

Virginians at War

WWII: Nurses

Resource Packet

Contains: Glossary, Images, Discussion Questions,
Additional Resources

Program Description: Virginians at War: WWII - Nurses features amazing, unique stories from World War II nurses who served in both Europe and the Pacific theaters. The film spans from the nurses' time before the war through basic training and their time in battle. The emotional stories highlight similarities between the experiences of American soldiers and the nurses who supported them, through fatigue, chaos, hunger, and eventually, victory.

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Length: 17:05

Streaming link: <https://vimeo.com/367107549>

Featured Speakers:

SSGT Albert E. Cratch, Virginia Beach
1st LT Dorothy S. Davis, Jefferson Park
CPL George S. Fiske, Williamsburg
BG Anna Mae Hays, Arlington
1st LT Evelyn Kowalchuk, Huddleston
CAPT Alice E. B. Lane, Alexandria
RADM John L. Marocchi, Sperryville
Y1/C Richard A. Paroubek, Williamsburg
1st LT Ruth M. Puryear, Richmond
PFC Arthur "Art" Schintzel, Williamsburg
1st LT Margaret S. B. Vogel, Virginia Beach
MAJ Nellie E. Walls, Richmond
LT COL Louise E. Wells, Richmond



GLOSSARY

IMPORTANT TERMS

- **Army Nurse Corps:** a branch of the Army Medical Department; nursing service for the U.S. Army composed entirely of registered nurses (RNs)
- **Baptism by fire:** a phrase that means learning something the hard way, or having to deal with a difficult situation without prior experience
- **Cadet Nurse Corps:** a WWII nurse training program under the U.S. Public Health Service that recruited women between the ages of 17 and 35 from accredited colleges
- **Chief nurse:** Chief Nursing Officer; the head nurse in a facility that manages fellow nurses and other day-to-day operations
- **Evacuation hospital:** a mobile hospital near transportation facilities; during WWII, evacuation hospitals had 53 nurses and could accommodate 750 patients
- **Field hospital:** a temporary hospital or mobile medical unit at the front lines; during WWII, field hospitals were staffed with 18 nurses and could handle 75-150 patients; field doctors and nurses could perform 80 operations per day
- **Litter:** a type of stretcher or rescue basket used to move injured people
- **Li'l Abner:** a comic strip that ran in newspapers from 1934 to 1977
- **American Red Cross:** an emergency and disaster relief organization; the Red Cross became involved in WWII prior to the U.S. entering the war, assisting civilian victims of war in Europe in 1939 and later aiding wounded U.S. soldiers abroad and at home
- **Taps:** the bugle call played during military funerals

NOTABLE PEOPLE

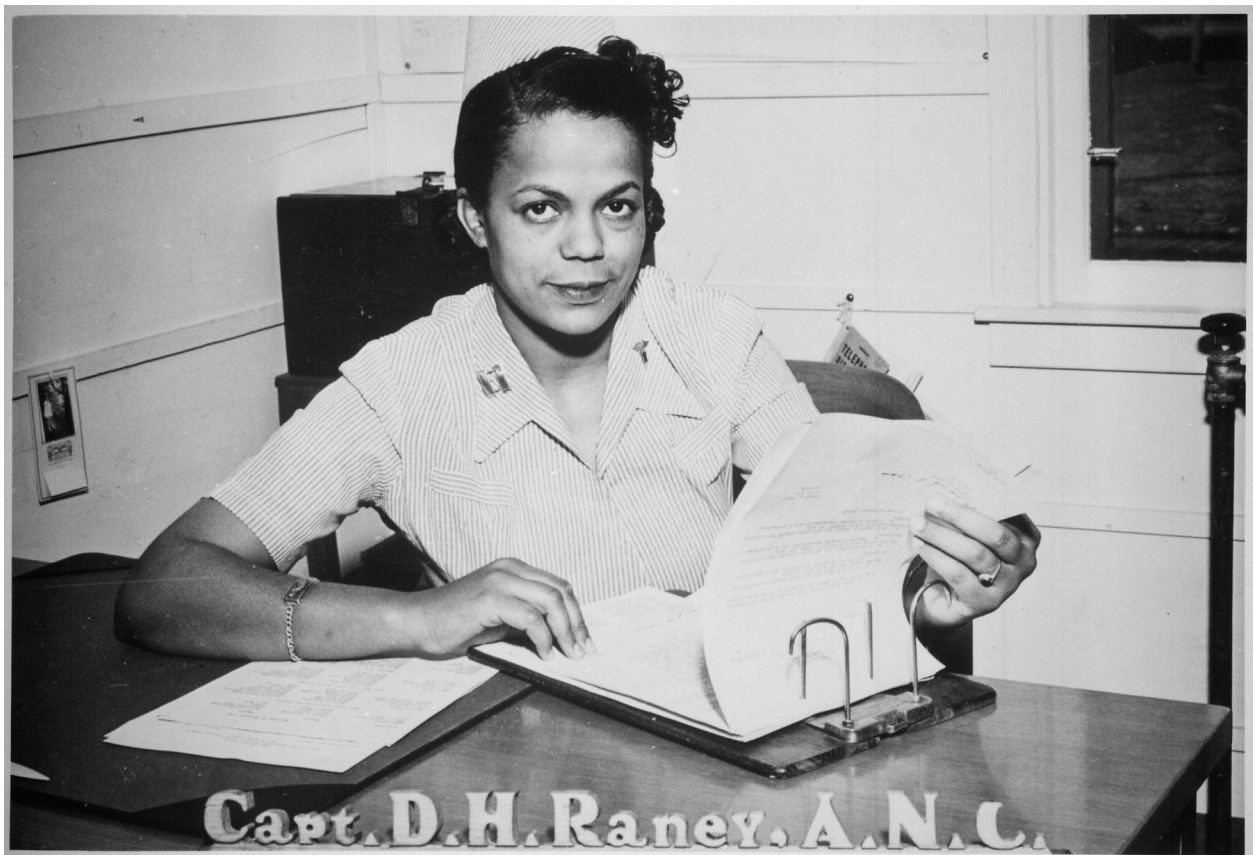
- **Colonel Julia O. Flikke:** first woman to hold the rank of Colonel in the Army; superintendent of the ANC
- **2nd Lieutenant Ruth M. Gardiner:** first Army nurse to be killed in a theater of operation during WWII
- **Brigadier General Anna Mae Hays:** first woman in the U.S. Army to be promoted to a General Officer rank; served in the CBI theater in India and Burma; influenced military policy to prevent occupational sexism and equal treatment of women in the Armed Forces
- **2nd Lieutenant Elsie Ott:** first nurse to receive an Air Medal for an aerial evacuation from India to Washington, D.C.
- **Major Della Raney:** first African-American Chief Nurse of the ANC; first Black woman nurse to be promoted to Captain and Major in the U.S. Army

KEY FIGURES

- Approximately **500** Black nurses served in the Army Air Corps during WWII
- **201** Army nurses died during WWII; **16** deaths were a direct result of enemy action
- **1,600** Army nurses were decorated for their service during WWII
- There were more than **57,000** nurses registered by August 1945

NURSES of WWII TIMELINE

- **December 7, 1941:** Pearl Harbor attack occurs, where 82 Army nurses are stationed; less than 1,000 nurses are registered with the Army prior to Pearl Harbor; this attack prompts a surge in U.S. nurses joining the armed forces (from less than 7,000 to over 12,000 in six months)
- **March 1942:** Della Hayden Raney becomes the first African-American in U.S. history to serve as Chief Nurse at the Tuskegee Army Air Field
- **April 9, 1942:** Bataan (Philippines) falls under Japanese control; 21 Army nurses escape, 66 are held as prisoners of war
- **November 8, 1942:** 60 nurses land on the coast of North Africa to support the invasion; nurses operated out of an abandoned hospital with no electricity or running water, using supplies they had carried ashore
- **December 1942:** Congress passes a law allowing ANC officers to be promoted up to colonel, and allows for better pay of ANC officers
- **July 12, 1943:** Nurses arrive at Sicily to support U.S. forces, but are forced to hide in trenches and foxholes due to German dive bombers; nurses have to protect field hospitals from mosquitoes, as malaria is a huge problem in the area
- **July 27, 1943:** 2nd Lt. Ruth M. Gardiner is the first American nurse killed in active duty during an emergency air evacuation near Alaska
- **September 13, 1943:** HMHS *Newfoundland*, a British hospital ship carrying 103 American nurses, is struck by a torpedo and sinks; all American nurses are rescued by British ships
- **November 8, 1943:** a plane carrying 13 flight nurses and 13 medical corpsmen hits bad weather between Sicily and the east coast of Italy; the plane becomes lost and makes an emergency landing in the Albanian mountains, in German territory; locals help the stranded nurses and corpsmen escape to Allied territory on foot in severe snowstorms; the journey lasts two months and crosses 800 miles of territory; all make the journey except for three nurses, who are captured by Germans but eventually escape by posing as Albanian citizens – it takes five months of travel on donkeys for the three nurses to reach Allied territory
- **January 27, 1944:** Army nurses land on Anzio beach in Italy to support U.S. troops
- **June 10, 1944:** Army nurses land at Normandy to establish Field and Evacuation hospitals
- **September 27, 1944:** Lt. Reba Z. Whittle is captured by Germans when her evacuation squadron is shot down
- **January 1945:** Franklin D. Roosevelt suggests that nurses be drafted in a State of the Union address; nurse draft bill is passed by the House but is not passed by the Senate before the end of the war
- **February 18, 1945:** Army nurse prisoners of war receive the Bronze Star medal
- **April 28, 1945:** Six Army nurses and five Army medics are killed on USS *Comfort* by a Japanese kamikaze plane
- **May 8, 1945:** VE Day; more than 52,000 nurses are on active duty serving in 605 overseas hospitals and 454 U.S. hospitals
- **September 2, 1945:** VJ Day; more than 57,000 nurses are on active duty



Della Hayden Raney, first Black woman in the ANC

(National Archives)



Surgical ward of the 268th station hospital in New Guinea

(U.S. Army Signal Corps)



Army Air Force School of Air Evacuation in Kentucky

(National Museum of the U.S. Air Force)



U.S. Army Nurses in France, August 1944

(U.S. Army Signal Corps)



Liberated U.S. Army Nurses, February 1945
Formerly Japanese prisoners of war, captured at Bataan and Corregidor in 1942

(U.S. Army Center of Military History)



2nd Lt. Ruth M. Gardiner
(U.S. Air Force)



Lt. Reba Z. Whittle
(U.S. Air Force)



Brig. Gen. Anna Mae Hays in nursing school, 1940
(Lehigh Valley Heritage Museum)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What sort of training was required of Nurses in the war? Was it any more or less easy than the average soldier?
2. What were conditions like for nurses? Consider the stories of nurses trying to just care for themselves.
3. Did the Germans care if one had a red cross on them?
4. What did Nurses hope for in the long term after the war? Consider how they felt about their children and subsequent generations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the experiences of Virginians in World War II, view *Virginians at War: WWII China-Burma-India* and other films at vawarmemorial.org. Looking to do more research? Check out the links below.

- <https://history.army.mil/books/anc-highlights/chrono.htm>
- <https://www.awfdn.org/trailblazers/della-hayden-raney-jackson/>
- <https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/National/history-wwii.pdf>
- <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/72-14/72-14.HTM>
- <https://e-anca.org/History/ANC-Eras/1940-1950>