

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Oveta Culp Hobby, Journalist, Commander of the WAC, Cabinet Member, and Philanthropist, 1905-1995

From an early age, Oveta Culp Hobby approached governance with ease and assurance. When her father was elected state legislator, 14-year-old Oveta eagerly accompanied him to Austin. She missed many school days watching the legislative sessions but still managed to graduate at the top of her class. Oveta briefly attended college before jumping at the chance to be parliamentarian of the Texas House. She continued her education with tutors and classes at The University of Texas at Austin.<sup>1</sup>

In 1929 she joined the staff of the *Houston Post*. Here she became reacquainted with her father's friend William Hobby, a former governor now newspaper publisher. In February 1931 they wed, when he was 53 and Oveta was 26.



NOTE: The final photo may be different. Don't know yet what we can get.

Oveta quickly learned the newspaper business, rising from research editor to book editor to assistant editor. She worked alongside her husband in both his newspaper and radio enterprises. Twice she gave birth on her birthday (January 19)—to a son in 1932 and a daughter in 1937.

Oveta was in Washington on business when she was asked to organize a women's interest and public relations division for the army. After some hesitation she accepted and set about persuading mothers that the army would watch over their sons' well-being.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Oveta was put in charge of the brand-new Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. She insisted on removing the word "auxiliary" and elevated the corps to a full-status component of the military. She expanded the jobs women were certified to fill from 59 to 239. Prompted by Colonel Hobby, over 150,000 women volunteered to serve during World War II.<sup>2</sup>

At war's end Oveta came home to a hero's welcome in Houston and resumed her newspaper work. After she had campaigned nationally with Democrats for Eisenhower, the president appointed her first Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Again Oveta embarked on organizing a new branch of government. She resigned in 1955 to take care of her ailing husband and assume full management of the *Houston Post*. She served on numerous civic and business boards during nearly 50 years in public life.

### Quotations

*Any thoughtful person knows that we are in this war. Every one of us is going to have to do whatever we are called upon to do.*—Former Governor Will Hobby, urging his wife to take a position with the War Department, Summer 1941<sup>3</sup>

*It would never have crossed my mind to command an army of women. I never did learn to salute properly or master the 30-inch stride.*—Oveta Culp Hobby<sup>4</sup>

*Women who stepped up were measured as citizens of the nation, not as women. This was the people's war, and everyone was in it.*—Oveta Culp Hobby<sup>5</sup>

### Photo

To come from Rice University in February.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sources for biographical information in this article are William P. Hobby Jr., "Hobby, Oveta Culp," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/HH/fho86.html> (April 4, 2005); Anne Fears Crawford and Crystal Sasse Ragsdale, *Women in Texas: Their Lives, Their Experiences, Their Accomplishments* (Austin: State House Press, 1992), pp. 273-83; "Oveta Culp Hobby," Texas Women's Hall of Fame, Texas Woman's University, online <http://www.twu.edu/twhf/tw-hobby.htm> (March 4, 2005); "Hobby, Oveta Culp," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. (2005), online [www.encyclopedia.com/html/h/hobby-o1v.asp](http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/h/hobby-o1v.asp) (April 5, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Statistic on number of jobs from William P. Hobby Jr., "Hobby, Oveta Culp," *Handbook of Texas Online*, and from Mary Beth Rogers, ed., *Texas Women: A Celebration of History* (Austin: Texas Foundation for Women's Resources, 1981), p. 71. Statistic on number of women from "Oveta Culp Hobby," Famous Texans, <http://www.famoustexans.com/OvetaCulpHobby.htm> (March 3, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in William P. Hobby Jr., "Hobby, Oveta Culp," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> This quote is inscribed on the World War II Memorial, National Mall, Washington, D.C.

<sup>6</sup> Crawford and Ragsdale, *Women in Texas*, p. 277.