

Stella Evangeline Ware

U.S. Army, Major

1914 - 1991

Written by Montana Williamson, West Virginia University

With assistance from Morgan Loffler and Autumn Ware, instructed by Richard Zukowski



Stella Pietrowski as physical education teacher in Fairmont just before her enlistment in the Womens Army Corps. 1942 East Fairmont High School yearbook

Stella Evangeline Pietrowski Ware was born June 2, 1914, in Marion County, West Virginia. Stella was the youngest of five daughters born to Julian and Malania Pietrowski. Her older sisters were Jadwiga Pietrowski Gacki, Helen Pietrowski Napple, Ethel Pietrowski Timonshenko, and Valla Pietrowski. Julian and Malania Pietrowski immigrated to the United States together in 1907. They were from Wojciechy, a small village near the present-day Polish-Russian border. Both Julian and Malania spoke Russian but identified as Polish—their village, along with much of Poland, was Russian territory at the time. Poland would not regain its political independence until after World War I.

The couple boarded the steamer *Kaiserin Auguste Victoria* in Hamburg, Germany, and eventually landed in New York. Julian's paperwork stated that he was a "Tagelöhner," or a wage laborer. Julian and Malania Pietrowski were two of thousands of Polish immigrants who settled in West Virginia in the first two decades of the 20th century. By 1930 there were 15,000 Polish migrants living and working in West Virginia, many drawn to the state by the promise of work

in coal mines. In fact, coal companies recruited and helped facilitate travel for Polish workers to labor in West Virginia. It is not known if advertisements for laborers inspired the Pietrowskis to uproot, but Julian quickly found work as a coal miner in Marion County.

The Pietrowskis worked hard to create a comfortable home for their girls. While her father was working as a miner, Stella's earliest years would have been at home with her mother. Neither Julian or Malania were literate and they may have emphasized the importance of education to their girls. When Stella was six, life for the family was upended. Her father, Julian, passed away at the age of

Stella Evangeline Ware

48. Malania had four young girls to raise on her own and was unable to speak English. In the 1930 census Malania is listed as a homemaker while her daughter Helen worked as a clerk to keep the family afloat.



Stella sponsored the Girls Athletic Association at East Fairmont High. Stell is at far right (marked). 1940 East Fairmont High School yearbook

The death of her father and the need to provide for her mother may have inspired Stella's practical education. After graduating high school, Stella attended both West Virginia University (WVU) and the University of Wisconsin. She was an active member of the Glee Club during her time at West Virginia University. It was while Stella was attending WVU that her mother, Malania, passed away. Following her university graduation Stella became a physical education teacher at East Fairmont High School.



A WAC awaits inspection of her kit before transferring to another base. As an officer, Stella probably conducted such inspections. Truman Presidential Library

With the United States' entrance into World War II both Stella and her older sister, Valla, joined the military. Stella enlisted as an aviation cadet in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) August 21, 1942, and agreed to serve until the end of the war. Valla had enlisted in the WAC under the same conditions five months prior. Stella was promoted to lieutenant in April 1943. When her enlistment expired in 1947, she reenlisted and was promoted to captain.

Though tens of thousands of women were rapidly demobilized after World War II, Stella's decision to reenlist proved fortuitously timed. The following year President Harry Truman signed the Women's Armed Service Integration Act, which made the WAC and other female military organizations permanent and granted women equal and permanent rank. Prior to this law, women had only held temporary "equivalent" ranks during wartime. As a high-ranking WAC officer, Stella

Stella Evangeline Ware

probably spent a large amount of time at Camp Lee, Virginia (present-day Fort Lee), which was designated as the official WAC Training Center in 1948. The site is now home to the Army Women's Museum.

The outbreak of armed conflict in Korea in 1950 put the WAC back on war footing. Eventually, 25,000 women were called to active service in the WAC, including many from the reserves who were "summoned to active duty without their consent," or drafted, in a word. It was the first time in American history that women

were brought to military service in this manner. With so many new recruits, experienced officers like Stella Ware would have been in high demand to train and lead units until the cessation of hostilities in 1953. While no organized WAC presence was established in Korea, individual WACs were frequently assigned to other units near the combat theater, such as administrative sections in Seoul and Pusan. Thousands of WACs served in support roles throughout commands in Europe and the Pacific.

After the Korean War ended, sending thousands of women home from their wartime posts was a huge administrative and logistical undertaking. This intense period may have motivated Stella, now promoted to Major Ware, to retire in 1955. She had spent a total of 13 years in the Army, incorporating both World War II and the Korean War.

It was during her time in the military that Stella met her future husband, William Ware. William Ware, a California native, was also highly educated, having obtained degrees from the University of California, Harvard University, and Newark State College. Like Stella, William served in the military for a prolonged period. Over the course of his career, he achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel and received the Bronze Star, Army Commendation Medal, and ten combat stars. The couple had married April 12, 1947, and would settle in Oceanport, New Jersey, in 1959.

Stella and William had five children: Michael Ware, Steven Ware, Melanie Ware Fikes, Duang Ware McCray, and Michele Ware. Stella was an involved parent, serving in the PTA while her children attended school. In addition to raising her family, Stella took up a new career as a physical education teacher at Oceanport's high school. During her time at Oceanport High, Stella started the Future Physical Educators Club and encouraged young women to tour local college campuses and consider physical education as a career path. William worked a variety of jobs during and after his military service, including work as an advisor for the Brazilian Army, secretary to the U.S. Army's Signal and Chemical schools, operations editor for the Gaylord Technical Information Service, and finally as a librarian for Electronics Associates, Inc.



President Harry S. Truman poses with several women officers to display his signature on the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, which granted women permanent status in the U.S. military.

Stella Evangeline Ware

Stella and William were well-known and influential in their community. In addition to their combined military careers, William brought the family to local prominence when he ran as Mayor for Oceanport in 1965. Stella was a member of the Fort Monmouth Officer's Club and the owner of a local Mini Mart. William was active in the local Rotary Club and served on the Board of Education in their community.

The Ware family faced a crisis in 1981 when William went missing after what was meant to be a routine trip to the doctor's office. William's shocking disappearance made the front page of Oceanport's papers as the community wondered how and why William would have chosen to leave. The couple's eldest son, Michael, filed a missing person's report and spoke with the media, noting the couple had been together for more than 30 years. Nine days after he was last seen, William contacted Stella from Delaware to tell the family he was safe and would be heading home. Though no explanation was given for William's sudden disappearance or his bizarre location, Stella told the press the family was "hoping to make it a happy reunion." Such a reunion appears to have taken place, since Stella was survived by her husband, their five children, and seven grandchildren when she passed away a decade later.

Though Stella had maintained roots in the Oceanport community for over three decades, her birth connection to Marion County, West Virginia, determined her final resting place. After Stella Ware passed away June 5, 1991, she was interred in neighboring Taylor County in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



WACs in basic training at Camp Lee, Virginia in 1950.
Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries



Crest of the Women's Army Corps, the Greek goddess Pallas Athene. *Truman Presidential Library*

Stella Evangeline Ware

Sources

“Ancestry.com,” subscription database, www.ancestry.com: Accessed October 4, 2022, *Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934*, vol. 373-7 I, *VIII A 1 Band 192*; <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/1799406:1068>
New York City Municipal Archives; New
https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/2279412:61406?tid=&pid=&queryId=f0cdec0340ca988c9e058bb9e66491b3&_phsrc=QBm1682&_phstart=successSource
Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/30345595:7884>
Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/37511434:6061>
Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/100358373:6224>
Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/148023222:2442>
“U.S., *School Yearbooks, 1880-2012*”;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/164983909:1265>
“U.S., *School Yearbooks, 1880-2012*”;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/164957691:1265>
“United States World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946”;
<https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/247459:8939>

“Creation of the Women’s Army Corps.” The United States Army. Accessed on April 11, 2023.
<https://www.army.mil/women/history/>

Fred A. Barkey. “Poles.” The West Virginia Encyclopedia. October 22, 2010. <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1892>

NEWSPAPERS

“Adoptive Parents Reap Reward for Giving Out Lots of Love.” *The Asbury Press* (Asbury, NJ), May 2, 1971.

“Democrats Name Ware for Mayor.” *The Asbury Press* (Asbury, NJ), September 18, 1965.

“First of its Kind.” *Asbury Park Press* (Asbury, NJ), January 7, 1966.

“Oceanport Man Disappears Without a Trace.” *The Daily Register* (Shrewsbury, NJ), May 28, 1981.

“Stella Pietrowski Ware, 77.” *Asbury Park Press* (Asbury, NJ), July 7, 1991.

Stella Evangeline Ware

Resting Place

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

Section 2
Site 30

Date of interment: July 12, 1991

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
1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston, WV 25301
programs@wvhumanities.org
www.wvhumanities.org
304.346.8500