



PATRIOTISM RUNS IN THE FAMILY



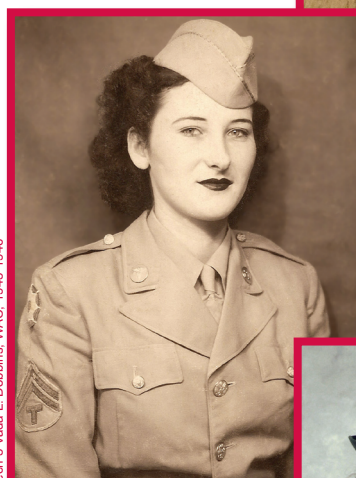
U.S. ARMY

Nurse Lyda Dobbins, USA NC, 1917-1921



A HERITAGE OF COMBAT BOOTS: THREE GENERATIONS OF ARMY WOMEN

"Your mother wears combat boots!" This childish insult never sent young Kathy Dobbins home crying in the 1960s. Instead, she shouted back at these playground bullies, "That's right, and so did my grandma!" Even as a schoolgirl, she knew the women in her family were special. Her mother wore combat boots for the US Army and her paternal grandmother did as well. Years later, Kathy's heritage of combat boots continued when she joined the Army, becoming the third generation of Dobbins women to serve her country.



Tech 5 Vada L. Dobbins, WAC, 1945-1946

SP4 Kathy L. Dobbins, WAC, 1973-1976



Army Nurse Lyda (Smith) Dobbins (far left), Chateauroux, France, 1917. Photo courtesy of Kathy Dobbins.

Kathy's rich family history of women's service in the Army began with her grandmother Lyda (Smith) Dobbins. A graduate of The New York Hospital School of Nursing, Lyda answered her country's call to serve during World War I. A member of the Army Nurse Corps, Lyda and 63 other nurses braved a transatlantic crossing aboard the transport ship *Finland* in August 1917, enroute to Base Hospital No. 9 in Chateauroux, France. She spent the next year and a half caring for thousands of wounded American GIs as the "Great War" raged on around her. Four months after the November 1918 Armistice, Lyda found herself aboard the *Leviathan* sailing for New York. Although WWI had ended, Lyda's service to her country had not. She soon arrived in the malaria-infected Panama Canal Zone, where she served until her marriage to Navy Reserve LCDR W.E. Dobbins, a Spanish-American War and WWI veteran.



WACs Tech 5 Vada (Harrah) Dobbins (right) and Jeanette Dzezinski, Brooke General Hospital, Ft. Sam Houston, TX, c. 1945. Photo courtesy of Kathy Dobbins.

A patriot who loved her country deeply, Lyda's military service was a memorable and important part of her life, according to her granddaughter Kathy. It's not surprising that Lyda passed on her patriotism to her son, Kathy's dad, William E. Dobbins, Jr., who became a career enlisted Navy man serving in both World War II and Korea. What was surprising was that she shared her unique background with another woman in William's life—his wife Vada (Harrah) Dobbins, a member of the WWII Women's Army Corps (WAC).

"My mother and grandmother talked about their common bond in the Army. ... My grandmother approved [of my mother's service] and that was part of why she loved my mother," says Kathy.

Vada, who grew up in the isolated hills of West Virginia, donned a pair of combat boots and answered her country's call to serve in 1945. Hailing from a patriotic family, Vada's reasons for joining the WAC were simple. The country was at war again and she felt it was her civic responsibility to join the war effort, according to her daughter. Vada had one brother, Mack Harrah, who was serving in the Army Air Forces but her other brother remained at home because he was disqualified from service due to injuries he suffered in a hunting accident. Then 20-year-old Vada believed it was her duty to serve in his place.



After completing WAC basic training at Ft. Oglethorpe, GA, Kathy's mom attended medical/surgical technician school before she was assigned to the 70th WAC Hospital Company, Brooke General Hospital, Ft. Sam Houston, TX. There she worked in obstetrics, neuro-surgery and on both the men's and women's surgical wards. She cared for wounded GIs as well as German POWs.

"My mother always spoke very fondly of her military service," Kathy says. "Joining the WAC introduced her to women from all over the country and provided her [with] opportunities to see other areas of the country. ... She loved to laugh and dance; and judging by her photo album, she had no shortage of suitors."

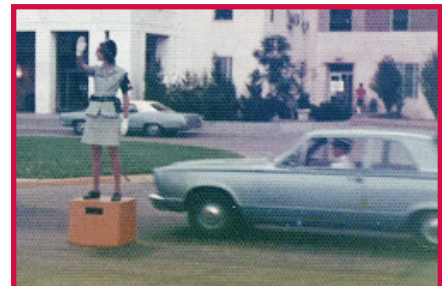
Vada, known as TECH 5 Harrah in those days, served nearly 18 months before she was discharged in October 1946.

Tech 5 Dobbins (standing), Brooke General Hospital, Ft. Sam Houston, TX, c. 1945. *Photo courtesy of Kathy Dobbins.*

With family history like Kathy's, no one was terribly surprised when she decided she wanted to give something back to her country in 1973. Like her mother and grandmother before her, Kathy says she believed that serving her country was what she was supposed to do as a patriotic American who enjoyed the freedoms of our nation. Her grandmother Lyda, who passed away when Kathy was 12, never saw her granddaughter don a pair of combat boots, but Kathy's parents were very proud.

"My mother was thrilled that I was joining to be a WAC just like she had been," Kathy remembers. Sadly, her mom was losing her battle with breast cancer at the time of Kathy's enlistment, but she did get to see her daughter wear the Army uniform before she passed away in 1974.

Kathy may have shared the heritage of combat boots with the women in her life, but the beginning of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973 opened up new opportunities for Kathy that her nurse grandmother and med/surge technician mother never even dreamed possible. After basic training at Ft. McClellan, AL, Kathy went off to the Army's Military Police (MP) School at Ft. Gordon, GA. So new to this occupational specialty were women, that when Kathy reported to her first duty station at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center (FAMC) in Denver, CO, the reaction she got was one of disbelief.



PFC Kathy Dobbins directs traffic, Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, Denver, CO, Spring 1974. *Photo courtesy of Kathy Dobbins.*

Duty for women in the MP corps was in its infancy, but Kathy knew she had found her calling. While at FAMC, she also attended MP Investigators School at Ft. Gordon and finished her tour at Fitzsimons as its first woman military police investigator. She continued in the investigations field during her second tour which took her to Taegu, Korea. Ironically, upon her arrival in Korea, SP4 Dobbins was the senior enlisted woman MP. After her one-year tour, Kathy returned to the United States and was honorably discharged from the Army.



SP4 Dobbins (left) and Korean Katusa MP Sgt. Jung, Camp Walker, Taegue, Korea, Oct. 1975. *Photo courtesy of Kathy Dobbins.*

Though her enlistment was but three short years, Kathy's time in the Army is one of the things in her life of which she is most proud. Knowing that other Dobbins women had gone before her definitely sealed the deal for Kathy. "I knew their devotion to their country and their selflessness is what lead them to enlist when they didn't have to," Kathy says. "My mother knew it was the right thing to do, and so did I."

As for Kathy's dad, he is thrilled to have had so many patriotic women in his life. "I am proud that my mother was a WWI vet and volunteer nurse who served in France, ... my wife was a WAC medic in WWII and that my daughter chose to carry on the military tradition to serve her country," he says.

Following her service in the Army, Kathy spent 29 years as a peace officer in the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. Today, she's enjoying retirement and carrying on two other family traditions—membership in the WAC Veterans chapter to which her mother had belonged and membership in the Women's Memorial. She and her mom Vada were both members of the Memorial for sometime and Kathy recently honored her Grandma Lyda with membership to preserve her story of military service.

It's doubtful that anyone today pokes fun at the long line of women wearing combat boots in Kathy's family. But if they did, Kathy would proudly shout back, "You bet they did and so did I!"