
Retired Army Nurse Recalls Korean War Service

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 30, 2001 – A half-century has passed since retired Army Maj. Julia Baxter worked as an operating room nurse in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, or MASH, in war-torn South Korea.

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Retired Army Maj. Julia Baxter, 80, talks with Charles L. Cragin at a March 15, 2001, Women's History Month ceremony. The acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness recognized Baxter for her service as an operating room nurse during the Korean War. Photo by Rudi Williams (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

The 80-year-old veteran remembers when more than 1,000 wounded soldiers were backlogged waiting for care in the yard outside the hospital.

"We worked eight hours on and eight hours off for about a month before changing to 12 hours on and 12 hours off," said Baxter, who received the Army's Bronze Star for her wartime service.

DoD's Women's History Month ceremony hosted March 15 by Charles L. Cragin paid tribute to Army nurses like Baxter who served in the Korean War. Within days of North Korea's June 25, 1950, attack on South Korea, Cragin told the audience, 57 Army nurses were deployed to Korea to care for wounded American and allied soldiers.

Cragin, acting under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, invited Baxter and her husband, retired Army Col. Daryle Baxter, to attend the Pentagon ceremony on behalf of her Korean War counterparts.

"We don't have an opportunity to thank the nurses individually, but I thought we could symbolically thank all of them who served by thanking you," Cragin told Baxter. He presented her with a certificate and a crystal Pentagon etched with the logo of the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Equal Opportunity in recognition of her Korean War service.

Baxter entered the Army Nurse Corps in April 1945 from Asheboro, N.C. She served in hospitals in the United States, Frankfurt and Berlin, Germany, and Tokyo. She went to Korea on July 6, 1950, with the 8055th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, as a first lieutenant and was later promoted to captain.

Each day, she was reminded of the brother she'd lost in World War II.

"When I first went to Korea," Baxter said, "each soldier that came in the operating room seemed like my brother. It took a little while to get over that. We did a little crying, then got back to work."

After about five months in Korea, Baxter went back to the Tokyo Army Hospital where she assisted doctors with plastic surgery and orthopedics for two years. In 1957, while stationed in Iran, she met her husband, an Army captain, and was married in 1958. She became pregnant and was discharged in 1959.

"In those days," she said, "you couldn't stay in if you were pregnant."

When Baxter returned to the States, she became an occupational health nurse with the federal government. After retiring, she became a teacher in Fairfax County, Va., and later retired from that job.

"I'm 80 years old and I'm still working as a substitute teacher in a special education school -- the Pulley Vocational Career Center in Fairfax County, Va.," she noted.

Baxter is pleased DoD honors its military women. "They've done so much for the country and it's about time they should be honored for their contributions," she said.

"I've lived in the best of times and the worst of times and it was such an honor to be here today."

Contact Author

Related Sites:

<http://korea50.army.mil/history/>.

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Retired Army Maj. Julia Baxter, 80 (right,) and her husband, retired Army Col. Daryle Baxter, attend a Women's History Month ceremony at the Pentagon March 15, 2001. Claiborne D. Haughton Jr., acting deputy assistant secretary of defense for equal opportunity, sits to their right. During the ceremony, DoD officials honored Baxter for her service as an operating room nurse during the Korean War. Photo by Rudi Williams
