

IRENE PAULINE KYLE

1922 –1996, WORLD WAR II

U.S. ARMY, CORPORAL

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Irene Pauline Kyle (née Williams) was born in Reynoldsville, Harrison County, West Virginia, on October 19, 1922, to parents Nellie Jayne Six and Ernest C. Williams. Both Nellie and Ernest hailed from Wetzel County.

Irene’s parents separated early in her life. By the age of seven, Irene and her younger brother Earl lived with their great-grandparents and grandmother, Minne Payne, on the family farm. Although the 1930 census record does not list Irene’s mother in the Wetzel County home, the family later recalled Nellie living nearby. Besides money and sustenance brought in by the farm, the household’s only other source of income was an uncle, John Six, who worked in road construction.

Irene graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville in 1940. She had been a Press Club member and showed a particular interest in commercial classes on penmanship, stenography, shorthand, and financial bookkeeping. Luckily, Irene emerged into the workforce as the Great Depression’s decade of economic hardships was finally waning. The United States government was pouring money into national defense jobs and related industries, and Irene soon found work at the Goodyear plant in Akron, Ohio.

She was far from the only Mountaineer in Akron. So many West Virginians moved to the city seeking work in its factories at this time that it was referred to jokingly as “the Capital of West Virginia.” Akron’s population tripled in size in the



two decades before World War II, making it the fastest growing city in the world. Many of Akron’s West Virginians did not intend to make Ohio their permanent home, however, often returning to their native state on weekends.

After the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, even more of Akron’s factories switched to war production. Self-sealing rubber

fuel tanks, rubber boats, life vests, and barrage balloons became top priority. Along with rubber production, Goodyear erected an airplane plant that built parts for 20 types of Army and Navy combat planes. By the end of the war, Goodyear’s Akron operation had become one of the 12 largest airplane factories in America.

The War Manpower Commission actively recruited women for plants such as these, representing a cultural and economic shift away from traditional American gender roles as men were drafted by the millions into the armed forces. Out of Goodyear’s 30,000-person wartime workforce, more than half were women. Irene and her mother became “Rosies”—a reference to “Rosie the Riveter” of World War II advertising, a fictional woman who emblemized all American women working in wartime industrial trades.

Irene became a lead sheet metal worker managing a six-person crew, constructing wings for B-26 Marauder bombers. Over 5,000 Marauders were built during World War II, most of which were assigned to the European Theater. Tressie McGee, a woman who also built plane parts at Goodyear, recalled how she was, “working for a purpose, the same as the soldiers out there. They knew they had to get out there and hold their line and fight. We knew if we didn’t supply the material, they couldn’t do their job.” Goodyear’s Rosies could also purchase special uniforms at the company store with sigils that read “Remember Pearl Harbor.”

Other members of Irene’s family served during World War II. In March 1943, Irene’s brother Earl traveled to Clarksburg, West Virginia, to enlist in the United States Navy. He served as a submariner before helping develop radar for U.S. bombers.

Irene met her future husband in 1943, encountering Albert James Kyle by chance in a hotel lobby in Charleston, West Virginia. “A. J.,” as he was known by loved ones, was born in Coco, Kanawha County, West Virginia, but worked for the Lorain Coal & Dock Coal Company in Wheeling by 1940. He left the coal mines for the U.S. Army and served as an infantryman with the 83rd Infantry Division, the “Thunderbolt Division.” In Germany,



Irene, her brother Earl, and mother Nellie in their wartime finest. *Courtesy of Dorothy Kyle*

Albert was captured and held as a prisoner of war. Months later, he escaped and made it safely to British lines.

While Albert was overseas, Irene sought to support the war effort in more direct ways than her work at Goodyear. On March 23, 1944, Irene enlisted in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). The WAC was originally known as the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) when it was established in May 1942. Prior to World War II, opportunities for women to serve in the military were primarily limited to nursing or communication work. In a strong showing of gender equality support, Massachusetts Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, who had worked to support veterans in the post-World War I years, sponsored the legislation that created the WAAC.

Rogers understood from firsthand experience the monumental role that women played as volunteers in prior military conflicts and insisted that the nation open doors for formal military participation for young women ready to serve their country.

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After thousands of women enlisted, the “auxiliary” designation was dropped in 1943, which granted female enlistees full U.S. Army benefits.

The WAC 1943 Physical Training Manual noted how women like Irene were “one of the small percentage of women qualified in mind and body to perform a soldier’s noncombat duties.” WACs filled essential noncombatant positions such as switchboard operators, mechanics, drivers, typists, clerks, motor pool drivers, and stenographers. Akron newspapers carried large ads recruiting women for the WACs with promises of valuable job training to enhance future careers and support U.S. soldiers.

When she entered the WAC, Irene took part in a rigorous training program to ensure her strength was ample enough “to perform hundreds of vital wartime tasks . . . [and] have the bearing and the self-confidence of a trained soldier.” Just like her male counterparts, Irene went through six weeks basic training designed “to learn the fundamentals of Army life” before she entered active duty as a clerk typist at Lockbourne Army Air Base in Columbus, Ohio.

The same WAC training manual also recognized the heightened scrutiny those serving in the WAC would face. “The eyes of the Army—and of the Nation—are on you. It is of prime importance that you look well, feel well, and work well throughout your military service.” This was not always easy to accomplish. Despite the national need for female servicemembers, many WACs faced resistance from the U.S. public. One New York Congressman called the corps “the silliest piece of legislation that has ever come before my notice.” Verbal ridicule was not the only problem: many WACs experienced sexual harassment from male soldiers. Male servicemembers even took part in a slander campaign against their female counterparts in 1943, which hindered recruitment efforts.

Despite these hindrances, Irene rose from the rating of private to a corporal after only two months. As a clerk typist, she worked in the Air Corps School of Flexible Gunnery and Navigation, keeping records and typing forms. She handled

incoming and outgoing mail and transcribed military correspondence. In March 1945, Irene was one of six WACs at Lockbourne Army Air Base who were “awarded the good conduct medal.” The corporal rank came with a \$66 paycheck. Irene also enjoyed the sense of camaraderie she gained with the WACs. She and her fellow Lockbourne WACs sewed a one-piece bathing suit embroidered with military patches, which they all took turns wearing.

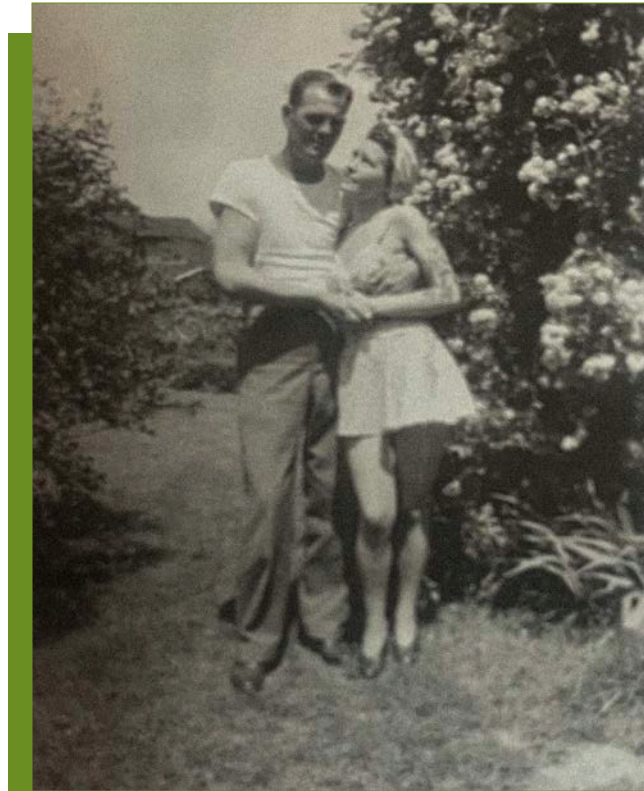
Celebrations rang out on May 8, 1945, to mark the end of World War II in Europe. It also meant Albert Kyle’s escape from the POW camp was rewarded with a trip back to the United States. Although it is unclear when he returned to America’s shores, he and Irene wasted little time tying the knot, and the couple married on June 25, 1945, in Summit County, Ohio.

Despite the end to fighting in Europe, work still remained for Irene and the Allies against the Imperial Japanese. War in the Pacific also ended, however, when the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9. Less than a month later, on September 2, 1945, formal surrender documents were signed aboard the USS *Missouri* marking the conclusion of World War II.

The United States worked quickly to demobilize. The Women’s Army Corps enlistees were some of the first to end their service. After a total of 1 year, 7 months and 23 days of service, Irene was honorably discharged at Fort Bragg in North Carolina on November 15, 1945. The reason for Irene’s separation was listed as “convenience of the government.” Along with her previously awarded Good Conduct Medal, Irene also received a Victory Medal.

The Kyles remained in Ohio for a time. A. J. worked for Cooper Tire, but the war’s end brought a nationwide manufacturing slump, and the couple soon decided to return home to West Virginia. There, A. J. rejoined the Army as a full-time recruiter.

On the night of December 28, 1946, Irene gave birth to twins, Aaron James and Adza Jean



Albert Kyle Sr. and Irene in the early days of their marriage. *Ancestry.com*

“Jeannie,” at the United Hospital Center in Clarksburg, West Virginia. Sadly, Aaron died at birth despite a seemingly normal pregnancy. Around this time, Irene’s mother, Nellie, moved back to Wetzel County and settled in Hundred. Irene gave birth to another son, Albert James Kyle Jr., on June 22, 1950.

Three days later, the North Korean People’s Army crossed the 38th parallel and invaded its southern neighbor, the Republic of Korea, touching off the Korean War. The U.S. military began offering reenlistment bonuses to World War II veterans as it sprang to the defense of battered South Korea. Albert Sr. entered active service once again on February 4, 1952.

A. J. Sr. spent most of the Korean War as a paymaster and operations sergeant in Japan, but made regular flights into Korea to deliver pay. World War II had highlighted the need for a centralized and streamlined payment system for the U.S. Army. Skilled paymasters were required

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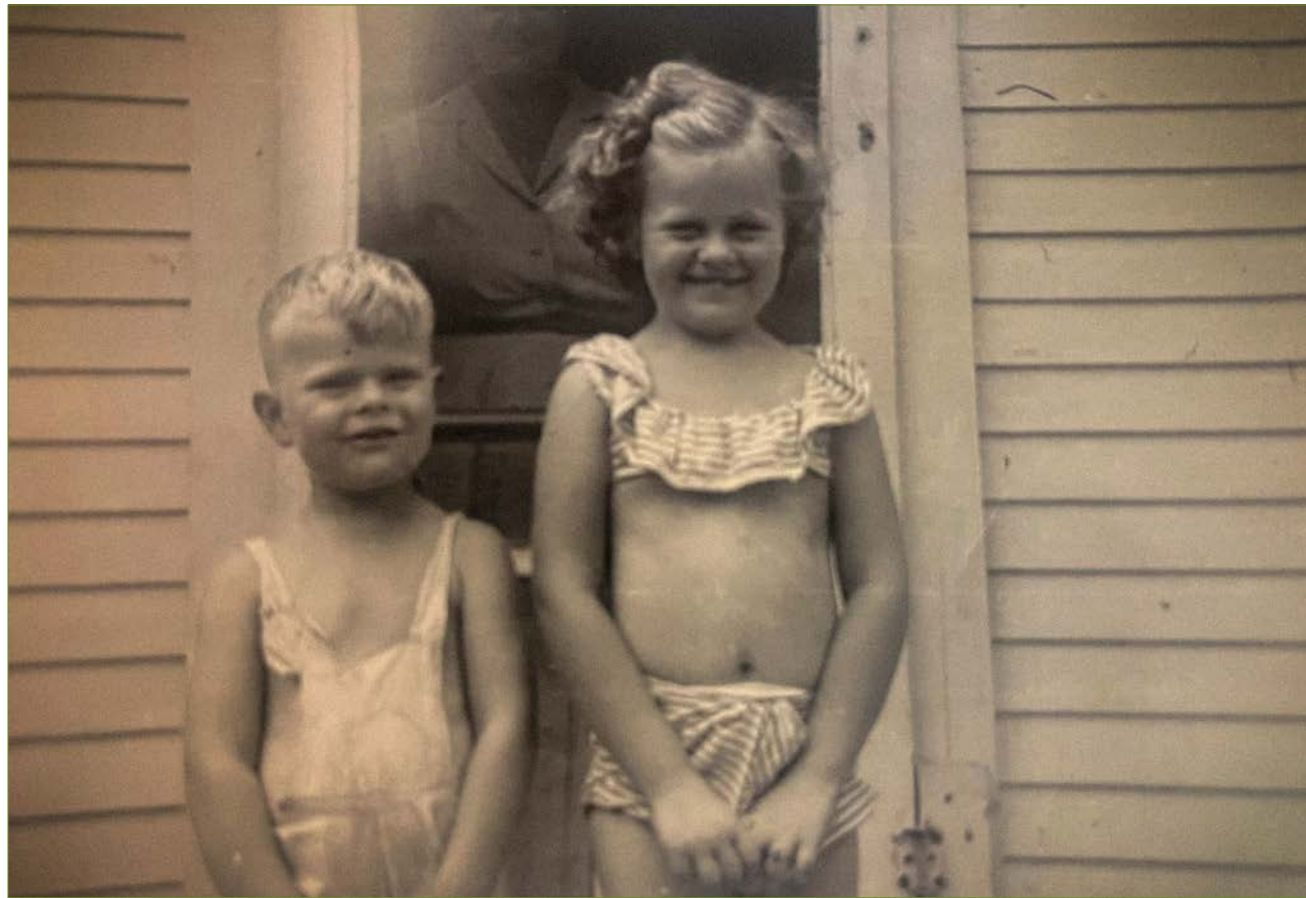
to handle the layers of administrative bureaucracy and deliver regular wages to soldiers.

At the end of the war, the family resettled in Dunbar, outside Charleston, West Virginia, where Master Sergeant Albert Sr. again worked as a recruiter for the Army and Air Force. Although her husband’s military salary was enough to sustain the family, Irene also remained close to the Army by occasionally working at the post exchange on base and helping at the induction centers. Albert celebrated his wife’s past military service by offering current and former WACs free tickets to the film *Francis Joins the WACs* at Charleston’s Virginian Movie Theater in September 1954.

In early 1955, Albert traveled to Fort Meade, Maryland, to prepare for a new military assignment when he suddenly fell ill and was sent to the hospital. The medical team at Walter Reed determined Albert’s illness stemmed from cancer. After only five weeks of symptoms, Albert James Kyle Sr. passed away on March 11, 1955, at the age of 44. The military returned his remains to West Virginia. He is buried at Sunset Memorial Park in Charleston. Following her husband’s death, Irene and her children relocated north to Parkersburg, straddling the distance between Albert’s parents in Charleston and her own mother in Hundred.

Irene loved her children and supported them with Albert’s Army pension and her own Social Security benefits. A. J. Jr. moved in with his grandmother Nellie in Wetzel County. He attended Hundred High School and enjoyed opportunities to hunt and fish. His older sister Jeannie remained with Irene in Parkersburg and graduated from Parkersburg High School.

Albert Jr. followed in his parents’ military footsteps, though he enlisted in the Navy. During the Vietnam War, he served aboard the new aircraft carrier USS *Constellation* (CV-64). After transferring to the Navy’s nuclear reactor training program, he left the Navy under the “sole surviving son” provision (also known as the Sole Survivor Policy or “sole survivorship discharge”) since his father had passed away during active military service.



The Kyle children, Albert Jr. and Adza Jean. *Courtesy of Dorothy Kyle*

When A. J. Jr. married and started his own family, Irene remained close. She moved in with her son for many years, serving as a pillar of support for A. J. Jr.'s wife, Dorothy, and her grandson Albert James Kyle III. Continuing the family tradition of service, A. J. III joined the West Virginia National Guard in 2006 and deployed to Iraq from 2009 to 2010, though Irene did not live long enough to see it.

Later in her life Irene suffered two strokes, the second of which left her unable to speak. She passed away on July 20, 1996, at the age of 73, and is interred in West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown. Her family remembers her as a remarkable woman—hardworking and independent. Her memory lives on through her family, who recall her as a devoted mother, grandmother, and soldier.



PLACE OF INTERMENT:
West Virginia National Cemetery
SECTION 1
SITE 867



WACs at Lockbourne Army Air Field. *Ohio History Connection*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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As home to one of the nation’s first national cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—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. Since 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.

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For readability, bibliographies have been omitted from this publication. Student research for these biographies relies heavily on primary sources—census records, city directories, draft cards, muster rolls, and more—made available digitally through Ancestry and Fold3. Yearbook repositories and the digitized collections of many universities and archives have been invaluable resources. Most newspaper research was conducted digitally via Newspapers.com, NewspaperArchives, and the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America* database.

Servicemembers’ Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) and Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) are another essential part of project research, provided free of charge in most cases by the National Archives through standard records requests.

As the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project has grown and matured, the team has found that new sources sometimes surface for veterans researched in prior project years. To better maintain a “living bibliography” of all its veterans, a single master document is kept up on the project’s webpage under the “Programs” tab at www.wvhumanities.org.

Views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Archives of the United States, or any other federal agency. For more information about the Veterans Legacy Memorial and the Veterans Legacy Grant Program, visit www.vlm cem.va.gov.

