

Fairfax County Chapter, NSDAR



LOLA WAS A SOLDIER
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"Sergeant Anderson" by Barney Zinn

LOLA MAXINE ANDERSON

Soldier ~ Sergeant ~ WAC

WORLD WAR TWO

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WORLD WAR TWO

In the early 1940s, came young American women,

From Sea to Shining Sea

brave enough and willing to fight to preserve

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

for America and the rest of the world.

Lola Anderson was one of them.

Lola was one of those courageous young American women who signed on for volunteer service as a soldier during World War II. She participated in the European and North African theaters of the war. Amazing young women like Lola served and sacrificed for freedom. Younger generations need to be reminded of the incredible wartime contributions of the people who went before them. Lola's name is entered at the

Woman In Military Service For America Memorial where she is a charter member. Lola is Lola (Anderson) Peach and Fairfax County Chapter, NSDAR, of Vienna, Virginia is proud to have her as one of its own Daughters of the American Revolution.


Music Tag: [George Winston's Version of Canon in D by Pachebel](#)

Lola Anderson was but a young woman during wartime when she observed the poster of Uncle Sam pointing his finger directly at her, saying "I want you for the U.S. Army". She signed up, and she says that in those days in the Army, there was NO "hurry up and wait", as she was quickly trained and sent out to do her duty, as her patriotic forebears had done in earlier times.

**This is Sergeant Lola Maxine Anderson's story:
"My Remembrances of World War II"**



Many of my friends were being called to service during the war and with a sense of duty, responsibility and patriotism I took seriously the sign with Uncle Sam pointing a finger at me and stating "I want you for the U.S. Army". On the 27th of April 1943, I was enrolled in the WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corp) and was ordered to active duty effective May 26, 1943, with orders to proceed to Fort Devens, Massachusetts.



May 28, 1943, I began my Basic Training at Fort Devens. The old tradition of hurry up and wait did not apply. I was fitted for military clothing, which included two blouses (jackets), two skirts, two shirts, and shoes. They did not have the required sizes for a small WAAC (I was under 100 pounds and about 5 foot 2 inches tall) and I had to have some alterations. The WAAC uniforms were designed by Hattie Carnegie. I was issued my identification tags (dog tags) which were two aluminum tags with name, serial number, next of kin and address, blood type, preferred religion and inoculation information. These tags were to always be on our person worn around our necks. The mess gear issued included a canteen for water, mess kit for food, knife, fork and spoon, and a large cup affair which would fit on the bottom of the canteen to be used for drinks. All were made of aluminum. All of these items would be carried on a belt around the waist if in the field.

Basic Training lasted until July 8, 1943. This was approximately five weeks after I was ordered to active duty. We learned to march and march in every direction. It was a thrill when the company received honors on Saturday's Dress Parades. We learned that what some would call discipline was structured routine.

We had classes in map reading, military customs, military Code of Justice, organization of the Army (Division, Battalion, Company, Platoon and Squads). We learned Military Courtesy, how to salute and how to care for our uniforms. We were instructed how to make a military bed with square comers and have the blankets so tight that a coin would bounce when tossed onto the bed. This was sometimes experienced at inspection along with the white glove treatment. Our day began at 5:30 a.m. and lasted until 10:00 p.m. except on very special occasions. Privacy was a thing of the past. Payroll was \$21.00 a month.

Toward the end of my 5-week Basic Training I was interviewed and tested for my future assignment with the 161st WAC Headquarters Company, effective July 23, 1943. Now the WAAC had become the WAC on 1 July 1943. Training in the Company was directed to an

overseas assignment. We learned to use the gas mask. In gas drill we had only a few seconds to get the mask in place - press the rubber around our faces and make certain there were no leaks. We learned to hit the ground in emergencies when we heard the order "Cover". We ran the obstacle course moving under barbwire on our stomachs, moved through tear gas for mask training. We went over high fences on ropes, learned military correspondence, how to pack a barracks bag the army way, took French and Spanish lessons and judo (our only form of defense). We were very interested when informed that the average AGCT in our Company was above officer's candidate level.

TROOP SHIP

On 21 August 1943, approximately ten weeks after becoming a WAC I was on my way overseas by ship traveling in a convoy. We had boarded a ship called Santa Rosa that had been with the Grace Line. The ship had been converted from a luxury liner to a troop carrier. We headed southward and then toward the East in the Atlantic Ocean. We zigged and zagged and we could see other ships in all directions. At the time we did not know where we would land. The ship cabins had 16 bunks with 3 tiers. The bath was very small and not designed with the purpose of accommodating so many people with shipboard ills. We had to crawl over other bunks to reach our own. We longed for fresh air. The meals were limited to two a day and as I remember we stood at raised counters for our meals served on trays. The sea was rough and if you did not hold onto your tray you might be eating someone else's meal. After almost two weeks under these conditions we were really troopers. We were apprehensive about the end of the voyage but after 13 days we reached the Rock of Gibraltar and passed through the straits. The Mediterranean was a lovely blue and calm.

ORAN, ALGERIA - NORTH AFRICA:

We were saddened that one of our company had become ill on board and two days before we landed died. She was buried in the Military Cemetery in Oran, North Africa.

We landed at the Port of Oran in Algeria North Africa on 2 September 1943. Approximately three months after I had received my Active Duty Orders on May 26, 1943. We were pleased to reach Port and to leave our sea legs behind. We did not know what to expect. Before debarking we could see strange people milling around at the end of the gangplank, in long white robes. We had been warned not to wear watches in sight but to keep them well above our shirt cuffs.

AIN EL TURCK:

Waiting at the Port was 6x6 trucks to transport us. We were taken out of the city to an area called Ain El Turck located on the Mediterranean Sea. The area was fenced and tents were awaiting us. Each tent had 5 cots and that was the extent of the furnishings. This was when our helmets became a blessing and were put to good use for many purposes. Not far from the last row of tents were wooden frames in which our helmets could be anchored and used as wash basins. There was a faucet with cold water. It seems that I felt unclean all the time I was in North Africa. We also had latrines (outside toilets) which were located not far from the one water faucet.

The first night we were at the tent compound we had a call for "cover" and it was something to see all the well trained WACs hit the dirt. It proved to be no emergency so back to our cots and army blankets. After our assignments in Oran the rains had come and it was quite depressing to come home from a long days work to find that the tent ropes had brought down the tents and all was wet. While living at Ain El Turck we were transported to Oran in big 6x6 trucks. These trucks had benches along the sides and you faced the passengers on the other side. They had canvas rolled up on both sides that could be lowered in case of rain. The ride took about 20 minutes through a long tunnel to reach our assignments at NATOUSA (North African Theater of Operation United States Army).

On September 6, 1943, I was assigned to the Headquarters, Service of Supply, NATOUSA,

Ordinance Section. This office was responsible for ordering, distribution and servicing all supplies for personnel needs by the U.S. Army units fighting in Italy and Southern France. Some of the items handled by Ordnance were weapons and ammunition, pistols, tanks, trucks, Jeeps and thousands of other things.

My duties were preparing correspondence, proof reading and other secretarial jobs. They were very strict regarding classified material and since I was required to handle these items I had a very high clearance. Our equipment was manual typewriter and since the minimum number of copies on a letter was original and three copies, it required a lot of thought to put the papers with the carbons together to be certain the outcome was proper. A letter was limited to one subject. You could write only on one side of the bond paper which was 8 x 10 ½ inches. The margins were 1 ¼ inch on the left and ¾ inch on the right. The number of the page was 1 inch from the bottom of the page. No errors and a correction could be made only if it was not obvious. We wrote memos, reports, telegrams, cablegrams, and endorsements. After many hours of this sort of pressure one becomes exhausted. We worked seven days a week from eight to five and longer when needed. I often wonder what would happen today if there was no electricity available to run typewriters, computers and copy machines.

We finally were moved from the tents to what had been a former school for French girls. It was good to get in out of the weather. The headquarters where we worked was nearby; therefore, we did not have to ride the rough trip in the trucks to town.

For health reasons we had to be extremely careful of the water and we used the lister bags which are large canvas bags that held fresh water. Otherwise the water supply was salt water. Many of us had quite a surprise when we were not aware of the outcome of using salt water to shampoo our hair and bathe. It really created a mess with our hair and afterwards there was no way to correct the mess and get the gum out of our hair but to use water from the lister bag.

The toilet system was not good. Many suffered from the illness related to overseas living. The sewage and water systems were in poor condition due to the fighting that had taken place there before our arrival.

We had our own WAC cooks and they made every effort to make the most of what they had been issued from the Quartermaster. I remember well the pancakes with only orange marmalade for topping. I do not care for orange marmalade today. We continued to have inspections so after our job assignments we had to prepare and keep things in order. We signed in and out so we could be located immediately.

Once in awhile we were given an afternoon off, and I was fortunate to be able to make a very interesting trip southwest of Oran, through flying sand, to visit the Foreign Legion at Sidi Bel Abbes. I wondered why each soldier I saw had joined the legion but perhaps they were thinking the same of us.

In the summer of 1943, the Italian Campaign began and the 5th Army under General Mark Clark and the 8th British Army under General Montgomery occupied Sicily and the invasion of the Italian mainland began September 1943, about the same time we had landed in North Africa. Rome was liberated June 1944. The invasion of Europe D-Day was on June 6, 1944.

In June 1944, we were told to prepare for a trip to Italy. This transfer involved one ship to move the complete headquarters. On July 1, 1944, we marched in our fatigues and helmets, under a smoke screen, and found our gas masks a necessity. The special precautions were taken because our complete headquarters was loading on shipboard for the crossing to Italy, and to avoid enemy aircraft.

ITALY

We arrived in the Port of Naples July 3, 1944, about one month after D-Day. In order for our ship to dock it was necessary to tie up by a sunken warship in the harbor. Only a part of the ship could be seen and the Army used the ship as a pier. A wooden walkway over the ship had been built to enable us to reach shore. We

saw disabled children and others begging for food. It was not a pleasant sight. We were then trucked to Caserta which is north of Naples. This is where we lived and worked from July 1944, until November 1944. Our living quarters were formerly a two-story spread out hospital building. Each room had four double bunk beds. We were with our same roommates which was good. We were all aware that one of our most blessed gifts was friendship. We had become quite close to each other and this made up our family. We were required to use mosquito netting over our beds and when we were inside our cot it was necessary to tuck the netting all the way around. The mosquito netting became a great barrier to rats which were numerous. The rats would drag away anything left on the floor that had an odor of food. The headquarters was now called Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTOUSA).

While in Italy I was granted a pass to visit Rome which had been liberated June 1944. The drive from Caserta to Rome took several hours. The roads were not cleared completely of mines and were not otherwise in good condition. The fighting had been going on there about five months earlier.

ROME

In Rome during my short stay I was billeted at a Red Cross Hotel, where I had the use of a cot and a bathroom down the hall. During my stay in Rome I was privileged to have an audience with Pope Pius XII at the Vatican. There was about twenty WACs, Nurses and Red Cross women both American and foreign that the Pope saw and talked to. I was privileged to have a conversation with him about Notre Dame University in Indiana. He had visited the University when he was Secretary to a former Pope. Being a Protestant I was concerned about kissing his ring, but he was very understanding and made me feel at ease. He blessed some religious medals I held for my Catholic friends.

On the return to Caserta three of the Ordnance personnel on leave to Rome were offered transportation back in the automobile of an Ordnance General which was making the trip. The roads from

Rome south were poor. We were not traveling fast. Someone shot at the car and the bullet passed in the backside window and then passed in front of me riding in the back seat and out the other side. Speed of the car was in my favor. Also among my memories were visits to Pompeii, Isle of Capri, Sorrento, Mt. Vesuvius which erupted in 1944, once again after the covering of Pompeii in the nineteenth century. The coals were still quite hot when I walked near the mountain.

DIJON SOUTHERN FRANCE

On November 11, 1944, I reported to Naples for a flight to Dijon France, my first military flight. At the time my total weight with baggage was 140 lbs. (40 lbs. was baggage). Again, I was among the early arrivals in the forward echelon and was quartered in a very large room with one little stove in the middle. The change in temperature from warm Italy was quite noticeable. Dijon is located not too far from the Swiss border and we were experiencing snow for the first time since arriving overseas. After sometime the other personnel were arriving and it became over crowded.

Our Headquarters was now called SOLOC ETOUSA (Southern Line of Communications, European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army). Soon we were billeted in several wooden one-story buildings. They possibly were prefabricated because when you would lie on your bunk you could look up and see footprints on the ceiling which seemed to always amuse me. We had the usual double deck bunks, and in each room there was a potbelly stove. This was a very cold winter and the stove was most appreciated. One of our buddies received a can of cheese from home and we would sneak a slice of bread from the mess and put the cheese on the bread and then under the grate of the stove where the ashes fell and make grilled cheese sandwiches. One time a salami was received and it was placed outside the window - the prisoners of war, cleaning around the compound evidently enjoyed it. The showers were in another building quite far from our barracks. We had to wear uniforms with overcoat to the showers to keep warm. Today I find it a luxury to have a nice warm bath in

privacy. On December 16, 1944 the Germans hit several American divisions who were stretched out thinly on our lines. Because of the bad weather the Allied bombers could not come in to help the American Troops for several days, so they were completely surrounded and they held on to a big bulge in our lines. This was called the "Battle of the Bulge". At the time that the battle was going on Dijon was in the Battle Zone. All enlisted men in the Headquarters carried their rifles in the office and officers wore holsters with pistols. The women did not carry weapons. If the Headquarters had been over run by the German Army, the women would have been unable to defend themselves. After the battle all personnel assigned to Headquarters SOLOC ETOUSA were awarded our second Battle Star to wear on our African, European Theater Campaign Ribbon.

EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATION - - PARIS

By February 1945, most of the fighting was in Germany. Since the main Headquarters, known as ETO or European Theater of Operations was in Paris; our support headquarters was also transferred to Paris. I was again in the forward group of Ordinance personnel to transfer, because they needed me to help prepare and shuffle papers. Paris had been liberated 25 August 1944, and six months had passed but the people were still suffering the effects of the war. Quite to my amazement I was billeted in a Hotel Reynolds located near the L'Etoile and Arc de Triomphe.

I shared a room with two girls who had come from England. I worked in a building located on the Champs-Élysées, which was quite a difference to what we had worked in along the way. Now many allied military personnel and some French Civilians worked with us. The Headquarters was now administering to the entire war effort in Europe. I found remnants in my desk showing that it had been used by the Germans. The city was under blackout and I experienced several air raids where it was necessary to go to the nearby air raid shelter. Even though we were now living in Paris all the WACs had to "fall out" every morning for reveille. Also we would have Company duties other than our office

duties.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt died suddenly at Warm Spring, Georgia on April 12, 1945. The War ended on May 7, 1945 VE Day (Victory in Europe). Paris went wild. When I left the office to reach my billet I took the Metro and when I reach my exit, it was quite a struggle to reach the Champs-Élysées. The exit was near the Arc de Triomphe and the center of activity. Before I left the office after we received the news we were able to see the flags flying from the Arch. I also witnessed a U.S. plane fly through the Arch finding it necessary to tip its wings to clear the sides. It was quite risky. Thank goodness nothing terrible happened. At night I went to the roof of my hotel with others to watch the lights come on all over the city.

On May 15, 1945, the third anniversary of the women's Army Corp, all of the WACs assigned to the European Theater of Operations marched down the Champs-Élysées from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde, about two and a half miles without any practice together and we marched beautifully behind a large military band, as hundreds of French people and Allied military personnel looked on.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Because of the serious illness of my father 16 May 1945, I requested my return to the United States. On 18 May 1945, I was issued orders. I returned to the United States by air by way of London, Prestwick, Scotland, (Where I bunked over night with ladies who were ferrying planes across the pond) Iceland where I had my first glass of milk in almost two years, and Newfoundland. On the trip home was the first time I had seen the pennies that were silver covered and first I thought them most unusual that two pennies had been covered by mercury by someone.



It was a thrill to see my dear country and to find it without the war damage that so many of the countries I had seen had experienced. I had now earned retirement from the WAC. I had given two years of service of which I was proud, and I

concluded that my duty to my family, with my father's serious illness, must now come before my duty in the service. I was pleased to be with my Father until he passed away July 16, 1945. He could now take the star out of the window that was displayed by many families to show a member in the service.

I shall never forget those wonderful people I served with and they will always remain fondly in my memory.



LOLA ANDERSON PEACH

Soldier ~ Sergeant ~ Veteran

WORLD WAR TWO



[HOME](#)

[TOP](#)

[LOLA's](#)



PHOTOS

Fairfax County Chapter NSDAR ~ Lola Was a Soldier was created by Edna Barney in the old-fashioned way, handwritten in 4.01 HTML language using Notepad. Invaluable assistance came from FCCDAR Daughter Corrine Rypka who was the motivator, and from HODAR Cliff Barney who scanned Lola's story and her two wartime photographs into electronic formatting. The modern images and all photo-editing were accomplished by Edna Barney. The HTML language of this page was validated with W3C and should display well in any browser. This page was created on 26 July 2006.

~~ A Neddy Creation ~~

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Until Then Graphics