

In the language of the Cherokee, “oveta” means “forget”, but the life of Oveta Culp Hobby is anything but forgettable. Hobby was born on January 19, 1905 in Killeen, Texas. Hobby had self-educated herself and attended, but did not graduate from, college. In 1942 after bitter and contentious debate with the Congress to pass the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps bill, Hobby was appointed as the first Director of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps and was granted the rank of Colonel, and became the first female Commanding Officer in the Army. The WAAC was created to fill in where there were shortages of men and to relieve men so that more could be sent to the battlefield. Members of the WAAC were the first women other than nurses to be in Army uniform.

Being the first Director of this new Auxiliary Corps, Hobby did not have guidance or any precedents to assist in her work - she had to set the standard for future Directors herself. Hobby enacted sound policies, planned, and even supervised the selection and training of new officers and regulations. Her own contribution to the Second World War effort is of significant importance. She faced enormous barriers. Hobby worked to push the Congress to convert the WAAC to an actual Army Corps to be part of the Army itself so that the women who served could claim the same status and receive the same benefits as the men who were serving. Hobby had to break down the pervasive stereotype that women could only bear and rear children, and also overcome the resistance of male soldiers and politicians, some of whom feared that women would abandon their child-bearing and rearing task. Hobby also had to convince other women to leave the comfort of their homes to stand up and support their country in a time of war.

If Oveta Culp Hobby has taught us anything, it has to be that when we roll up our sleeves and work together with anyone and everyone towards a common goal, we can and will accomplish the intended goal. By including women in the Second World War effort, I think it is one of the many

examples of American Exceptionalism. When we put all of our resources together, when we put all of our energy towards an effort, when we contribute all that we can, that's when we will finish, achieve, and even surpass our intended goal. During her tenure as the Director, Hobby guided the WAAC and WAC through three years with explosive and overwhelming growth. By 1945, the WAC served in countries around the world, filling nearly 240 different types of jobs.

At her retirement in 1945, Hobby received the Distinguished Service Medal for her efforts in the war, another first for a woman in the Army. Oveta Culp Hobby died with several other prominent achievements, like being the first female Secretary of the Health, Education, and Welfare department, but second female Secretary overall, on August 16, 1995, at age 90.