



World War II was the first time in American history that women were allowed to enlist in the military. Even today, these groundbreaking women remain on the sidelines of WWII history and many of their stories have been forgotten. Few of these women faced enemy fire or had the opportunity to serve overseas, but they were heroic nevertheless. When it was not expected of them, they left their homes and their families to serve their country. They served as essential behind-the-scenes members of the military, serving as officers, recruiters, clerks, storekeepers, control tower operators, nurses, pharmacists, and more. Women could enlist in special reserve units of the military starting in 1942, including the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC, dropping the "Auxiliary" in 1943 to become WAC), United States Naval Reserve

Hidden Heroes of WWII: An honor roll of DeKalb County women veterans

by EvaAnne D. Johnson

"Women who stepped up were measured as citizens of the nation, not as women ...

This was a people's war and everyone was in it."

- Oveta Culp Hobby

(as quoted on the World War II memorial in Washington, D.C.)

WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), Marine Corps Women's Reserve, Coast Guard SPARS, and Air Force WASPs (Women Airforce Service Pilots). The Army Nurse Corps (ANC) was established in 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908, but these women were not considered part of the Army or Navy until later, when they were given retroactive veteran status. The approximately 350,000 women nationwide who enlisted in these reserves "released a man to fight" overseas. Whether they enlisted out of patriotic duty, sense of adventure, or another reason, they became an essential part of the military.

The women of DeKalb County, Illinois, did not neglect their duty to their country. Many worked outside of the home for the first time in jobs that

supported the war effort, such as building top-secret planes at Wurlitzer in DeKalb or working on local farms. Others became nurses or organized fundraisers and blood drives for the American Red Cross. At least 135 women from DeKalb County were not content with supporting the war from home, and they enlisted in the military. The majority of these women joined the Navy WAVES, and women in the WAC were a close second. About 30 women from DeKalb County joined the ANC, four women enlisted in the Marines, and one known DeKalb County woman joined the SPARS. Many of them had brothers or husbands fighting overseas or met their husbands while serving. Several women followed their sisters, cousins, and even daughters into the military, including the three Villegas sisters of Sycamore, and the mother-daughter pair, Mary C. Burkart and Mary L. Burkart, who joined the WACs together in 1944.

Many of these women had never been away from home before but saw many parts of the country while enlisted. Women from DeKalb County served on military bases throughout the United States, including Hawaii. While the WAVES and SPARS were primarily stationed stateside, many of the women enlisted in the ANC and WAC were stationed abroad in Indonesia, France, Japan, Germany, and beyond. Although these women could not fight in combat, they were no strangers to dangerous and sensitive situations. ANC Jean MacQueen of Kirkland earned the Air Medal for courageous service and aerial fighting in 1945. WAC Marguerite Carnal operated a radio broadcasting studio in Algiers and taught French to her colleagues while stationed in Italy. Esther Mae Nesbitt is perhaps the most well-known woman WWII veteran of DeKalb County. She was the first DeKalb County woman to enlist in the WAC, was one of the first WACs to land on Normandy Beach in France in 1944 and earned the French Croix de Guerre medal for her

service as a map custodian in the European War Room. She was among several DeKalb County women who continued to serve in the military after the war, taking up their positions again during the Korean War and beyond. Some women, like Edith Spohn and Margaret Weydert of the Army Nurse Corps and Dorothy Bartlett of the WAC stayed in the military for their entire careers and earned the titles of Major, Colonel, and Lieutenant respectively.

Groundbreaking women from DeKalb County were among those to accomplish some "firsts" of the war. In October 1942, Marion Cook Holmes was the first woman to enlist in the WAC from DeKalb (enlisting just two days after Esther Nesbitt), and as a recruiter, she encouraged many other local girls to join her ranks. Mattie Jackson was the first African-American woman from DeKalb County to enlist in the WAC, and she earned the rank of Tech. Sergeant. Lynn Chilton of Maple Park was in the first group of women Marines to report for overseas duty, and Corporal Evelyn Anderson was part of the first WAC company to be sent into the Pacific theater. First Lieutenant Vera Floit was one of the first ten women to arrive in Saipan in the Mariana Islands. My grandmother, Mildred Kaiser, was among the first group of women to integrate Saufley Field in Pensacola, Florida.

The assignments that were given to these local women reflected the huge variety of positions that women held while enlisted. Ruth Babcock, Florence Billings, Beverly Vose, and Marjorie Swanson were instructors in the WAVES. Some women, including Constance Chenette and Dana Gibbons, were stationed in Washington, D. C. in the Navy department. Some specialists included: Margaret Frederick and Doris Weir, who were weather observers; Evelyn Anderson and Barbara White, who were stenographers; Norma Byers and Evelyn Johnson, who specialized in surgical

nursing; and Martha McMenamain, who worked with aerial photography.

After the war was over, most of these quiet heroes returned home to DeKalb County and resumed their lives. They married, returned to their jobs, and raised children and grandchildren. Many of them were proud of their service but felt that their sacrifice was small compared to the many men who sacrificed it all for their country. As my grandmother said once, it was

“just a small thing to do for your country.” It’s time that these women get the credit and honor that they deserve for their service. Their efforts changed the US military and society forever. Remember their names and learn their stories. We honor all of them, and to all who have served, for their service for this country.

The women of DeKalb County who enlisted in the military during WWII include:

Name	Branch	Hometown	Dates of Service
Ethel Muriel Anderson	WAVES	Kirkland	1944-1945
Evelyn Mae Anderson	WAC	DeKalb	1943-?
Ruth Ann Ashelford	ANC	Clare	1944-1964
Norma Evelyn Aurbeck	WAC	Leland	1944-?
Erdine Ruth Babcock	WAVES	Waterman	1943-1945
Elizabeth Ann Baird	WAVES	DeKalb	1943-1946
Betty Jane Baker	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1945
Marion H. Banks	WAVES	Kirkland	1943-1945
Ella Naomi Barnes	WAVES	Sycamore	1942-1947
Dorothy E. Bartlett	WAC	Malta	1942-1946
Hazel M. Bemis	WAC	DeKalb	1944-?
Evelyn Jean Bennett	WAC	Genoa	1944-1953
Thelma M. Bennett	Marines	DeKalb / Waverly, OH	1944-?
Florence Janet Billings	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1945
Betty Ruth Binkley	WAVES	Sycamore	1943-1946?
Irene Agnes Bleifuss	ANC	Sycamore	1943-1945
Marjorie May “Judy” Blomberg	WAC	Esmond	1944-?
Barbara June Burchard	WAVES	DeKalb	1945-1946
Mary Catherine Burkart	WAC	Sycamore	1944-1946
Mary Louise Burkart	WAC	Sycamore	1944-1945
Cecile Butts	WAC	Sycamore	1944-?
Mary Butz	WAVES	Genoa	?
Mildred Byers	WAVES	Kirkland	1944-1946
Norma M. Byers	ANC	Kirkland	1942-1942
Phyllis Mae Carlson	ANC	DeKalb	1945-?

Marguerite Carnal	WAC	DeKalb	1943-1946?
Shirley June Carpenter	WAVES	Sycamore	1943-1946
Erma L. Carrison	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1945
Marlyn Jean Carroll	WAC	Genoa	1944-1945
Mary A. Cerveny	WAC	?	1943-?
Constance Chenette	WAVES	DeKalb	1943-1946
Lynn Milrie Chilton	Marines	Maple Park	1943-?
Grace Coffey	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946
Rebecca "Becky" Mae Colby	WAVES	Shabbona	1943-1946
Gladys Marie Cornell	WAVES	Genoa	1943-1944
Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Craig	WAVES	Shabbona	1945-1946
Edith Ray Crook	WAVES	DeKalb	1943-1945
Ruth C. Divok	WAC	?	1943-?
Helen Rhoda Drake	ANC	Clare	1945-1947
Loyce Birdella Dryden	WAC	Sycamore	1944-1945
Margaret Genevieve Duffy	WAC	Shabbona	1943-1963
Daisy Eastwood	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1946
Violet Audrey Eastwood	WAVES	DeKalb	1942-1944
Marie Isabel Elvert	ANC	Sycamore	1945-?
Vera Elanora Floit	ANC	Sycamore	1942-1946
Alma Linda Fraile	WAC	Sycamore	1944-?
Margaret Jean Frederick	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946
Mildred Elizabeth Freney	WAC	Chicago / DeKalb Co.	1942-?
Erma M. Frigo	WAC	Chicago / DeKalb Co.	1943-?
Vona Virginia Fulsome	Marines	DeKalb / Taylorville	1943-1944
Dana Jane Gibbons	WAVES	Sycamore	1942-1945
Dorothy A. Giles	ANC	DeKalb	1942-1945
Jeanette Goble	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1946
Elizabeth Luella "Betty Lou" Gormley	WAVES	Genoa	1945-1946
Pauline Hackman	ANC	Genoa	1943-?
Doris Elizabeth Hagman	ANC	DeKalb	1945-
Ruth Irene Hall	ANC	Genoa	1942-1946
Donna Jean Harris	WAC	DeKalb	1943-1946
Agnes Louise C. Henderson	WAC	Sycamore	1943-1943
Helen R. Herrmann	ANC	Shabbona / Steward	1943-1945?
Helen Margaret Hickey	ANC	Shabbona / DeKalb	1943?-1945

Eva S. Hilde	WAC	?	1943-1948
Marion Louise Cook Holmes	WAC	DeKalb	1942-?
Marian Elizabeth Hooker	ANC	Sycamore	1944-1946
Agnes Elizabeth Hunter	WAC	DeKalb	1943-1944?
Barbara Louise Ireland	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1945
Mattie L. Jackson	WAC	Sycamore	1943-1946
Dorothy Boxley Jenkins	WAC	Shabbona	1944-1946
Barbara June Johnson	SPARS	Lee	1944-1945
Evelyn Marie Johnson	ANC	Clare	1942-1943
Verna Alvina Johnson	Marines	Maple Park / Sycamore	1943-1945
Hazel Jones	ANC	Sycamore / Kirkland	1942-1945
Mildred Agnes Kaiser	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1946
Vergene Helen Kirby	WAVES	Rockford / DeKalb	1944-1946
Irene Lalley	WAVES	Clare / Sycamore	1943-1945
Edith B. Larsen	WAVES	DeKalb	1943-1944
Jeanette Lillian Lindelof	ANC	Sycamore	1943-?
Jean Isabell MacQueen	ANC	Kirkland	1943-1945
Madalene Jean Maertz	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1945
Viola Margaret Magnuson	ANC	Sycamore / Clare	1943-1946?
Margaret Betty Malsich	WAC	Sycamore	1944-1946
Marie Mary Mangeris	ANC	DeKalb / Creston	1942-1946
Mary Catherine "Katy" McCabe	WAVES	Maple Park	1944-1946
Muriel Marie McClenahan	ANC	DeKalb / Sycamore	1941-?
Roberta McCormick	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1946
Martha Claire McMenamin	WAC	DeKalb	1944-1946
Mary Margaret Meacham	WAC	Oak Park / DeKalb Co.	1942-?
Doris Mary Meier	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946
Betty Jean Miller	WAC	Hinckley	1943-?
J. Loreena Moudy	WAVES	DeKalb / Urbana	1942-1944
Esther Mae Nesbitt	WAC	Sycamore	1942-1945
Ione Genevieve Norwick	WAC	?	1942-1945
Madolyn F. O'Donnell	WAVES	DeKalb / Steward	1943-1945
Carol K. O'Kane	WAVES	Shabbona	1944-1946
Mary D. O'Kerns	WAC	DeKalb Co. / Chicago	1942-1943
Doris Elizabeth Osborne	WAC	DeKalb Co. / Chicago	1942-?
Dorothy Ann Papke	WAC	DeKalb Co. / Chicago	1942-1945

Ruth Virginia Paulson	ANC	DeKalb	1945-1946
Helen Elizabeth Peters	WAC	Chicago / Sister Lakes, MI / DeKalb Co.	1943-1945
Lucille L. Plamback	WAC	DeKalb Co. / Chicago	1942-1945
Mercedes I. Rankin	WAVES	Kingston	1944-1945
Marjorie Ann Risley	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1946
Naomi Ruth Roulette	WAVES	DeKalb / Kirkland	1944-1946
Carol Jean Sears	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946
Donna Jean Shellaberger	WAC	DeKalb	1943-1946
Belle Shuchter	WAC	DeKalb Co. / Chicago	1942-?
Harriet Shepard Simms	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1949
Marjorie K. Smith	ANC	Sycamore	1942-1945
Edith Eloise Spohn	ANC	Shabbona	1943-1963
Ruth Sophia Stenmark	WAC	DeKalb Co. / Chicago	1943-?
Marjorie M. Storm	ANC	Genoa	1945-1946
Marjorie Carolyn Swanson	WAVES	DeKalb	1943-?
Wilma Marie Swanson	WAVES	Sycamore	1943-1946
Doris Virginia Swedberg	WAVES	Mayfield	1944-?
Mary Gene Underwood	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946?
Ruth Carol Upton	ANC	Mayfield	1945-1946
Edith Eleanor Urish	WAVES	Paw Paw / DeKalb	1943-1945?
Mary Agnes Utter	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946
Felicitas Villegas	WAC	Sycamore	1944-?
Theophila Villegas	WAC	Sycamore	1944-1945
Beverly L. Vose	WAVES	DeKalb / Joliet	1944-?
Lillian Waters	WAC	DeKalb / Downers Grove	1943-?
Doris Evelyn Weir	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-?
Ruth Lamontera Welander	WAVES	Sycamore	1943-1946
Jeanette Marie Wennlund	WAVES	DeKalb	1944-1946
Mary Elizabeth Wetzel	WAVES	Sycamore	1944-1946
Margaret Emily Weydert	ANC	DeKalb / Maple Park	1945-1947
Barbara Irene White	WAC	Genoa	1944-?
Alta Louese Wiley	ANC	Sycamore	1942-1944
Eudora Adele Williams	WAVES	Genoa	1944-1945
Dorothy M. Willrett	WAC	Malta	1944-1946?
Barbara Luciene Wilson	ANC	Sycamore	1945-1946
Marjorie Alice Wonser	WAVES	Sycamore / Cortland	1944-?

Women WWII veterans who lived in DeKalb County at other points in their lives include:

Name	Branch	Hometown	Dates of Service
Cora Esther Blatcher	WAC	Winnebago Co. / DeKalb Co.	1943-
Patricia Jane Brown	WAVES	Urbana / Waterman	? (2.5 years)
Mary Fox	WAC	Ohio	1942-1945
Frances M. Garland	WAC	Woodstock / DeKalb	1942-?
Fay Ann Horton	Air Force Civil Air Patrol	Los Angeles, CA	?-?
Dorothy L. Lindeen	ANC	Milwaukee / Sycamore	?
Elaine Martin	WAVES	Milwaukee / Sycamore	?
Cecelia Dawson Paul	Marines	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	1944-1945
Lola Genevieve Range	ANC	Fairbury / Sandwich	1943-1946
Jeannie Margaret Scott	Marines	Racine, WI	?

More information about these women's service can be found at the Joiner History Room. This honor roll was compiled from local newspaper articles, Army military records, census records, obituaries, and other records found on Ancestry.com. The women's names and hometowns reflect their names and permanent residences at the time of enlistment during WWII. Dates of service included are known enlistment and discharge dates during WWII; later service dates may not be listed. While I have striven for accuracy, I apologize for any mistakes. Please forward any corrections or additions to this honor roll to the Joiner History Room staff. Part II, which will honor the Homefront Women Heroes, will be published in the Spring 2020 issue of Cornsilk.

Images and captions:

[<http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/WVHP/id/6788>] Recruiting poster for the armed forces, 1944, encouraging women to enlist "For your country's sake today – For your own sake tomorrow."