

# Janet Sue Ward

U.S. Navy, Lieutenant

1936 - 2000

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Instructed by Rebecca Bartlett

Janet Sue Boylen was born in the Barbour County seat of Philippi, West Virginia, on February 3, 1936, to Carl and Leila Boylen. By 1940 the Boylens had moved to Grafton in neighboring Taylor County. Though life and military service would take her elsewhere for years at a time, Grafton would be Janet's lifelong home.

She was the youngest of three girls—Anna and Mary were eight and six years older than Janet, respectively. Their mechanically gifted father, Carl, managed to find various forms of employment during and after the Great Depression. He owned an electrical shop with his brother in the 1930s, then took work as an automobile mechanic in the 1940s. By 1950 he was a fireman with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, which maintained a large depot in Grafton.

Though the home the Boylens owned on Mackin Street—just a few short blocks from the banks of the Tygart River—was hardly luxurious, it was comfortable enough to raise three girls to adulthood.

Leila was a homemaker who could see to the needs of the family. It was also just a few minutes' walk from the Boylen residence to newly completed Grafton High School, the construction of which was made possible with New Deal funds in 1940. As a teenager Janet became very involved in school clubs, band, and choir. She graduated in 1954 and began to look for a future beyond her hometown.

During the late 1940s and 1950s, relatively few employment opportunities offered competitive pay for women. Nursing was one such avenue, driven in part by nationwide nursing shortages during World War II and the Korean War. Army Nurse Corps and Navy Nurse Corps recruiters had a frequent presence on high school and college campuses. A chance at independence and economic security may have been the motivation for all three Boylen sisters to enter the field of nursing.

Eldest sister Anna went first, enrolling in the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps in 1945 at St. Mary's



**Janet Sue Boylen in 1953. *Grafton High School yearbook***

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Form 300-A (Revised May 1944)  
FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY  
U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
DIVISION OF NURSE EDUCATION

Budget Bureau  
No. 08-R145.1.  
Approval expires  
8-31-45

SERIAL No 199140

UNITED STATES CADET NURSE CORPS  
MEMBERSHIP CARD A

Name of Cadet:  
Boylan, Anna Jeanne  
(Last) (First) (Middle initial)

Cadet's home address:  
305 Mackin Street  
(Number and street, or R. F. D.)  
Grafton, (Taylor) W. Va.  
(City) (County) (State)

Cadet's age on date of admission to Corps 17

Date of birth June 20, 1927

Dates of admission to school: (Fill in all that apply)  
(1) Originally June 1, 1945  
(2) By re-admission  
(3) By transfer from another school

Date of admission to Corps June 1, 1945

Date of prospective beginning of Senior Cadet period Dec. 1, 1947

Date of issuance of Form 300 Sept. 4, 1945

Certificate of Membership

(Signature of Director of School of Nursing)

Do not write below this line (this space is for central office use).  
Termination by— Date

Graduation

Withdrawal (a) (b) 8-22-49  
GPO 16-40005-1

School of Nursing - St. Mary's  
City Clarksburg - State W. Va.

Sister Anna's Cadet Nurse Corps membership card. Both of Janet's older sisters preceded her into the nursing profession, though Janet was the only one to join the Navy. [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com)



1965 advertisement for the Navy Nurse Corps. NHHC

Hospital in Clarksburg, Harrison County. Mary followed in 1950, then Janet four years later—though the sisters were never enrolled at St. Mary's at the same time.

Janet entered the military with the Navy Nurse Corps February 27, 1963, just as President John F. Kennedy was increasing the number of American military “advisory” personnel in Vietnam to about 16,000 troops. Yet another nationwide nursing shortage affected both civilian and military medical infrastructure at this time, and after several years of civilian nursing Janet may have been convinced to try the Navy Nurse Corps through recruitment incentives. The year after Janet's enlistment, the Nurse Training Act of 1964 committed more federal funding to nursing schools, student loans and scholarships, and female military nurses were allowed to marry and have children.

After her initial training, Janet was assigned to the U.S. Navy base in Guam. The Navy Nurse Corps had maintained personnel in Guam nearly since the Corps' inception in 1908, shortly after the island was acquired during the Spanish-American War. In the 1940s casualties from many Pacific War campaigns were brought to Guam after it was retaken from the Japanese, including men wounded in action during the invasion of Okinawa.

Despite constant expansion, Guam's facilities were almost always inadequate. Korean War navy nurses often had to make do with wards crammed into tents and Quonset huts. Construction efforts during the Vietnam War, particularly while Janet was stationed at the base, gradually built much of the infrastructure present today. Janet would have been surrounded by the constant racket of construction—not only of new hospital wings, but “additional fuel storage tanks, ammunition magazines, warehouses, hangars, and ship berthing facilities.” A May 1966 report lists 326 operating beds available in Guam's wards, soon to be augmented by 900 more in hospital buildings then being built.

Unfortunately, those beds became ever more necessary as the Vietnam War intensified. In 1965, two years after Janet first arrived in Guam, American military casualties in the



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growing conflict amounted to a total of 1,369. The year Janet was honorably discharged from active service, 1968, was the deadliest year of the war—with 14,589 killed or wounded. Large numbers of these wounded passed through Guam before being transported back to the United States.

Though records of Janet serving closer to the combat theater have not yet been located, it would have been unusual for a nurse to remain at a single station for five full years. She could also have pulled duty at an American base in Yokosuka, Japan, or the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon. Fellow Navy nurses were also on station aboard the *Haven*-class hospital ships USS *Repose* (AH-16) and USS *Sanctuary*, which were positioned offshore from operational areas. On *Repose*, 22 doctors, three dentists, 29 nurses, 246 corpsmen, and additional Navy personnel served across the ship's seven decks and received wounded men via medevac helicopter from the mainland. In July 1966, for example, *Repose*'s operating rooms worked for three days without break during an intense period of combat. The hardworking Navy medical personnel of the *Repose* would treat over 9,000 combat casualties over the course of the Vietnam war.



**A Navy nurse comforts a patient aboard the hospital ship USS *Repose* in 1967. *Repose* was then stationed in the South China Sea. NHHC**

Perhaps it was the mounting human cost that motivated Janet not to reenlist. She left active duty March 31, 1968, though she served two additional years in the Navy Reserve. There was also her growing family to consider. Janet had married Charles Edward Ward, a Navy Corpsman, sometime between 1965 and 1967. Their son, David, was born in 1971, followed later by a daughter, Heather. Following David's birth Janet moved back to Grafton, possibly to be close to her ailing mother (her father passed away in 1970). By mid-decade, she was working at Grafton City Hospital, which was rapidly remodeling and expanding at the time. A new Chronic Disease building and several new sections would have created many openings for nurses with Janet's extensive experience.

Janet eventually retired from Grafton City Hospital, though she was far from inactive. As in her youth, she remained very involved in civic and community organizations. She was a member of the Taylor County Historical Society, the Grafton Women's Club, the Grafton Post of the American Legion, and several church organizations.

Janet died June 25, 2000, and was interred at the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown, beloved in her hometown to the last.

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## Sources

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## Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery  
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354  
(304) 265-2044

Section 1  
Site 301

Date of interment: June 28, 2000

## About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

**Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council**  
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