

Mary L. Hawkins (USANC)

Denver, Colorado

Nurse Corps World War II Hero

BY C. DOUGLAS STERNER

The Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) is the sixth highest military award, ranking in precedence below the Legion of Merit. Established in 1926, it is awarded for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight during war or in peacetime. Nearly 200,000 DFCs have been awarded in history. Numbered among these was civilian aviator Amelia Earhart Putnam, the first of fewer than two dozen women in history to receive the award. Numbered among those others is a young woman from California, with ties to the city of her birth, Denver, Colorado.

Thomas M. Hawkins was a U.S. Army technical sergeant who was stationed in Denver, Colorado, when Mary Louise Hawkins was born. She was the third daughter of Thomas and Mary France Hawkins since their marriage in 1917. Although their youngest daughter would spend most of her early life in California, her first breaths were filled with Colorado's high mountain air, when she was born at Fitzsimons Army Hospital on May 24, 1921.



By age three, Mary Louise was a world traveler, the family having lived for a time in the Philippine Islands when her father's military duties took him there. After a brief tenure in the Philippines, the family returned to Colorado in 1924. Two years later when Mary Louise was five years old, her mother died and was buried at Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. Thomas remarried to Hallie Virginia McNeill, and the family moved to California where he would go on to work in the Veterans Facilities Hospital.

Mary Hawkins graduated from Sequoia High School in Redwood City, and in 1942, and graduated from Highland School of Nursing in Oakland, California. During this period she was a member of the Visiting Nurses Association in San Francisco.

After entering military service in the Army Nurse Corps in 1943, she was commissioned a second lieutenant in January 1943, and posted to duty in Walla Walla, Washington. While serving there her step-mother died.

FLIGHT NURSES IN WORLD WAR II



While women have served as nurses during every war in our nation's history, prior to 1901 they served in civilian capacities. In 1901 the Army Nurse Corps was established as a part of the Army Medical Department, and, in fact, the first two decorated heroes to earn the Army's Distinguished Service Cross when it was established in 1917, were both nurses serving in France on August 17, 1917, six months before American troops began combat operations.

The Nurse Corps' role expanded during World War II when, in November 1942, the War Department directed the training of flight surgeons, flight nurses, and enlisted personnel for evacuation duty aboard troop and cargo carriers. Flight Nurses were to be assigned to evacuation aircraft used to transport seriously wounded combat soldiers to hospitals. This required special training beyond their prior medical training in triage and care, such as monitoring the effects of high altitude on their patients. They were also trained in crash procedures and survival.



Every Flight Nurse was a volunteer, for what was essentially combat duty. Since the evacuation aircraft served dual duty, often transporting supplies and ammunition back to the battlefield after delivering the wounded, they could not be marked with a red cross

denoting them as medical flights. This made them subject to attack by enemy aircraft and ground fire, increasing the danger of Flight Nurse duty.

The first class of Army Flight Nurses graduated at Bowman Field in Louisville, Kentucky, and received their distinctive wings with a large “N” in the center.

Flight Nurses were commissioned officers, and were unusual in the military at the time, as they outranked the male surgical technician that accompanied them on these *mercy flights*. Each U.S. Army Air Force squadron was assigned an evacuation aircraft who, in addition to the pilot and flight staff, cared for the wounded en route to a military hospital.

Evacuation aircraft could be loaded and airborne from the battlefield in fewer than ten minutes. While the wounded were being carried aboard, a flight surgeon briefed the nurse on the condition of each patient.



SECOND LIEUTENANT MARY HAWKINS

After serving briefly in Walla Walla in 1943, Second Lieutenant Mary Hawkins was deployed to the combat zones of the Pacific Theater of Operations with the Air Transport Command. Over the next 13 months she flew multiple missions and was responsible for saving the lives of countless wounded, earning the Air Medal for her professional and valiant service.

On September 26 1944, her C-47 evacuation aircraft landed at a makeshift airfield at Los Negros in the Admiralty Group, to recover the badly wounded from the fierce fighting in the Palau Islands. As the Flight Surgeon quickly briefed her on the condition of her patients and the nature of their wounds, twenty-four seriously wounded Marines were loaded aboard. Only minutes later, the C-47 lifted off to transport the badly wounded Marines to the hospital at Guadalcanal.

En route on the long-distance flight, the C-47 became lost – the compass had been erratic since they had left Los Negros, and then went



out completely. A turbulent front began to buffet the plane, forcing it to burn more fuel; the auxiliary tanks were close to empty.

The pilot, realizing he could not reach Guadalcanal, saw a small clearing in the mostly-mountainous and small (only 6.6 square miles) island of Bellonia. The engines were sputtering as the last fuel was consumed. Lieutenant Hawkins told the patients to brace themselves. Gliding low over the jungle, treetops cut the airplane's speed, and then the pilot was maneuvering to fit it into the small clearing.

The C-47 landed hard, sustaining severe damage. One of the propellers was wrenched loose and tore through the fuselage of the aircraft, lacerating several patients and severing the trachea of one of the wounded Marines Lieutenant Hawkins was caring for.



With the help of her surgical technician Technical Sergeant Ernest W. Miller of Newport, Oregon, and one of the patients who was mobile, she quickly worked to restore order inside the now-bloody cargo hold. The wounded were quickly evacuated and the Marine whose windpipe was nearly severed, was carried to the edge of the foreboding jungle and laid beneath a tree. Using blankets, Lieutenant Hawkins positioned him to minimize shock and also protect him from the elements. She administered drugs for pain.

The Marine's airway was severely damaged, and the immediate need was to find a way to keep it open, as well as to find a way to insert a suction tube to keep the man's throat clear until more sophisticated help became available. Lacking any kind of surgical tools, Lieutenant Hawkins took one of the Mae West life preservers the aircraft carried and cut the inflation tube on the collar. With the help of Technical Sergeant Miller, she used it to perform an emergency tracheotomy, shoving the tube down the dying Marine's throat. Amazingly, it bought her time. Then, while Miller held the man's tongue, Lieutenant Hawkins inserted a rectal tube attached to an asepto syringe to begin sucking the blood from his lungs.



As friendly natives began to converge on the clearing, their curiosity made them more of a nuisance than a help. Miller transferred the Marine back to the interior of the aircraft to get him out of the elements and give him some privacy. She then turned her attention to patching up the multiple cuts, scrapes, and lacerations of the other wounded.

Eventually the air crew and the patients were moved to the nearby native village, and learning that one of the wounded had a rudimentary understanding of their language, Miller put him in the chief's hut to be her liaison.

The C-47's radio operator was able to reach Guadalcanal before his radio died, and a flight of badly needed blood plasma was promised within a few hours. Sadly, it never arrived – the supply aircraft forced was by the weather and impending darkness to turn back. Meanwhile, one of the wounded who was a Navy Corpsman radioed his Naval comrades at Guadalcanal, but although they were not able to immediately send the needed plasma, a rescue effort was mounted.

That night the survivors ate dinner with the natives – broiled green bananas which were not kind to the palate. One of the wounded began to succumb to shock and another was struck with malaria fever, but Hawkins and Miller maintained their vigil through the night. During those dark and tenuous hours, a radio message was received that a Navy destroyer would arrive early the next day, thirteen hours after the crash landing. In the darkness the pilot, co-pilot, and three of the stronger patients made their way through the wild Solmons' jungle to the beach where in the early dawn, they could see the destroyer five miles off shore.

A short time later small boats from the destroyer came ashore bringing plasma, other drugs, and skilled medical professionals. Led back to the village, they continued their treatment until the survivors could be evacuated.

There had been twenty-four wounded but Marines when the C-47 had been loaded the previous day. When they came out of the jungle and arrived at the hospital, there were still twenty-four living but wounded Marines, thanks not only to the skill and courage of Lieutenant Hawkins and Technical Sergeant Miller, but also due to the incredible ingenuity of the woman who found a way to do what needed to be done. Her makeshift surgery had kept him alive for nineteen hours.

The *Honolulu Advertiser* later reported, “(Lieutenant Hawkins) took care of all the wounded and saved one man's life, and swam her way out to a Navy vessel when the little boat in which she was transferring the last batch of casualties collapsed – ‘Its all in a day's work,’ Lieutenant Hawkins says.”

Hawkins was promoted to First Lieutenant shortly after her heroic mission in September 1944, and logged more than 600 hours of flight time in the Pacific during the War. On July 7, 1945, at the Headquarters Pacific Division Army Transport Command at Oahu, Hawaii, both

Hawkins and Technical Sergeant Miller were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to First Lieutenant (Nurse Corps), [then Second Lieutenant] Mary Louise Hawkins (ASN: N-737974), United States Army, for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight while serving with the Air Transportation Command as Flight Nurse in charge of patients of a crashed evacuation airplane on Bellona Island, Solomons Group, on 26 September 1944. First Lieutenant Hawkins displayed unusual courage in rendering prompt and efficient first-aid treatment to an injured passenger immediately after the accident. Examination of the patients extricated with her from the wreckage disclosed that a wounded Marine Corps enlisted man had suffered throat injuries in the crash and was threatened with death by asphyxiation. Although badly shaken by the crew, First Lieutenant Hawkins performed an emergency operation, enabling the patient to breathe and thereby saving his life. First Lieutenant Hawkins' immediate performance of technically difficult acts despite the stress incident to the crash landing of the airplane is an example of steadfast courage which reflects great credit on herself and the Army Nurse Corps.

After the war and her honorable discharge, Mary Hawkins returned to California where she continued her education, earning her masters degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1953.

While working as a nurse in Saudi Arabia in 1959, she met William Michael Lambert, and the following year the two were married in Zurich, Switzerland. They returned to the United States briefly, living in New York and Texas, while Mary served on the faculty of Texas Women's University. In 1966 they left for Africa, living in various parts of Africa and the Middle East before returning home in 1976. Mary

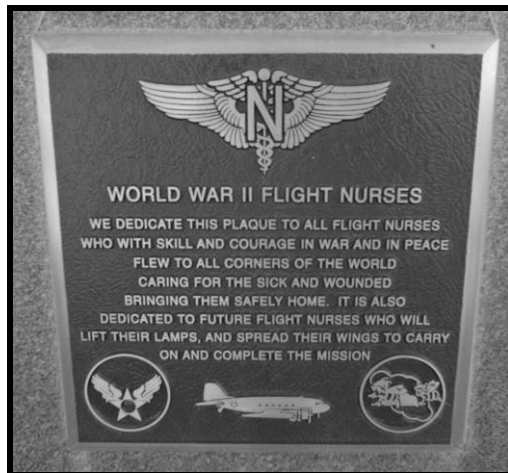


resumed her nursing career until 1988 the couple moved to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where they resided until her death on July 9, 2007 at the age of 86.

FOOTONTE:

In all, about 500 Army nurses served as members of thirty-one medical air evacuation transport squadrons operating worldwide. It is a tribute to their skill that of the 1,176,048 patients air evacuated throughout the war, only 46 died en route. Seventeen flight nurses lost their lives during the war.

The World War II Flight Nurses are memorialized at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Among numerous displays is a large marker to the WWII Flight Nurses.



Subj: **Re: Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert**
 Date: 1/15/2008 10:17:54 AM Central Standard Time
 From: tereynol@nmsu.edu
 To: AdnileM49@aol.com
 Melinda:

Bow
 8-06
 #3
 \$10.00

Thank you so much for answering my e mail! You give me hope that we can indeed find out a little about what happened with Mary Lou. I do not have an obit for her. All I have is the notation on my mother's address card for her sister, Frances: Mary Lambert died 4/25/95. Two or three years later Frances called my mother to ask her about genetics in the Reynolds family. I spoke with Frances and she told me that she had breast cancer and that both of her sisters had died of breast cancer. Frances said that she was dying and indeed we never heard from her again.

Would you be able to send a copy of my e mail to the address you sent newsletters to for Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert? Along with it you could also include my home address to see if perhaps whoever is getting the newsletter might write to me. I am pretty sure that Mary Lou had children and perhaps they would like a Reynolds family contact. Mary Lou's mother was buried not far from my parents in a cemetery in Denver.

My home address is: 2308 La Senda Drive, Las Cruces, NM 88011.

Thank you so much for your assistance! Any information, no matter how long it takes, will be very welcome.

Terry Reynolds

At 06:36 PM 1/14/2008, you wrote:

Hello Terry, your email was forwarded to me by Pat Brennan.

My mother is Dorothy Errair and she is the President of the WWII Flight Nurse Association, I do all the book work and have been tracking and collecting all the names and information on all WWII Flight Nurses, I also write their Newsletter.

I have just arrived in Florida (Mother's home) from Michigan for the winter and I usually carry all my huge collecting books with me but this trip I left them in Michigan. If Mary Louise had sent me stories or any written information I'd have them in those books. On my data base I do have her name and address and in fact I just sent out a 20 page Newsletter in Dec. 2007 to her address, because I didn't have her as deceased. Would you have an obit for Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert??? The Newsletter has not be returned undeliverable so someone is receiving the Newsletters. I do have 4 Nurses who also served in the 828th and I will send them a quick letter and see if they remember anything. Now let me tell you, these Nurses are up in age and they don't hurry very well, so it might take some time. I hope your time is not limited.

I will get back to you.

Melinda Errair Bruckman

Start the year off right. [Easy ways to stay in shape](#) in the new year.

Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert

Subj: Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert
Date: 1/28/2008 12:21:56 PM Central Standard Time
From: tereynol@nmsu.edu
To: AdnileM49@aol.com

CHECKED MAY 05 2008

Melinda:

Charlotte' s letter arrived this morning. Thank you so much for sending it on! How interesting! I need to read it through a couple more times to fully digest its contents. Here at the office that is sometimes hard to do with the many interruptions I have every minute of the day.

I guess you may have figure out that I am not a male. Why else would kids have called me "Daisy Mae"? That is an often mistake given my name although I never have it a problem once people see me. Especially when I was younger. it would be a stretch today to see how I once looked like "Daisy Mae."Charlotte at her age can definitely be forgiven.

Can you tell me why the flight nurse records were in St. Louis? How did they burn up? That is a true tragedy and I can only admire you for trying to save this piece of WWII history. I think you are doing an amazing job and just in the nick of time before the WWII generation is totally gone.

Let me know if you learn anything else about Mary Lou.

Terry

Terry R. Reynolds, Ph.D.
Curator of Collections and Exhibits
University Museum
New Mexico State University
P.O. Box 30001, MSC 3564
Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001
505-646-4056
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Subj: **Addresses**
Date: 4/11/2008 3:45:21 PM Central Daylight Time
From: tereynol@nmsu.edu
To: AdnileM49@aol.com
Melinda:

CHECKED MAY 06 2008

Really appreciate it if you would send a copy of the newsletter to myself and to my cousin in Wichita Falls. Our addresses are:

Terry Reynolds
2308 La Senda Dr.
Las Cruces, NM 88011

Jackie Hall
4515 Dunbarton
Wichita Falls, TX 76302

*file in
Marylouise
Hawkins
Lambert*

My cousin in Texas is about Mary Lou's age. She never met her, but has heard about her all of her life. She was really interested in seeing if we could find her. Ah, well, perhaps someday someone will know something. I think that the place of Mary Lou's address is like a retirement living situation. I think I figured that out from the web. I looked in the obits in that town and didn't find her. Of course she might not be too with it or some such. If you know anyone living in that part of Virginia, who wants to do a little detective work put them on to it. Unfortunately, the only people I know living in Virginia live in the DC area.

Your attempts at a get together sound totally frustrating. I give you credit for giving it a try. If you ever want a Western adventure place, try New Mexico. We have fantastic vistas and a very interesting cultural mix. Since I am retiring in July, I would be available as a guide to all the weird and wonderful places in the state.

Thanks again for all your help! Do keep in touch!

Terry

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Subj: **Another thought**
Date: 1/18/2008 10:16:27 AM Central Standard Time
From: tereynoi@nmsu.edu
To: AdnileM49@aol.com
Melinda:

Thank you so much for your assistance on Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert. I have had several additional thoughts. No, I don't think it is a ghost with which you have been in contact. *It is most likely Mary Lou. Why else would someone have sent you money.

I got the telephone number in Waynesboro, but have been unable to raise any one. I will send a letter and see what happens.

I spoke with another cousin last evening and she thinks that the only person to keep in contact with Mary Lou and her sisters was my mother. My mother would have been 90 in 1995 and perhaps one of the three girls passed away and mother wrote it down as Mary Lou. My mother was pretty sharp up until her death at 97 1/2 years, but you never know. Also we got to thinking that one would probably not have wanted to live in South Africa certainly in the 80s and 90s. So very possibly she and her husband would have moved to the US. I figure her to be about 87 or 88.

(By the way you should know that if I ever saw Mary Lou it would have been during or right after WWII. I would have been a very small child. I remember visiting her father and step-mother in California some years later.)

I must say I have always distrusted oral history because people just don't get it entirely right and this situation just goes to prove it again. I am going to check with another cousin this weekend to see what he can remember. It is possible that his mother may also have been in touch with Mary Lou or one of her sisters.

I still would like to find out if she was awarded medals for her feats in WWII. From what I have been able to learn in books and old clippings, she certainly should have been recognized. Hopefully, either she or someone else will provide that answer. Her drawing will be on exhibit here at the University Museum from 21 Feb until 23 June as part of an exhibit entitled "New Deal Crafts: Spanish Colonial Revival" so perhaps we will get an answer before the exhibit closes.

I know nothing about the association of which your mother is President. Please send an address, etc. and I will mail a small check in thanks for all your assistance. If you find out anything further, I and several of Mary Lou's cousins will be forever grateful and will be very interested to learn anything more.

Terry

Subj: **Mary Louise Hawkins Lambert**
Date: 1/22/2008 9:30:58 AM Central Standard Time
From: tereynol@nmsu.edu
To: AdnileM49@aol.com

Melinda:

Was delighted to find 3 e mails this morning from you regarding my mysterious cousin. (We had a 3 day weekend which I put to good use shoveling out my house from the Holiday debris.) I have yet to get my letter off to the Virginia address as have been terribly busy at the Museum, but am going to get it out today or tomorrow.

I very much look forward to Charlotte Mallon's letter. Found it very interesting that they nicknamed Mary Lou, "Daisy Mae." Many of my school chums called me that in grade school and middle school. I was quite tall and lanky. I rather expect that she did not receive the medals that she was recommended for at the end of the war. It does not lessen what she did.

I hope that Gene will write to me. The 1943 date I believe I got from a publication. Indeed Mary Lou was recommended for the medals in 1945 so it is possible that is when she crashed landed on a small island south of Guadacanal. I have the newspaper clipping of her being reported as doing something heroic, but my mother did not date it.

Well, this mystery has the entire family all twittering and everyone is waiting to learn more. I must say you have definitely made by life interesting and I do thank you so much.

dismantled team in Orlando AAF, Florida
until June 1944. went to Pacific Sept 2
1944. That's how I got up in the
828th M.G.E.S.!

I graduated from Nurse Training in 1938. a Grand Rapids, Michigan Hospital.

If she ever kept up with correspondents (and we all did) or the Alumni Association from her hospital, somebody there knows something about her. ^{maybe in} ^{So I guess}

I'm sure she was friendly with Clay Ly Borker Lee. I think I can pick out the girls she ran around with from my Flight Nurse Association list. Of course it's their maiden names that are familiar.

Well, in clearing out material preparatory to D.R.S. I must have discarded my most recent list of Flight Nurses. One I know has died recently, Mary Mames of Tuscon, Ariz! I'm sure Daisy Mae knew her.

I would contact her School of Nursing. Chances are they have a News Section & you could get a notice in it.

Cordially

Chalette L. M. Faust Mallon

En route to no. 6 area X-mas '43 I got pneumonia & a collapsed lung - then assigned to our air base

I don't recall Daisy being in my class. I think she must have graduated in the class before me, and gone to Troop Council ^{in So. Pacific} Command.

That episode of the emergency trocheating sound like the type of thing the Troop Carrier Nurses did (~~Camp~~ Ludlow, Beauvernille, ^{Manua} maybe Espulso ⁱⁿ Sante).

Where did she graduate from? ⁱⁿ Nurses Training? In Texas? I seem to remember that she was one of the gang who when they weren't flying, eating or sleeping, used to feed on someone's hand playing poker!

Four of us were decorated after hostilities ^{in Germany} ceased. Mary God, Donja Dove, myself and a Flight Nurse from Troop Carrier Squadron ^{So. Pac.} who was en route home & was decorated with me (a total stranger). Bronie Star, too.

I doubt if "Daisy Mae" received her decoration. My husband & Merbit Marie Auffan met in W.W.II, were decorated by Andrei Grompko post-humously about 4 years ago (well, before the U.S.S.R broke up).

P.P.S. Georgia Dorsey - is still alive in
California - I'm sure she knew her.

12415 No 103. 1 Ave, Apt C-55, Sun Valley Lodge,
Sun City, Ariz. 85351 Thurs. - p.m.

Dear Mr Reynolds:

Your query regarding Mary Louise
Brockins was received from Tallahassee,
Florida this morning.

^{never on paper} During the war, there were 2 popular
comic strips: one was "Terry + the Pirates"
which sort of related to the "Flying Tropic" of
C.B.I. fame, + the other was "Lil Abner".

The girl in "Lil Abner" was "Daisy Mae"
Lawkins (a voluptuous blond). So of course
Mary Lou was always called "Daisy
Mae" - (I never heard her called anything
else). "Lil Abner" was a take off on poor white
^{in Appalachia}

The 826th + 828th M.A.E.S. were sort of
"peck up squadrons" ^(a catch all) in the Pacific - that
is Air Transport Command. The 2 Commands
in the Pacific were "Troop Carrier" flying
C-47's ^{50 mph} and the A.T.C. flying 4 engine C-54's ^{A Catalina}.

I had graduated at Thanksgiving of '43 from
A.G.F.S.A.E. at Bowman Field, Ky (Franklin Co.)