

Coastal Living

P O U X T M C W U



ABOVE: After the Hungnam evacuation during the Korean War, Helen W. Wolek, left of center, passes out doughnuts Dec. 29, 1950, to members of the 65th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division upon their arrival in Busan. (American Red Cross Archives photo) RIGHT: Amber Meadows was a member of the Red Cross "Donut Dollies" during the Korean war. She lives Down East. (Contributed photo)



Carteret County is home to Donut Dollie

BY RUTHIE KING
CONTRIBUTOR

Editor's note: Compass Points columnist Ruthie King recently sat down with Amber Meadows, who served as a Donut Dollie during the Korean War. This is Ms. King's account of what she learned during the conversation and from the book Life in a Fish Bowl – A Call to Serve.

As some of you know, I write for the Atlantic/Sea Level communities of the Compass Points section in the *Carteret County News-Times* Sunday edition. Dec. 16, 2018, I wrote a story about the "Donut Dollies."

"Donut Dollies" was the popular term used to refer to the American Red Cross women who volunteered to work overseas in mobile service clubs called club mobiles.

Later that day, I received a phone call from a lady and this is how she started the conversation, "Miss King, I just read your article about the 'Donut Dollies' and I just want you to know that I am a Donut Dollie and I served during the Korean War."

Needless to say, I became excited and I asked her if could I meet with her and interview her for the newspaper. Thankfully, she agreed and so early in January, I went to her home in one of our local Down East communities and here was this smiling lady, Amber Meadows, wearing her Donut Dollie shirt and hat.

She had a photo album full of photos from her stay in Korea, plus photos of Japan and China, where she would visit on her rest and relaxation time. She also shared with me and let me borrow her only copy of the book *Life in a Fish Bowl – A Call to Serve*. This book is full of stories, memories and facts about the American Red Cross club mobile program recalled by different women who served in Korea and other countries.

I started my visit with Mrs. Meadows telling me about how she became a Donut Dollie. She grew up in California. Her father was a field officer for the Red Cross and told her that once she completed college to join the Red Cross.

She did and in 1960 she went to Washington, D.C., to enter the Red Cross SRAO (Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas) Program, better known as the Donut Dollies.

After a two-week training session at the American Red Cross national headquarters, she was sent to Camp Zama in Japan for one week of training, given her army field uniform, combat boots and put on a plane to Kimpo Air Base and from there to her assigned base. Some of the training in D.C. was how the women should act and they knew what the Red Cross expected of them.

"We knew what would and would not be tolerated. Dating married men was a no-no...their guidance to resolve this dilemma was 'married until proven single.' Unauthorized flying in small military planes and helicopters was a no-no. Excessive drinking was a no-no," Mrs.

Meadows said. "We knew the penalty – you would be sent home and that was that."

The Donut Dollies had to understand and agree to these rules.

According to *Life in a Fish Bowl*, the club mobile program was "to encourage active soldier participation in recreational activities that provide a relaxing break in the busy military schedule and to help keep the young Americans in touch with home."

Mrs. Meadows said her first place of residence out on the field was with the 1st Calvary Division. The 19th Artillery was a howitzer group and their place to live was called the Molly Pitcher Hootch, named after a famous woman in the American Revolutionary War.

To welcome the "Dollies" to the camp, the soldiers shot off a small howitzer located outside their billet, a Quonset hut.

The military provided a ¾-ton truck and a driver to carry the Donut Dollies to approximately six different locations Monday through Friday.

During each stop, soldiers were given coffee and doughnuts, and the women made up games for them to play with each other.

Mrs. Meadows told me that the doughnuts were cooked daily (in the wee hours in Korean bakeries) and the coffee was made in the base mess halls.

Their days were busy with serving and entertaining the soldiers, but their days were not over when they came back to camp.

The ladies were required to attend nightly functions all over the area Monday through Friday, and they were required to go to the officers' club and dance with the soldiers on the weekends.

In the book, one "Dollie" commented, "We had a social life that wouldn't stop. Required attendance at up to 10 parties a week made them soon lose their charm and adventure. We not only had to smile Monday through Friday but we had to continue smiling at all the 'command' attendance weekend functions as well. Smiling, how I remember smiling; 'Be cheerful' at all times we were told. Never let the men see you drooping or sad. You may feel drooping and sad, but never let it show, nor did we even when it was tough. Be professional, wear your uniform proudly."

Mrs. Meadows said that sometimes the social functions were most welcomed because they were given the opportunity to take a shower.

There were times when their water tanks did not work, and they could not take showers for several weeks.

If they did have the opportunity to shower after a very dusty day on the unpaved roads, a guard had to be posted and he patrolled the shower area to protect the "Dollies"

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According to the *State of Delaware Historical and Cultural Affairs*, "the Red Cross had very high standards for their female volunteers, standards which were higher than those of the military. Applicants had to be college graduates, at least 25 years of age, have stellar reference letters, pass physical examinations and have an outstanding personality as demonstrated at personal interviews. With the rigorous selection process only one in six applicants made the cut. Once accepted, the new volunteers were sent to Washington, D.C. to the American Red Cross training program located on the campus of American University. There was considerable attention given to the appropriate way to wear the uniform, with ten pages of specific instructions in the Red Cross uniform manual – collars always to be pinned, no earrings, hair ornaments, 'brilliant nail polish' or 'excessive use of cosmetics.'

"The club mobiles also carried chewing gum, cigarettes, magazines and newspapers (and) a phonograph with loudspeakers and records. Popularly referred to as 'donut dollies' since one of their biggest tasks was making and serving doughnuts to the servicemen, these volunteers were the actual stars of the show. Doughnuts dominated the activities of the club mobiles. Next to the women themselves, the doughnuts and the coffee served with them were among the GI's most beloved symbols of home and they also became the trademark of the wartime Red Cross."

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Fill a bag with up to 10 items for \$5 until Saturday at Caroline's Collectables in Morehead City. Proceeds from this sale benefit the Carteret County Domestic Violence Program Safe House.