

An Unsung Hero: Rose L. Gibbs

With a contagious laugh, veteran Rose L. Gibbs responded to the question regarding her reasons for entering the army, "Free clothes, free food, free boarding, free training, and 75 dollars a month? I said that's pretty good, I think I'll go down." On March 2, 1949, Rose L. Gibbs, a native of the small town of Blackstone, Virginia, enthusiastically enlisted in the U.S. Army in pursuit of exploration around the world, only to discover her new station a mere thirty miles from her hometown, much to her dismay.

As the Korean War erupted, Gibbs found herself stationed in Osaka, Japan—a hub where casualties from the conflict were transported for medical attention and care. Gibbs, known for her rebellious spirit and quick-witted sense of humor, maintained her independence, fearlessly advocating for both her own rights and those of fellow women in an era when their voices often fell on deaf ears. She vividly recounted the scenes from within the hospital, where the injured were lined against the walls. She mentions the little room for contemplation about the events that led them there; instead, her focus was on how to offer the best care to ensure their safety. Seven days a week, 12 hours a day Gibbs worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of soldiers serving in Korea, she recounts her memories of injuries directly related to frostbite so much so that the hospital dedicated a unit to frostbite specifically. Gibbs recounts a unique issue that faced nurses during the Korean War: hemorrhagic fever. The fever brought with it a rapid onset of organ failure and neurological deterioration, a challenge that Rose acknowledges made it increasingly difficult for her to provide care, particularly in terms of effective communication. Despite the difficulties she faced during her time as an army nurse, Gibbs laughs even now as she remembers the anecdote about a patient she cared for. Hemorrhagic fever symptoms made the patient quiet, and he only nodded to express himself; yet, as Rose started to leave after caring for him, he

stated his only word to her: "Too-da-loo." It was times like this that helped Gibbs manage her time serving in the Korean War, and she couldn't help but smile at the simplicity of the words and repeat them back. Gibbs' service in the Korean War ended in 1953 after she was honorably discharged when she became pregnant, soon giving birth to one of her four children. Throughout the remainder of her life, Gibbs continued her career as a nurse, making history as the first female soldier of the month from Fort Gregg-Adams (formerly Fort Lee), Virginia, to be honored at the Pentagon and the first female director of the clinical laboratory at the VA Hospital in Michigan

Amidst the stories of the Korean War, the vital role of women, especially nurses, often goes unnoticed. The tireless dedication Gibbs possessed for caring for the wounded, often in unimaginably challenging conditions, is a testament to her resilience and unwavering commitment to the cause. Yet, often contributions made by women during this time remain a lesser-known chapter in the history of conflict. As I gaze at photographs of my own mother, a veteran nurse who was stationed in Korea, I can't help but wonder if the landscapes she once stood upon bear traces of Rose L. Gibbs' legacy. Gibbs, like countless other women of her time, was a trailblazer who forged a path for the future, one that included a diverse military consisting of the efforts of both men and women. In an era where the contributions of many were often overlooked, she boldly championed for the rights of herself and her peers. Reflecting on her service, Gibbs shared, "I don't regret a minute that I spent in service. If I had to do it all over, I would do it." This sentiment encapsulates not only the unwavering dedication of Gibbs but also the indomitable spirit that defined her and countless other women who served alongside her during the Korean War. With each passing day, we take strides towards a more inclusive and

accurate representation of history, ensuring that the legacy of women like Rose L. Gibbs continues to inspire generations to come, just as it is for me.

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