulance. I was then sent to Hollorand General Hospital in Staten Island, New York. Upon arrival at Hollorand, we were greeted and assigned our barracks and to the Motor School. The barracks were heated by coal burning stoves. German Prisoners of War were assigned to take care of the stoves. When they entered the barracks, they would yell out, "A Man in the House!!". The barracks was like a large happy family. I cannot remember if there was ever a misunderstanding between any of the women.

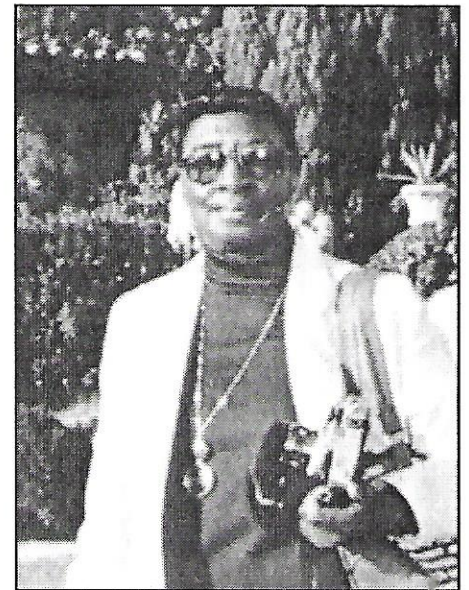
During the European invasion, I drove an ambulance. When the ship's arrived with the wounded soldiers, we would being early evacuation of patients to airports, and pick up the wounded from the ship and transport them to Brentwood or Hollorand Hospitals. In between ship arrivals, I drove a linen truck from the hospital wards where the German Prisoner's



of War loaded the truck and then I would take the linen to the laundry. I also worked at the Gas Station as an attendant, and as a teletype operator at Western Union.

When my tour duty was completed, I received an honorable discharge at Fort Sheridan on January 21, 1946. I relocated to Jefferson City, Missouri where my mom, family and friends were happy to have me back with them. Using the GI Bill, I enrolled at Lincoln University. Later I returned to Springfield, Illinois where I was employed by the Illinois Commission on Children as Office Manager. I was the first and only Black in the office.

My experiences in the Army gave me the courage, support, strength, and confidence to survive all sorts of events in my life. For a number of years, I have lived in the Bronx, New York. I have been a volunteer at the Methodist Church Home for the Aged in Riverdale, New York where I served on the Board of Directors and was President of the Auxiliary. A community activist, I have been involved with many programs and events in leadership positions. I have been honored and won numerous awards and citations, one of which was the Community Service Award presented to me by the President of the Borough of the Bronx. I am a charter member of the NABMW and an active member of the Northeast Region where I have served as a member of the National Elections Committee. I thoroughly enjoy my association with my "sister soldiers" and attending our meetings and Reunions.



## ALLIE G. HARSHAW

Born on January 30, 1918 in Lawndale, North Carolina, I grew up during the Depression years. We were dirt-poor farmers. I was one of fourteen children, having four sisters and nine brothers.

During my school years, there had not been a graduating class from my high school. I was a member of the first class to graduate, which consisted of three girls. During my junior year, I was sent to reorganize the books in the school library. While working there, I found the book Up From Slavery by Booker T. Washington. I took the book home and asked my mother who Booker T. Washington was. She did not know. In the back of the book was a card to be returned to Tuskegee requesting information about enrolling. I kept the card.

When I became a senior, I wrote to Tuskegee asking about entering. The answer was that I could work my way through college on what was called the "five year plan". I was to work two years full time and go to night school. Then I would work part time and go to school full time for three years. All I needed was my ticket to Tuskegee and fifty dollars in cash. I worked full time for one year. I made up credits and graduated with my class in 1940.

After graduation, I moved back to Lawndale, and was hired to teach at Douglas High School. While there I started a Home Economics Department. I worked at Douglas until April of 1943, when I resigned to join the WAAC. I did my basic training at Fort Des Moines. From there I was sent to Motor Transport School. I did not know how to drive. After several weeks I was transferred to Bakers and Cooks School, since I held a Bachelor of Science Degree in Home Economics. During my service, I trained at Fort Dix, New Jersey; England General Hospital; Atlantic City, New Jersey; and Lockborne AFB in Ohio as a Physical Therapy Technician. At Fort Francis E. Warren in Wyoming, I served as Mess Hall Sergeant...

Following my attendance at Radiology School at Fort Sam Houston, Texas in 1948, I served at Chanute AFB, Illinois; Sealand AFB, Whales; South Ruislip AFB, London England; March AFB, and Vandenberg AFB in California as Radiological Superintendent.

I retired from the USAF in November 1973 with over thirty years of military service. While in the service, I went from PFC to PHD. Following my retirement, I worked as a substitute teacher for the Lompoc Unified School District in California. This career lasted from 1974 until 1996.

Today I spend my time traveling around the world. When I am not globe trotting, I love to read, walk, bowl, and visit with friends.



## MYRTLE JACKSON

During 1942 and 1943, and prior to entering the military service, I worked in Washington, DC as a clerk in the government. While attending a movie with friends, I viewed WAACS at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. At that point, I suggested we join the Army and put some glamour in it. They laughingly agreed. The next day, I brought applications home for us. They refused them, saying they would not join adding that neither would I. I submitted my application the next day.

Early one March morning, I left DC accompanied by a WAAC officer and about twenty other enlistees. Upon arriving at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, we were housed on Stable Row. No WAAC uniforms were available for us, so we were issued male Army coats to wear over our civilian clothing until we received our uniforms. Basic Training, though demanding, posed no problem for me. In fact, I enjoyed the process of drilling and other Army tasks we had to learn. I never served on KP; in fact I frequently thought that if I were assigned KP, I would go over the hill.

Although I was born and raised in New York, the thought of being segregated in the military did not faze me a bit. I had already experienced segregation working for the government in DC, which we referred to as the "District of Crackers".

I was assigned to Fort Clark, Texas as a librarian in the Post Library. It was an assignment I enjoyed immensely. When soldiers were sent overseas, I was assigned to the motor pool where I inspected trucks driven by civilians. During this period I applied for OCS, but was rejected because "the quota for Negroes had been filled."

My next assignment was as a Ward Attendant in the hospital at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Subsequently, I was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana where I was trained as an X-Ray Technician. This was a rewarding experience for me, as I was able to function in that capacity as a civilian employee in the Veterans Administration Hospitals.

In 1949, I joined a Medical Unit of the Army Reserves. In 1950, the unit was activated and I was back in the Army, stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington, and Camp Stoneman, California. I was discharged in 1952.

I resumed work as a civilian X-Ray Technician. I attended evening classes at City College of New York and received my Bachelor's Degree. I attended Hunter College School of Social Work and earned a Masters Degree in Social Work. I obtained employment in that field and worked in Veterans Administration Hospitals in the Bronx and Brooklyn, New York and Washington, DC. I retired in 1980.

34 I enjoyed my days in the military and am a Charter Member and loyal supporter of the NABMW.



## SARAH EMMERT JACKSON

It was my senior year at Chicago Teachers College and our country was at war in Europe. I also worked part-time as a cashier in a Walgreen's Drug Store for thirty-five cents per hour. I was working on that Sunday morning, December 7, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Everyone stopped—stunned at what we were hearing. No one could believe it. Was it a hoax like the Martians landing in New Jersey? At school, the next day, the talk among the young men was about preparation to enlist or to answer their draft call. The women became involved in Red Cross activities such as knitting scarves for soldiers.

When the announcement came about the formation of the WAAC in the spring of 1942, there was much talk about joining the Army. To me, it was a chance to improve my economic situation as well as a chance to show my patriotism. Economically, it was a “no-brainer”. When I graduated from college, my name would be added to a long list of people waiting for assignments as teachers. This meant that at the very best, I might be called to substitute one day a week for \$6.00 per day or possibly \$24.00 per month. In the Army, I would have meals, clothing and shelter furnished, plus \$21.00 per month; \$50.00 per month after Basic. Chicago was just coming out of the Depression, thanks to the defense program. Many men who had not worked in years were now employed and prosperous. Very few women were hired at first. “Roise, the Riveter” had to wait awhile for a job.

True to the prevailing standard in a segregated environment (no signs, but we know where we weren't welcomed), it had been decided that ten percent of the candidates for Officer Training would be “colored” since the colored population was ten percent of the total. Having a Bachelor's Degree was a requirement. Since I was still in college, I was required to submit a letter from the registrar that I would graduate before the end of June. After all of the written tests, oral interviews and physical examination, approximately forty women from Illinois were chosen for the first group of Officer Candidates. The four “colored” candidates were from Chicago. After we were sworn in, we received travel orders. The four colored women were identified at the bottom of the list. We had nine days to prepare to leave Chicago. Twenty of us left La Salle Street Station on the night of July 20, 1943. We were given a food allowance of seventy-five cents, and one dollar for a meal in the dining car. Since my brother and I had figured out how to feed our family of three on four or five dollars a week, it seemed like a lot of money. One aside—in the dining car, tables were set with linen cloths, crystal glassware and polished silver. When the first course was served, the waiter nudged the implement. He didn't want another colored person to make a mistake.

We had such a good time on the train with the other recruits; I was totally unprepared for the next step. An Army bus picked us up at the station and let us out at the gate. It surprised me when I was told to go to another area while the rest of the busload was sent to the same company. I had my first taste of overt segregation. All colored recruits were sent to a separate building and assigned to the Third Platoon of the First Company of the First Training Regiment. Across the street from us were Platoons One and Two, all white.

Some memories of Basic Training are as fresh today as if they happened yesterday. Lining up outside of a door for immunizations, admitted one by one, shot in each arm before you could blink, and then sent out of another door. The people waiting outside in line never guessed what was happening inside. Another lasting memory was marching in full uniform including bra, girdle, rayon slip, rayon hoe, button-down long sleeved khaki skirt, khaki jacket, laced oxfords and our famous WAC hat. Apparently few of us had read the schedule for the day, so upon arriving at the barracks, most of us soaking wet, started peeling off our clothes. Some of us even made it into the shower before a whistle blew and the sergeant called "On the double, Third Platoon". Everyone struggled to get back into uniform. Putting a wet body into a wet girdle is not easy; somehow we made it, but from then on, we read the schedule.

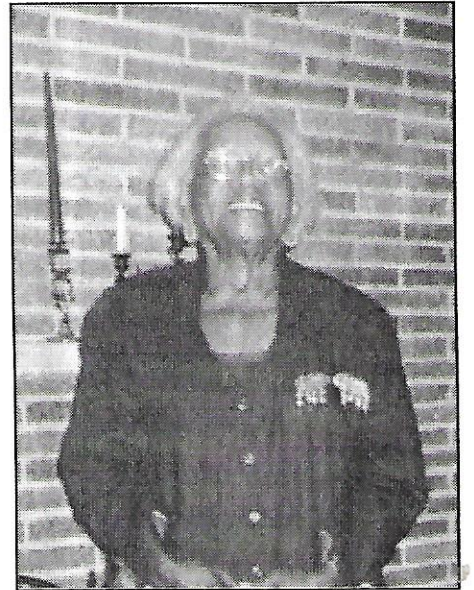
A painful experience was mealtime on the first evening. When I walked into the mess hall I started to sit down with some of the people who had come down from Illinois with me only to discover that the Third Platoon were assigned to separate tables. As I approached the special section, the rest of the Third Platoon was sitting there with their trays untouched. A sign in the center of the table read "For Colored". No one ate. The next day there was a sign that read "For C". The hunger strike continued until the signs were removed but we still had to sit in our special area. Army rules and regulations had to be observed.

After graduation, I received my "Third Officer" bars, equivalent to Second Lieutenant. I was assigned to the Academic Battalion where I was taught property accounting. I wasn't exactly pleased. If I had remained in Chicago, I would have started on the day after Labor Day. As it was I started work on Labor Day.

My next assignment was to Quartermaster School at Camp Lee, Virginia for further instruction in supplying and transporting Army personnel. Classes over, I returned to Fort Des Moines with an assignment to the Quartermaster Warehouse. As it turned out, there were no openings, so I became an "excess officer". "Excess Officer" became the story of my life for a period of time. I was an Excess Officer in several basic training companies under Lt. Charity Adams. Finally I was made Commanding Officer of Company 28, Cooks and Bakers School. My last assignment was as Battalion Commander. This came after we were sworn into the WAC and dropped the title auxiliaries.

I married on June 5, 1943. Shortly after our swearing into the WAC I found I was pregnant with my first child. In spite of severe morning sickness, I still had to perform my duties as Battalion Commander. This included Saturday Parades—standing in command and relaying orders to the troops, and not daring to get sick or pass out.

After my discharge, I was a stay-at-home Mom until shortly after the birth of my second child. I resumed my teaching career with various assignments between maternity leaves for four more children. I served as a teacher and administrator for thirty-three years. Many skills, lessons, and attitudes that I learned in the Army came into use and I juggled the roles of wife, mother, teacher, administrator, and volunteer. Organizational skills, the unwillingness to leave a job half-done or undone helped me to become a successful teacher and administrator. I feel that I owe thanks to the WAC for the training that helped me be a success in civilian life.



## DOROTHY TURNER JOHNSON

I was recruited by Lt. Dovey Johnson in Atlanta, Georgia where I was working as an assistant to the librarian at Spellman College from which I had graduated in 1938. It was not long before I received orders to report for Basic Training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. I found the training to be rigorous and exacting. Army life and all the requirements were strange to me, but I soon adapted to the long and sometimes tiresome waiting hours for something to happen. As we were among the first women in the Army, there were many changes, orders, and counter orders, interminable waiting period, exacting inspections, and a protocol for every move or action. I managed to survive, sometimes with humor, sometimes with tears. There were good and fun times as well. I liked wearing the uniform; the parades; and the many friendships I made, some of which have lasted until today.

Following Basic, I moved to the city of Des Moines where I attended Administrative School. We lived in a downtown hotel. While there I had the opportunity to visit around in the city as well as learn how to do clerical work the Army way. Following a number of weeks in this training, I received orders to my first duty station at Fort Riley, Kansas. The majority of the women in my unit were assigned to work in the Base Hospital, some to the Base USO, and others had company duties. Because of my previous experience, I was assigned to the Base Library where I remained until I was assigned to report to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for overseas training.

By this time, I felt I had learned a lot, not only about the military but also about people in general. Men and women from all walks of life and from vastly different environments surrounded me. What a wonderful education for one who had led a rather sheltered existence. When I was chosen to leave Ft. Riley and report for overseas training, I was elated and ready to accept whatever lied in store for me.

The training at Fort Oglethorpe was rough and intense. I was told it approximated the training the men received. No matter, I survived it and was eager to join the others in my company for whatever assignment awaited us aboard. Following several weeks training, the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory boarded a troop ship in New York Harbor for our trip to Europe. We were assigned the momentous task of clearing up a warehouse of mail, which had accumulated and needed to be processed and forwarded to the troops, which were moving rapidly through Europe. At that time, the first routings had failed to reach them.

When we reached our station in Birmingham, England we were barraged with huge amounts of mail that needed to be sorted and distributed among the members of our unit. Each of us had several locator boxes that contained individual identification cards, each of which alphabetically listed a soldier's name and last known address. I was given the X, Y, and

Z files. All the information on soldiers whose names began with those letters was my responsibility. I was dedicated to the task of getting this long overdue mail to them. In reality, these soldiers became "my soldiers", with whom I bonded and for whom I was determined to succeed. Each of these men was fighting men who had not heard from their loved ones for months and they were abroad fighting for all of us!!

We worked hard and we eventually cleared out the mail in Birmingham. We were then shipped to France to clear out the backload of mail there. We were stationed in a historic city, Rouen, and lived in a fort, which had housed Napoleon's troops. I felt a real sense of history, principally because in college, I had taken a course in European history and the Napoleonic Wars were fresh in my memory. We ate, slept, worked and played in this compound until all of the mail was cleared, redirected, and dispersed among those who should have had it a long time before.

While in Rouen, we toured the city, made friends with the townspeople, and enjoyed the sights, the food, and the hospitality of neighbors. Part of our group was ordered to Paris. I was not as fortunate. After Europe was liberated, some of the earlier enlistees received orders to return to the states to be mustered out of the Army. Following a short stay at Ft. Bragg, we received our final paychecks; our Army discharges, said our good-byes, and were soon on our way to civilian lives again.

When I arrived home in Cleveland, Ohio, I was received with open arms by my family and friends. Since I was still in uniform and somewhat of an oddity, I attracted curiosity but no hostility. I soon found a job suited to my education, ability and experience. I enrolled in graduate school under the G.I. Bill and received a degree in Library Science at the University of Wisconsin. I have held librarian jobs at Florida Normal and Industrial Institute at St. Augustine, Florida, Spelman College, Detroit Public Library, Cleveland Library and Cuyahoga Community College. I received a Fulbright Scholarship, U.S. Office of Education. I am a member of the American Library Association, Association of University Professors, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and the Urban League Guild. I authored One Day, Mother/Un Dia, Madre in 1996,

My interest in Spelman College has never wavered and I have been fortunate to be able to contribute to the college through fundraising, and other activities including the revitalization of the Science building. Having the opportunity to travel extensively in Africa, Europe, Japan, and the Far East, has added to my growth as a citizen of the world. I look back very fondly on my experiences as one of the first enlisted women in the U.S. Army and I would not trade those experiences for any others I have had.

## IRENE GARNER JOHNSON

I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was attending Woodward, a public high school, but was not doing as well as I wanted. I decided to leave and enrolled at McCall School, an all black school, which I felt, had a better curriculum for me and where classes were more individualized. My mother, however, objected and I had to return to Woodward. I was not happy. I was not achieving the way I wanted and decided to leave school. I went to work as a nurse's aide in the local hospital. On December 7, 1941, I was leaning and looking out of my window when I saw my cousin who was in uniform. Behind me on the radio, I heard a newsflash. Pearl Harbor had been bombed. To tease my cousin I stated to sing a song that I made up as I went along..."Thomas had to go to war. Thomas has to go to war" repeating it over and over, not realizing the seriousness of the event.

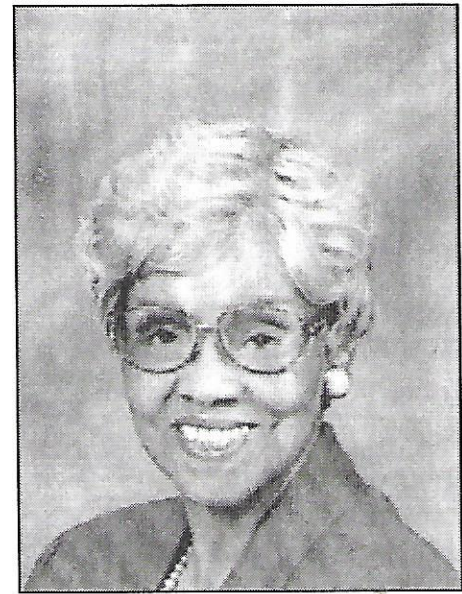
Once the war started, we saw many war pictures, listened to and read about the need for everyone to make a contribution to the war effort. I was not happy with my situation and when I heard about all the opportunities which would be available to soldiers in the military, I decided to join the WAAC. This gave me the opportunity to serve my country and do my part. I had to wait until I was twenty-one to report for activity duty. When the day arrived for me to report, I was accompanied by my mother. When she was about to leave, I started to cry. I had decided I was not ready to go. In the midst of distress, I was informed that I would be an acting sergeant for the trip. I was to be in charge of seven women, all older and taller than me. I was given the train tickets, meal tickets, and orders for each woman. I stopped crying. I can still feel the pressure of my first assignment in the military.

I enjoyed Basic Training at Fort Des Moines. I was pleased to have black officers. A cherished memory is of the Gas Drill we had to perform. There was a male soldier behind me in the line and he kept saying, "I have been alive all this time and now this woman in front of me is going to cause my demise". I did not look back. I was just determined to get in and out of the gas room and I did it. Because I was "fast" in those days and survival was on my mind.

Following Basic, I was assigned to Camp Kearns, Utah where I worked as a supply clerk and a hospital aide. I loved the Camp Kearns environmental area, which was very different from anything I had seen in Ohio. We were very close to Salt Lake City where the people dressed differently. I learned about the Mormons and their customs.

I spent all of my time in the military at Camp Kearns. I was discharged in Sheridan, Illinois. I became a member of the fifty two-twenty club which meant I received twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. In those days, twenty dollars was a lot of money. I moved to Baltimore, Maryland where I attended the Cortez-Peters Business School. Cortez was recognized as the "fastest typist" in the world. I graduated from there and earned a diploma. I returned to Cincinnati and enrolled in the Liberal Arts School of the University of Cincinnati where I was awarded my Bachelors Degree in Special Education. I used the G.I. Bill to further my education. My military experience and my educational training raised my self-esteem and made me a confident woman. I married Harold Johnson in 1964, have one son, and two grandchildren. I am eighty years young, and still do substitute teaching in the public school system.





## ANNA KNIGHT JORDAN

I followed up my graduation from Cardoza High School in Washington, DC with further study at Wadleigh High School in New York City, and the Cortez-Peters Business School in Washington. I studied typing, shorthand, English, and Card Punch Machine operation. After school, I worked part-time for a Physician and a Lawyer. My first federal government job was with the Social Security Agency in Baltimore, Maryland. Later I worked with the Commerce Department in the District of Columbia. I then went to work for the District government in its Department of Public Welfare.

On a spring day in April of 1943, while looking through an open window, I said to myself, "There has to be something better for me to do in this world." I called my best friend on her job and said, "Ruth, I have planned your future for you." She asked, "What is it?" I replied, "We are going to join the Army". She laughed so vigorously her machine work jammed. After awhile she did agree and we signed up for the WAAC. We took our test in Virginia, but departed from Washington. While taking my test, my girlfriend copied some answers from my paper. She even copied my serial number on her test. I caught the error and it was corrected before I turned in our papers. My family was unhappy at the idea of my joining the Army, because my three brothers were already in the service. I understood that overseas duty for females was not mandatory so I promised my parents that I would never go overseas. After many well wishes from my family, I boarded a train from Washington, DC and headed for Des Moines, Iowa. The train was a sleeper. I could not resist thinking about the future, and I imagined a sweetheart who I might meet at some point. I did meet someone later on in Rouen France, but we did not marry. When we arrived in Des Moines, we were transported to the base by truck.

During Basic, I learned there were two ways to do everything, the Right way and the Army way. I put the Right way on the back burner, and learned to perform the Army way. The test for a properly made bunk was to have a quarter bounce up and down when tossed on the blanket. I learned to live comfortably with only a footlocker and a duffle bag. The most unpleasant duties were KP and Latrine Duty. Following Basic, Ruth and I asked our commanding officer to be sent to the same station. I was sent to Fort Clark, Texas and Ruth was sent to Staten Island, New York. Big Lesson—Never ask to be stationed with a friend!

At Fort Clark, I was assigned to the Signal Corps as a Clerk-Typist. We dated soldiers, rode in jeeps with them, and I even learned to drive a seven-shift dump truck! There were German Prisoners of War on the post, and each day they would march past our barracks doing their "goose step". A bad experience was the stealing of my straightening comb by another. When I reported the incident to the commanding officer, she requested that the comb be brought to her. She kept the comb in her possession till my transfer at which time she returned it to me. I found Captain Kearney to be a fair and just person.

My second station was Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. I found the work exciting there as I operated a TWX machine, typed, took dictation and performed other secretarial tasks. It was here that I did Cryptography. Whenever secret messages came in at night, a chauffeur driven car would transport me to the office where I was secured inside a special room where messages were coded and decoded using the Morse Code. Following that, the messages were burned and the equipment was locked in a safe.

Following service at Gruber, I was sent to take overseas training. The training included going through a gas chamber, intensive physical training, climbing ropes to "abandon ship" if required. We were outfitted and received additional equipment. We left New York for the European Theater of Operations on the Queen Mary. It was a memorable experience, although I was hospitalized for three days at sea. We landed in Scotland and were transported to Birmingham, England where our commanding officer, Major Adams, and other officers welcomed us. As we settled in, we were told we were being housed in a converted horse's stable. We only had cold water for bathing and used our helmets to hold the water, instead of the old sinks. While in England, I had the opportunity to visit Westminster Abbey, Flanders Field ("where the poppies grow") and have tea and tea sandwiches with several English families. We were a postal battalion assigned to redirect mail for the European Theater of Operations. A sad memory was having the entire battalion called out, assembled, and brought to attention to receive the shocking news of the death of our President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

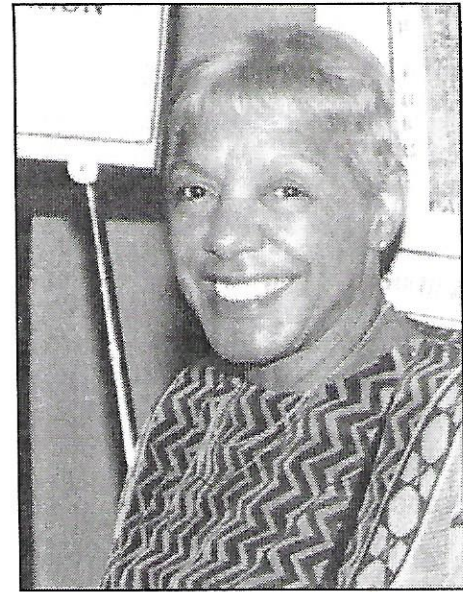
We were transferred to France. The trip across the English Channel was a frightening experience to me, because the water was very choppy and dangerous. We landed at Le Havre, France, a city which had been heavily bombed. We were transported to Rouen, France. In Rouen, we serviced mail, including letters and packages, which had accumulated and had not reached the soldiers for whom it was intended. By this time, we were well seasoned and tackled this job with efficiency and speed. We did work that was expected to take a year in five months! Because of my business background, I sometimes was assigned to assist our civilian switchboard operators. Once in awhile a wrong plug would be pulled and very important people would be disconnected. It was serious, but hilarious to hear us trying to explain the situation: them speaking French and me speaking English. My only French lessons were in high school many years ago.

Later, while stationed in Paris, I had the opportunity to visit the Pyrenees Mountains in southern France. I rode from the tip of one mountain up to the tip of another in a cable car. I waded barefoot in the Mediterranean Sea. In Paris, I attended the Grand Opera, Moulin Rouge, visited the Arch de Triomphe and strolled along Pigalle. After five months in Paris, I was among the first of our group to leave for home. En route to the states on the ship, Claymont Victory, I was among the "most seasick" group. The waves, rocking and rolling, were almost unbearable. We had to have medication. After a long week at sea, we arrived at Fort Dix to be discharged. My last Army meal was a delicious steak dinner on the sixteenth of May in 1946.

Following my military service, I attended Howard University under the G.I. Bill. I graduated in June of 1949. Our graduation speaker was President Harry Truman. That year, Howard had the largest graduation class it had ever had. At that time, many returned soldiers were attending college under the G.I. Bill and colleges were crowded. I had a Liberal Arts Education majoring in English and French. I lived at home instead of on campus. It was at Howard that I met and married Dr. Carl Jordon, who was from Savannah, Georgia. We met in the NEWMAN CLUB, a religious club for Catholics on campus. In 1994, we moved to Savannah and there produced three, now successful children, who presented us with five grandchildren. I did not work, but continued to broaden my education my attending Howard summers. I also studied at Catholic University in Washington, as well as Savannah State University and Armstrong University, both which are in Savannah, GA.

I have organized local chapters of national associations, did substitute teaching, headed membership drives for charitable causes, represented Chatham County at the Salk Institute in San Diego, CA and was President of the National Medical Auxiliary, Inc. I attended a White House Conference on Health, Nutrition, and Food. I have also edited a cookbook, "Healthy Homemaker", and have traveled extensively.

I am a charter life member of the NABMW, served on the Organizational Structure Committee, and have been Chairperson of the Southeast Region. I am a dedicated and committed member of our association and strive to take and spread our message about the history of Black military women wherever and whenever I can.



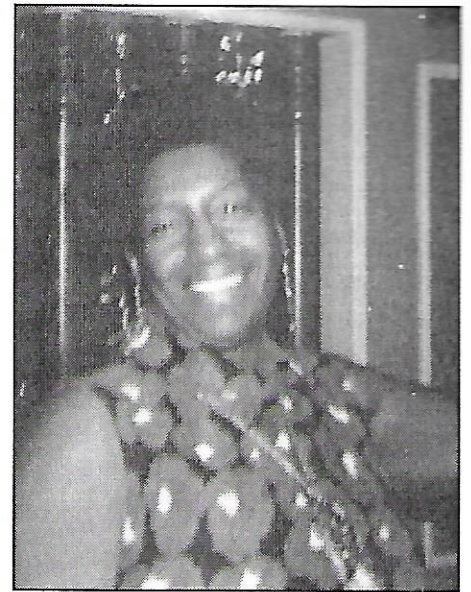
## HAZEL E. JOSEY

Enlisting in the WAAC/WAC gave me the opportunity to participate in the war effort. Many of my male friends were already serving in the US Army and US Air Force by the time I enlisted.

Reporting to the WAAC unit at Fort Des Moines entailed a short streetcar ride for me, since I was born and raised in Des Moines. I enlisted while I was a senior at the University of Iowa. I was deferred until I graduated in May 1943. I reported for active duty at Fort Des Moines on May 16, 1943.

Many long lasting friendships and many once-in-a-lifetime experiences resulted from my having been in the service. I shall never forget or regret having served with the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory in England and France, an all African American Battalion whose contributions during World War Two should have, but as yet, have not, been recognized nationally.

It has been a joy to meet women I served with many years ago at our NABMW reunions.



## ODESSA MARSHALL

I was living the good life while living with my grandmother in Somerville, Tennessee. I was a student at Somerville High School. After graduation, my grandmother and I moved to St. Louis, Missouri to live with my father. While there, Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941. Shortly after, the Army started recruiting women for military duty. In order to speed enlistment, the Army offered such benefits as higher education, training in many fields along with the opportunity to travel to countries outside of the United States. I realized that here in one package, were many things that I wanted. I was very happy to enlist even though my grandmother did not want me to go.

I was sworn in at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. From the first day I enlisted until the day I was discharged, my military service was wonderful. When I boarded the train in St. Louis, bound for Des Moines, Iowa, there were four other inductees aboard. We were going there to take Basic Training. The Army had not fully prepared for the arrival of women at this base. The proper clothing for women had not arrived. The weather was intensely cold. In fact, it was below freezing. We were issued men's overcoats, socks and shoes. We did not receive our WAAC uniforms until three weeks later. I quickly settled into basic training without any problems. Living with all of those women from many different states was like living in a college dormitory. In the weeks that followed, we were taught the basic requirements, proper military dress, marching, drilling, calisthenics, inspection routines, and much much more. I never did KP. I knew many of the enlistees but did not make any special friends at that time. Our training officers were Lts. Atkinson, Keyton, and Donaldson. The top ranking officers Lt. Campbell and Adams. Basic training was a rich experience for me.

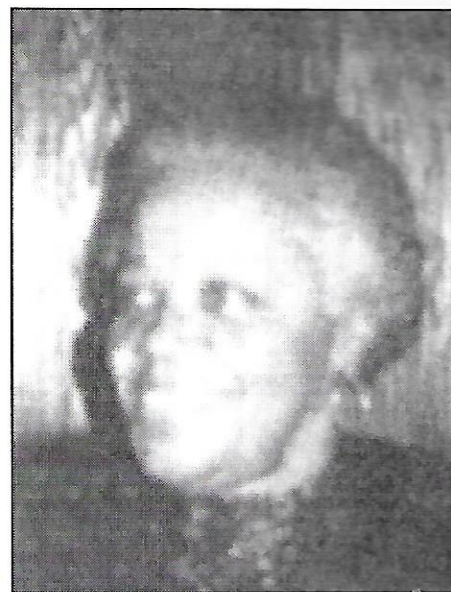
Following basic, I was shipped to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. While there I became a surgical technician at the Station Hospital. I also received the following ranks of PFC, Corporal and Tech Sergeant. While there, I received my first furlough and I along with two friends, Edna Edmundson and Pat Burton visited Los Angeles, California.

Shortly after returning to the base, the Army announced it was forming a unit that was to go overseas and volunteers were being sought. Vast amounts of mail destined for troops in the European Theater of Operations had not been delivered. The mail was stockpiled in warehouses in England. To get the tons of mail sorted and delivered this new unit, the 6888th Central Postal Directory was formed. I eagerly volunteered and was accepted. I was assigned as a medical technician. The unit became known as the Six Triple Eight. We were trained for the work we were to perform when we reached the European Theater of Operations.

At the end of our overseas training at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, we were moved by train to Staten Island, New York. Our destination was Birmingham, England which for a while was our base of operations. We were billeted at the King Edward's School. It was while I was stationed here, that I met the Queen of England, Queen Mary, and her two daughters, Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret.

In record time, the Six Triple Eight unpacked, sorted, and got the mail out to thousands of GI's who had been waiting so long for those letters and packages from home. The morale of these soldiers soared !!! We later moved to Rouen and Paris France. When on leave, I visited other beautiful and thrilling cities in Europe; London, Strafford on the Avon, Brussels and the Netherlands.

At the end of my tour of duty in Europe, we sailed home on the Ile De France, landing in Boston, Massachusetts. From there, I took a train to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri where I received my discharge. After a short while, I started to school using the GI Bill to become a nurse. My military experience had a wonderful impact on my life. While in the service, I developed greater self confidence. I received a professional education. It also set into motion, circumstances that caused me to meet my husband, to whom I have been married fifty eight years. We had nine children. One son, John Winston Marshall was killed in Iraq during the present war. We also have twenty two grandchildren. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to serve in the WAAC and WAC. My contribution to the military was being the best soldier possible in every respect that I could be. I enjoyed my time in the armed forces!!



## LUCILLE R. MAYS

3/43-1/46; WAC/Army/Enlisted: /Sergeant; Basic/Fort Des Moines, Iowa; Bakers and Cooks. School, Fort Des Moines; Assigned, Head Chef, Officers Mess; Assigned Staging Area, Movement of Troops; 2289 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10037 (212) 283-1747