

Doris J. Watson collection

AFC 2001/001/50596

Guides to the Collections in the Veterans History Project



**Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
November 2007**

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/vhp.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017655348>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/eadvhp.vh018003>

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Finding aid encoded by Lisa Gomez, July 2018

Collection Summary

Title: Doris J. Watson collection: Veterans History Project (U.S.)

Inclusive Dates: 1939-1946

Call No.: AFC 2001/001/50596

Creator: Watson, Doris J., 1912-1978

Extent (photographs): 4 photographs.

Extent (correspondence): 148 letters (283 pages).

Extent (civilian papers): 1 civilian paper.

Extent (clippings): 1 clipping.

Extent (military papers): 1 military paper.

Language: In English.

Location: Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017655348>

Summary: Collection includes clippings, civilian papers, correspondence, military papers, and photographic prints.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Watson, Doris J., 1912-1978.

Watson, Doris, J., 1912-1978--Correspondence.

Williams, Jean

Organizations

American Folklife Center

United States. Army Nurse Corps.

Veterans History Project (U.S.)

Subjects

Women nurses--Correspondence.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, Female.

World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives, American.

World War, 1939-1945--Veterans--Michigan.

Form/Genre

Clippings.

Correspondence.

Manuscripts.

Photographs.

Arrangement

The collection has been organized into two series: Manuscripts and Photographs. Manuscripts are arranged alphabetically by type, and chronologically thereunder.

Acquisition

Accessioned, 2007.

Copyright Status

Duplication of collection materials may be restricted.

Access and Restrictions

Collection is open for research; access restrictions apply. To request collection materials, please contact the Veterans History Project at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/vhp.contact>

Preferred Citation

Doris J. Watson Collection (AFC/2001/001/50596), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

Biographical Note

Doris J. Watson (later Doris Matthews) was born on March 9, 1912 and raised in East Lansing, Michigan. In 1939 she graduated from the Mercy College of Nursing, in Detroit, Michigan, and in 1943 she enlisted in the United States Army Nurse Corps. She served from 1943-1946 with the 11th Evacuation Hospital in Tunisia and Italy.

As a surgical nurse, Watson treated patients wounded at Tunisia, Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Anzio Beach, and Rome-Arno. She also experienced poor health during her service, suffering from pneumonia and impetigo, and spent 103 days in the hospital as a patient before returning to work.

Watson was discharged with the rank of Major in September 1946 and returned to civilian life, eventually moving to New Hampshire. She died on March 15, 1978.

Scope and Content

This collection contains civilian papers, clippings, correspondence, military papers, and photographs. The majority of the collection consists of correspondence. While serving in the Army Nurse Corps from 03/17/1943 to 07/24/1944 Watson was stationed in North Africa and Italy. She wrote to her parents an average of three to four times per week and would frequently scold them if they did not write to her as often. She wrote about serving as a nurse in tent evacuation hospitals in the European Theater, often describing the terrible wounds that she would treat. She felt it was her duty as a nurse to not only medically treat the soldiers but to provide companionship, often having long conversations with her patients. She describes experiencing different cultures for the first time, traveling, sailing, and shopping while on leave. She wrote often of the weather in North Africa, she considered it a good day if it did not rain. she also details many of her experiences “dating” during her time in the service. Dating relationships appeared complicated and perhaps intended more for companionship and entertainment rather than for romance or sexual relationships. Watson wrote about dating married officers who were madly in love with their wives, dating a prince, and about missing her own fiancé, Anthony. In one letter, Watson sternly explains to her concerned mother that she would never become physically intimate with these men as she adores her fiancé too much. Complementing the correspondence in the collection are photographs of Watson in her Army Nurse Corps Uniform and working in the hospital tent.

Description of Series

Container

Series

Series I: Manuscripts

Series II: Photographs

Container List

Container	Contents
Series I: Manuscripts	
BOX-FOLDER MSS1422/1	Civilian Papers, September 9, 1939 1 folder MS01: Diploma from the Mercy College of Nursing, Detroit, Michigan.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1422/2	Clippings, Circa 1943 1 folder MS02: A photocopied newspaper clipping with an image of corpsmen carrying a wounded soldier into a field station (enclosed in letter dated 2/20/1944).
BOX-FOLDER MSS1422/3-14	Correspondence, March 17, 1943-July 25, 1944 12 folders MS03: Topics covered include: experiences on the trip across the Atlantic; opinion of North Africa, its weather, terrain, and people; social excursions; as a surgery nurse sees horrible wounds; May Day in Africa; purchasing gifts and souvenirs; end of African Campaign, moved on to mountainous terrain, patients slow getting help; discusses allotment; welcomed by all; took in an orphaned kitten; waiting for next invasion to start; sends love to father on his birthday; assisted at scene of traffic accident; came down with dysentery and was hospitalized; poem from the Stars and Stripes about Army nurses; describes a typical day; experience bargaining for merchandise in Tunis; left Africa after invasion, moved on to Sicily; encountered fighting; describes making camp and foraging for food; hopes to be home for Christmas; mismanagement of their site; upset that her hospital is not near the front, treating patients already on the road to recovery; interlude to nest action; has seamstress make her a formal gown for date with a prince, the brother of the king of Italy; warms water for bathing in her helmet; Sicilian pastime, telling jokes, veteran sends 30 moron jokes; humorous letter telling but not telling of her new duty station so it can't be censored; 5 in 1 rations; locals harvesting their crops; receiving packages from home; British invade Italy, but are too slow because they stop for tea time; visit to Palermo; the social scene; writing by flashlight; prince was a 'wolf', no more dates; rumors of moving on; nurses often sick; can't wait to go back to combat duty; in hospital for pneumonia; feels Italy is next destination; dating; mail; daily activities in hospital; news from home; sickness; moving to different stations; friends and relationships; Christmas; back in hospital for diarrhea and infection from impetigo; opinion of Patton; closer to God; temperature, not allowed out of bed; reprimands parents for worrying about her; recuperating; 32nd birthday; able to take walks; will stay overseas as long as troops need her; after 103 days in hospital, discharged; sent back to unit in Italy; life on Anzio Beach; proud of herself for being self-sufficient; working 12 hour night shifts; worries about flak; does not like her location, but that she feels safe; describes new latrine; feels hospitals are in area protected from Germans; many casualties from Anzio Beach; credits the soldiers for their bravery; back in hospital for sacroiliac joint inflammation separation; anticipates big job to do after discharge from hospital; tries to visit Rome, war interferes; wants to stay until war is over; five days leave to Foggia; troops appreciate American nurses; describes the battleground of Anzio; General takes veteran to find brother; concerned that Nurse Corps does not have enough reserve for another Anzio; describes swimming date.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1423/1-2	Correspondence, March 17, 1943-July 25, 1944 2 folders

Series I: Manuscripts

Container	Contents
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	MS03 continued.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1423/3	Military Papers, September 05, 1946
	1 folder
	MS04: A double-sided certificate of service and military record form.

Series II: Photographs

BOX-FOLDER MSS1423/4	Original Photographic Prints, Circa 1943
	4 Photographs
	PH01: Black-and-white portrait of Watson at work in a tent ward.
	PH02: Black-and-white image of Watson lying in her bed in her tent, with a flak roof over her bed.
	PH03: A colorized portrait of Watson wearing her dress white uniform.
	PH04: Black-and-white portrait of Watson in nursing uniform.