



**CELEBRATING THE
MILITARY SERVICE OF
OKLAHOMA WOMEN, TO
HONOR THE 73RD
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
ARMED SERVICES
INTEGRATION ACT!**

June 12, 1948

Thank you for your service!



**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

1950–1953 During the Korean War, over 50,000 women served at home and abroad. 500 Army nurses served in combat zones and many Navy nurses served on hospital ships. Female medical air evacuation nurses of the USAF Nurse Corps were the only women permitted to serve in the Korean battle zone.

The remainder of Women in the Air Force (WAF) carried out various support roles at rear-echelon bases in Japan, including air traffic control, weather observation, radar operation, and photo interpretation. In June 1953, the number of WAFs serving in Japan peaked at 600 while total WAF strength worldwide reached 12,800 female officers and enlisted personnel.

Eighteen women--16 nurses and two Air Force personnel--lost their lives in the Korean War.

Captain Jonita Ruth Bonham, from Bennington OK, and a nursing graduate of the University of Oklahoma was awarded the USAF Distinguished Flying Cross.



Lieutenant Bonham was born on April 2, 1922 in Bennington, Oklahoma, and joined the Army Air Corps, where she was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Medical Corps. She served in the Philippines and Japan after World War II, and then returned to the United States, resigning from active military duty.

When the Korean War broke out she rejoined the military, this time as a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. On September 26, 1950, she was serving as a flight nurse with another nurse, Vera Brown, in a C-54 cargo plane that had been converted into an emergency hospital. Bonham and Brown were two of three medical team members on the flight that day. About a half mile from shore the plane stalled, descended, and slammed into the Sea of Japan, breaking into three pieces and sinking.

Bonham, who was completely submerged in the aircraft, managed to fight her way to the surface, where she found herself swimming for her life in a sea churned up by high winds. She hung onto a floating barracks bag until she was able to grab a life raft rope. She stayed in the water, grabbing other survivors and guiding them to the rope. It was not until 17 of them were safe that she allowed herself to be pulled into one of two available rafts. Although she was seriously wounded, she forgot about her own injuries as she encouraged panicked survivors to stay in the raft until rescue. Unfortunately, nobody at base operations knew that the plane had crashed. Once rescued, Bonham spent nine months in the hospital recovering from a broken cheek bone, skull fracture, broken shoulder and broken left wrist. She was transferred to Maxwell AFB for further recovery, and there she became the first female recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross. Soon thereafter she was promoted to Captain.

The Cavalcade of America radio program aired a story about her on April 9, 1952, "The Nurse Who Forgot Fear". Articles about Jonita appeared in Everywoman's Magazine and Reader's Digest. Jonita Bonham later married Col. Clifton Willard Bovee (1913-2007) and they had children Tony Bovee, Greg Bovee, and Renee Bovee. She lived for many years in Colorado Springs, spending the last six months of her life in Cheyenne, Wyoming with her daughter. She died of cancer there on December 24, 1994.

Distinguished Flying Cross
AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Korean War
Service: Air Force
Rank: First Lieutenant

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to First Lieutenant **Jonita Ruth Bonham**, United States Air Force, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight while acting as Flight Nurse in medical air evacuation flights totaling one hundred seventy (170) hours from 25 July to 26 September 1950. Lieutenant Bonham flew in unarmed cargo type aircraft. On many occasions these aircraft were operating in and out of advance airfields which were being subjected to enemy fire; transporting ammunition, rockets, bombs and other types of high explosives and inflammable material, under adverse weather conditions and over hazardous terrain. Despite these conditions, Lieutenant Bonham carried out her missions willingly and without complaint, continually comforting and caring for her patients. By her courage, ability and unselfish devotion to duty, Lieutenant Bonham has reflected great credit upon herself, her profession and the United States Air Force.



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