Mary Roberts Wilson

Mary Louise Roberts grew up in Texas, the eldest of six children. When she was eighteen, she knew she wanted to be a nurse. Enrolled in a training program, she quickly discovered her skills lay in surgery. By 1941, when still in her 20's, she was chosen to be operating room supervisor at Dallas' Methodist Hospital.

In the turmoil following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Mary volunteered for duty. Now Lt. Roberts, she became operating room supervisor for the army's 56th Evacuation Unit out of Baylor. By Easter of 1943, she was overseas in Casablanca. Lt. Roberts was assigned to follow the 36th, 88th, and 90th infantry divisions of the Fifth Army.

For the young officer from Texas, the war was about to heat up. She and her team of 50 nurses were shipped to Italy to set up a file hospital outside of Anzio. In one of the most brutal chapters of World War II, Allied forces withstood weeks of attack as the German fought to retake the beach.

"Army Nurse Corps Officer presented with Silver Star Decoration for heroism during action on the Anzio Beachhead in Italy. Maj. Gen. John Lucas presents the medal to Lt. Mary L. Roberts."

During this time, Lt. Roberts earned her nickname the "Angel of Anzio." She was later quoted as saying, "You could say I was fearful but not scared. There were so many soldiers depending on you." They were fortunate to be in her care.

With the Army evacuation hospital taking a pounding from German shellfire, surgeons ordered Roberts to take cover. She refused. Roberts and her nurses were able to keep the hospital functioning, doing what they could to help "her boys."

For bravery and service in battle, Lt. Mary Roberts was the first female in the history of the United States to be awarded the Silver Star.

Lt. Roberts served two more years overses before returning home to Dallas. In 1946, she became the operating room supervisor at the local Veterans Administration Hospital, a position she held for 25 years. She died November 19, 2001, of a heart attack in Dallas at age 87