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After World War II ended in August 1945, the nation returned to peaceful pursuits. On July 26, 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, abolishing racial segregation in the armed forces. In June 1950, North Korea, a small Asian nation of little concern to most Americans, launched a surprise invasion of its neighbor to the south. The United States was once again at war, fighting with its ally South Korea. Many active duty nurses were unexpectedly called to scene of battle. One of the North Carolina nurses responding to this call was Mattie Hicks.

Mattie Donnell Hicks was born in Greensboro, North Carolina on September 2, 1914, to John and Josephine Donnell. She was one of ten children. Pursuing her childhood dream, after graduating from the all African American Dudley High School, she enrolled at the Grady Hospital School of Nursing in Atlanta, Georgia. Three years later she earned her diploma and began her career at a segregated, rural hospital in Gainesville, Georgia.

Hicks "wanted to do something different in going into the military to try to help the soldiers with their wounds and all that". She joined the Army Nurse Corps on July 2, 1945 but served only a few weeks until World War II ended in August 1945. However, Hicks realized she enjoyed Army nursing so she re-enlisted in March 1946 and stayed for twenty one years.

When the Korean War broke out, Hicks was assigned to the 11th Evacuation Hospital in Wonju, Korea on the eastern battlefield. During the war, approximately 540 Army Nurses served on the ground in Korea. Seriously wounded and ailing troops were air lifted to awaiting Navy hospital ships or evacuated to Army Hospitals in Japan and the United States for more intense treatment than was available in Korean MASH units or evacuation hospitals. Many Army nurses served in the newly created Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH) units close to the front. Hicks and other nurses in Evacuation Hospitals took wounded soldiers from the MASH units and provided longer term care. She recalled in an oral history interview in 1999

We enjoyed our work very much. One thing, we were kept busy because patients would be coming right off the battlefield because they had the helicopters to pick them up, bring them right to the hospital which saved a lot of their lives ... whenever a shipment would come in, you'd work ... if they were in real bad shape, they would ship them on right away. But if they were not in too bad shape, they would stay right there and we'd take care of them.

Each Evacuation Hospital had a specialty area. The 11th Evacuation Hospital had a renal insufficiency unit and pioneered the use of renal dialysis. Hicks and her colleagues at the 11th Evacuation Hospital were among the first nurses to support patients with hemorrhagic fever on the first generation of artificial kidney machines. In addition to patients with renal disease and battlefield wounds, Hicks and her colleagues provided general care for soldiers and their family members with a variety of ailments. She recalled civilians coming to the hospitals with tuberculosis and gastro-intestinal distress.

"We had to run a tube down their throat and clean - and get all the fluid and stuff out of their stomach. And you know, through that tube live worms would come through, Live!"

When asked about her social situation in Korea, including homesickness, cold temperatures, Spartan accommodations and serving in one of the first integrated units in US armed forces history, Hicks remembered, "when you're afraid, as most of us were, being in a theater where they were fighting and all that, you kind of act like a family".

After her tour in Korea, Hicks served wherever the Army Nurse Corps needed her. Her postings included hospitals in Japan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Germany and North Carolina. She worked in medical surgical nursing and obstetrical nursing. She earned many medals for her courage and service including the World War II Victory Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and Army Commendation Medal, the Armed Service Reserve Medal, a Meritorious Unit Citation and a United Nations Service Medal.

In March, 1966 Hicks retired from the Army having earned the rank of major. She returned home to Greensboro and built a home. After her years of travel she was ready to spend time with her extended family and childhood friends. She was dedicated to her church spending many hours serving on committees, in the choir and helping fellow congregants in need. Hicks passed away on March 14, 2004.