



## Two North Carolina Nurses Who Served In The Korean War

By: **Dr. Phoebe Pollitt, RN**

### Abstract

Fifty years ago, on June 27, 1950, the United States entered a war on the Korean Peninsula to fight aggression by the communist government of North Korea. Before the armistice was declared in 1953, 540 nurses served in Korea and another 1,000 or so served in the theater of war on board hospital ships, on MEDEVAC aircraft, and in hospitals in Japan. Several of these nurses were from North Carolina, including Julia Baxter and Mattie Hicks, in Korea. After graduating from Grady Hospital School of Nursing in Atlanta, she joined the ANC on July 2, 1945. Hicks served only a few weeks before World War II ended. Realizing she enjoyed Army nursing she re-enlisted and stayed in the ANC for 21 years.

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## Two North Carolina Nurses Who Served in the Korean War

By NCNA Member Dr. Phoebe Pollitt, RN; Nursing History Council Vice-Chair

Fifty years ago, on June 27, 1950, the United States entered a war on the Korean Peninsula to fight aggression by the communist government of North Korea. Before the armistice was declared in 1953, 540 nurses served in Korea and another 1,000 or so served in the theater of war on board hospital ships, on MEDEVAC aircraft, and in hospitals in Japan. Several of these nurses were from North Carolina, including Julia Baxter and Mattie Hicks.

The first soldiers landed in Korea on July 5th, 1950, and were quickly routed by the North Korean Army. The next day, 57 Army nurses arrived and helped establish a hospital in Pusan. Twelve of these nurses volunteered to serve in the first MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) unit, which moved with the troops as close as possible to the battle lines. One of these was First Lieutenant Julia Choate Baxter, a white nurse from Raleigh who first entered the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in April 1945. Within a month, the MASH unit personnel had to retreat back to Pusan. They were often within hearing distance of enemy fire. She recalled her Korean War service this way:

“We worked eight hours on and eight hours off for about a month before we went to twelve hours on and twelve hours off, but it didn’t make a difference, we were on call 24 hours a day. I don’t think we can imagine it, there might be a thousand wounded laying in the yard. But we were young and happy. We just accepted what came along.”

Baxter moved from Korea to the Tokyo Army Hospital in Japan in late 1950, and for the remainder of the war she worked in an operating room with soldiers needing more extensive surgery than could be provided in Korea. Baxter later served in the Middle East and retired with the rank of Major.

First Lieutenant Mattie Donnell Hicks, an African American nurse from Greensboro, was another nurse who served

in Korea. After graduating from Grady Hospital School of Nursing in Atlanta, she joined the ANC on July 2, 1945. Hicks served only a few weeks before World War II ended. Realizing she enjoyed Army nursing she re-enlisted and stayed in the ANC for 21 years.

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— Julia Baxter

When the Korean War broke out, Hicks was assigned to an Evacuation Hospital in Wonju. Nurses in Evacuation Hospitals received wounded soldiers from the MASH units and provided longer term care. She recalled in an oral history interview in 1999:

“We were kept busy because patients would be coming right off the battlefield ... they had the helicopters to pick them up, bring them right to the hospital which saved a lot of their lives.”

After her tour in Korea, Hicks worked in Army hospitals in Japan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Germany and North Carolina. She earned many medals including the World War II Victory Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, an Army Commendation Medal, the Armed Service Reserve Medal, a Meritorious Unit Citation and a United Nations Service Medal. She retired in 1966 having earned the rank of Major. Hicks passed away, after a life of service, on March 14, 2004.

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