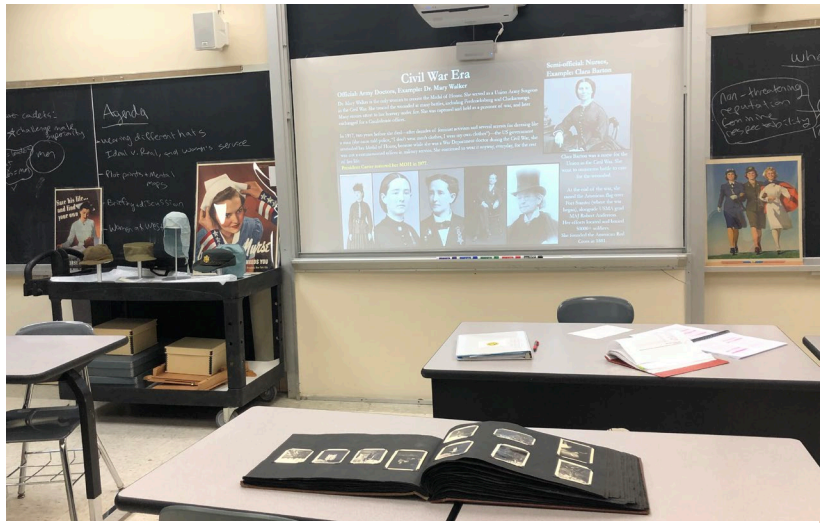


Wearing Different Hats: The Ideal, the Real, and Women's Service in the US Army **By Justine Meberg**

Course: HI101, The Army of the Republic: Leading Citizen-Soldiers
Lesson: 27, Integrating Women in the Force

When does the history of women in the U.S. Army begin? This lesson uses Army Nurse LTC (Ret) Julia Tamer Kerr's different hats to demonstrate one woman's combat service across three wars. Her beanie from winter service in World War Two, her fatigue cap from Korea, and her patrol cap from Vietnam are artifacts that provide us with a pragmatic contrast to the public relations campaigns that cast Women's Army Corps (WAC) uniforms as feminine and chic rather than useful. In contrast, her service hat and nursing caps show the feminized aesthetic that the politics of respectability demanded. Thinking about how Tamer wore different hats—both literally, and figuratively as a woman/soldier—might encourage Cadets to re-periodize their ideas about when women's military service began and consider how women served in combat long before the regulations changed to allow women to do so officially. This package includes the hats mentioned above and two army nurse recruiting posters from the museum's art collection.



*Classroom set up for material culture lesson from WP
Museum LTC (Ret) Julia Tamer Kerr collection*

The [Julia Tamer Kerr papers](#) at UNC Greensboro include the following biographical information: She was born in Pawcatuck, Connecticut, on 17 May 1915 to Salim Sa'ad and Maryam Tamer, and served in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 1945 to 1968, in which time she served in both the North African and European theaters of the Second World War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War in station, field, and evacuation hospitals. During the Korean War she was stationed in Taejon and Pusan, Korea, for eighteen months. From 1966 to 1967, she served as an operating room and emergency room supervisor in Saigon, Vietnam. Kerr married her husband, Otto Kerr Jr., in Vietnam on April 27, 1966.

This lesson begins by introducing the metaphor of wearing different hats and asking Cadets to describe the kind of person who wore each. They draw clear contrasts between the “ideal” images of nurses as portrayed in the recruiting posters, and the practical, combat-tested hats that the real Julia Tamer wore throughout many wars. This leads to discussion on the dual nature of women's military service, where women were asked wear two hats simultaneously, that of the ideal woman, and that of the competent professional. This impossible position also helps explain the obsession of WAC leaders with feminine respectability, which was for them an

effective suit of armor, one that allowed them to protect their unique place in the U.S. Army. This in turn helps Cadets understand the pressures for and against expanding women's opportunities in the army, and the contested place of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in this timeframe.

Returning to Tamer, Cadets have never heard of her, or particularly considered that nurses might have such long careers. This creates the opportunity to make a periodization argument. The WACs do not mark the beginning of the history of women in the army, because earlier traditions of the ANC at the dawn of the 20th century, and the even earlier tradition of Army laundresses, officialized in 1802, also represent women's army service. Also, just like the WACs and World War Two mark no "beginning" to women's history in the army, women being allowed to enter West Point in 1976 marks no "end" to women's fights for fair treatment. We used an oral history clip from [Kris Fuhr's \(USMA Class of 1985\) oral history interview](#) to discuss what barriers to fair treatment still exist, which is another chance to discuss the ERA, and trace the thread of women's service to the present day.



Photographs from LTC (Ret) Julia Tamer Kerr's personal WWII photo album, documenting her basic training and wartime memories.

For use of West Point instructors, the following items were used in this display:

- 1) 22819: Hat, wool, with visor, olive green, LTC Julia Kerr 1962-68
- 2) 22774: "Spring Up" fatigue cap worn by CPT Julia Tamer in Korean War
- 3) 22775: Woolen, (O.D.) knitted cap, LT Julia Tamer, 9th Army 1944-45
- 4) 22784.1: Cotton, operating room hair covering, MAJ Julia Kerr, Vietnam 66-67
- 5) 22784.2 Cotton, operating room hair covering, MAJ Julia Kerr, Vietnam 66-67
- 6) 8180.109: Poster, Recruitment, Nurse, "Become a Nurse", United States Armed Forces Institute, United States, 1942, World War II
- 7) 8180.068: Poster, Recruitment, Nurse, "Save His Life...and Find Your Own", Office of War Information, United States, 1943, World War II
- 8) 8180.022: Poster, Recruitment, Women's Recruitment, "Untitled", by Frederick Sands Brunner, United States, World War II

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