

Oveta Culp Hobby: From Media to Military

[Voice of Narrator] 1941. World War Two is raging overseas. With the United States on the brink of war, more men than ever are needed on the front lines. Congress proposes a bill that would allow women into the army freeing up more men into battle. At first, the idea seems preposterous. It would take the expertise of a young media mogul to convince her country that enlisting women in the military would be best for its nation. [Title] Oveta Culp Hobby: From Media to Military.

[Narrator] Oveta Culp Hobby, known for her poise and her communication skills would play a revolutionary role during World War Two for standing up to her country and demanding equal rights for women as they became integrated into the military workforce.

Oveta was born in central Texas on January 19th, 1905. Her mother, a suffragette, pushed her to stand up for women's rights. At the age of 21, Oveta was voted in as the first woman parliamentarian of the Texas House of Representatives. When the legislature was not in session, Oveta worked at the Houston Post, one of the nation's largest newspapers. While there, she met her future husband, former Texas Governor William Perez Hobby. In 1931, Oveta moved to Houston where she continued to work at the Post and was eventually promoted to Executive Vice President. Together, the Hobby's bought the newspaper, and purchased other local radio and television stations, catapulting Oveta into a career in media communication.

Under her direction, the Post stood behind Houston's growing Black community by reporting on topics important to them and giving them exposure in a positive way. As a businesswoman, Oveta promoted equal employment by hiring women and minorities as reporters and journalists. One notable example is when a struggling law school graduate showed up on the steps of Oveta's television station at a time when most major Houston law firms were not hiring women. Excited about showcasing Houston's first female news reporter, Oveta took a stand on hiring Kay Bailey Hutchison who later went on to become Texas first female U.S. Senator.

[Kay Bailey Hutchison's voice] ...she of course hired women in her news department and certainly became a pioneer in television. [Narrator] As

Oveta's career thrived in Houston, overseas things were growing dire. It would be a matter of time when the United States would be drawn into World War Two. With this possibility looming, FDR instated a peacetime draft, while Congress worked to pass a controversial bill to establish a women's army corps. Soon, thousands of letters from women all over the country poured in wanting to know what would happen to their loved ones once drafted. In response, the War Department created a Women's Interest Section with a twofold purpose. One, to address the women's concerns, and two, to explore the interest among the women in joining the Army in non-combat roles. Oveta's accomplishments in the media drew the attention of General (?), the head of the Army's public relations bureau. He asked her to lead this section. Leaving her job at the Post, Oveta arrived in DC during the Summer of 1941 to take a stand with the Women's Interest Section. Using her skills as an excellent communicator, she got right to work.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, America plunged into World War Two. Oveta was sent to Congress to stand up for the highly contested bill that would establish the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Even though passage of the bill still awaited approval, plans by the War Department to create the corps were underway. Oveta's efforts with the Woman's Interest Section made her the favorite choice to organize the Corps. [Voice of Amanda Vtipilson, Women's Army Historian] When they first started talking about moment being in the Army, they wanted someone who had a proven record of success, and someone who had the guts to do something different. [Narrator] At first, the idea of women serving in the Army was not well received. With Oveta's ability to connect with people and promote the concept in a positive way, helped draw support for the bill as well as well as persuade women to join the Corp.

[Voice of Major Florence Dunn, Vietnam War Veteran] She had to think outside the box to determine everything that women would do while they were in the military. Also, she had to determine, the installations where they would serve, she had to determine the logistics, even down to the uniforms. [Narrator] On May 15th, 1942, a year after Oveta joined the War Department, FDR finally signed the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps bill into law and Ovet's stamp in history as its Director took root. [Voice of a newscaster] Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby taking the Oath of Office as the director of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. [Narrator] Women can now enlist in the

Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, or the WAAC. Due to Oveta's enthusiastic publicity, more than 13,000 women signed up by the end of the first day.

At first the women stayed at old Army quarters after the Army engineers refused to make new barracks for the WAAC. Oveta stood up for her Corps and drew the plans for the encampment herself.

On the first payday, the female doctors were denied their salary. They were told that only those serving as doctors were authorized to receive pay, and that women were not doctors. Oveta stood up to Congress and demanded that her personnel be paid. [Voice of Laura Beckworth, Hobby Communications. Oveta Culp Hobby's Granddaughter] She just felt that this was an opportunity for women to serve their country, and also to get paid, and get all the same benefits that men in the service did.

[Narrator] Women were taught various skills needed to serve in the military. Initially, expectations were low. It was thought that three women would be needed to fill on man's non-combat job. However, the women proved them wrong. It turned out that for one woman, they were at least 10 men, thus overcoming the manpower shortage on the battlefield. [Voice of Debra Winegarten, Professor UT Austin] So she was always pushing the envelope of Why can't a woman do that job? And she kept finding more jobs that women can do. [Voice of a reporter] Wherever they are, WACs on the job relieve soldiers, doing confidential administrative work that can only be handled by Army personnel. [Narrator] After one year of success, the Women's Corps was still an auxiliary corps and the women did not still receive Army rank officer status, or veteran's rights. Oveta continued to stand up for the rights of her military women and the auxiliary corps reorganized becoming the newly formed Women's Army Corps, known as the WACs. The WACs were the first women's section to be granted full Army status, transforming them from a marginalized group of women to an integral part of the Army.

On July 5th, 1943, Oveta took the Oath of Office as director of the Women's Army Corps. She earned the rank of Colonel, making her the first woman to be fully admitted into the Army. [Voice of an Army woman, Oveta?] We shall pay our debt to democracy. We shall keep our date with destiny. [Narrator] Even after obtaining equal status, the WACs continued to face gender

barriers. When Oveta found out that women were being dishonorably discharged for pregnancy without permission, she took a stand by arguing that the fathers of the illegitimate children receive dishonorable leave as well. Due to her insistence, regulations for women in all branches of military service were changed, and pregnant women became entitled to honorable discharge and medical care. Despite the success of the Women's Army Corps, opposing views still existed. [Voice of a man] What the devil does a woman want to be a soldier for? Just a waste of time. [Narrator] Using her media talents, Oveta stood up to negative assumptions by promoting the Women's Army Corps as a space where women could safely learn vocational skills and contribute to the war effort. Due to Oveta's public relations skills and the Corps success, by 1944 more than 600,000 WACs were requested to serve all over the world.

The demands of the war started to take a toll on Oveta's health. On July 12th, 1945, at the age of 40, Oveta requested permission to resign from military service. Two months later, World War Two would come to an end. [Voice of General George C. Marshall] When the war has been won, women in the Army will march shoulder to shoulder with the men in the great victory parade. [Narrator] Oveta insisted that the WACs continue to work with their newly acquired skills even after the end of the war. Her stand in history created a labor force of career women that still exists today.

The Women's Army Corps served in the Vietnam War until it was fully integrated into the regular Army in 1978. Today military women continue to enjoy privileges equal to their male counterparts thanks to the efforts of Oveta Culp Hobby. A media giant and a military figure, Oveta Culp Hobby is remembered as a woman who took a stand in history for equal opportunity and women's rights. After her death at the age of 90, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame with a citation that reads: You were respectful of the power you wielded in influential positions. You made the road smoother for the women who followed you. [patriotic music]