

at *The Houston Post* led her to an unpaid appointment in 1941-42 as chief of the Women's Interest Section of the War Department Bureau of Public Relations. The bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 spurred her to lobby heavily for the establishment of an auxiliary military corps for women, and in May 1942, Secretary of War Henry Stimson appointed her director of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (the "auxiliary" was later dropped), with the rank of colonel.

To Hobby, this was far from a ceremonial post. She traveled extensively to recruit officers, and she visited England and France to see how women here were serving during the war. At first, WACs, as they were called (pronounced "wax"), numbered only a few hundred, but Hobby identified more than 200 Army jobs suitable for women, and the ranks soon swelled past 100,000.

In the male-dominated Army, acceptance of women soldiers was problematic, but Hobby fought hard for their recognition. For instance, at the time, WACs who became "pregnant without permission" were dishonorably discharged without pay. Taking up the cause of her soldiers, Colonel Hobby requested that men who fathered children out of wedlock receive the same treatment. Officials got the point, and soon, pregnant WACs received honorable discharges.

Oveta Culp Hobby received the Distinguished Service Medal in January 1945, the first Army woman so honored. By July 1945, the demands of being a wife, mother, and colonel had taken their toll, and she resigned her commission. Years later, visitors to her

**O**veta Culp Hobby, perhaps better known for her later role as the nation's first secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, served as a colonel and commanding officer of the Women's Army Corps during World War II and lobbied unflinchingly for women's military rights. Texans also knew her as executive vice president of *The Houston Post*.

*Houston Post* office would still see the medal pinned to her lapel.

—Laura Bray, San Antonio

### Frontline Adventures

**H**.R. Knickerbocker, a native Texan who attained media-superstar status in the 1930s, became known to millions of Americans through his vivid news dispatches cabled from the world's hot spots. "Wherever history is being made, Knick finds a ringside seat," a colleague declared.

Born in Yoakum in 1898, the Methodist preacher's son with flaming red hair lived in Weatherford, Temple, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Waco during his childhood and early teens. He graduated from Waco High in 1914 and from Southwestern University in Georgetown in 1917.

After service in the Army Signal Corps, young H.R. went to New York, studied psychiatry at Columbia for a year, and worked for two years as a cub reporter for dailies in the metropolitan area. Returning to Texas at age 24, he organ-

and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*. From Berlin, he covered Adolf Hitler's rise to power in the 1920s and early '30s, predicting in 1934 that Europe would become embroiled in another major war.

Knickerbocker cabled news to the United States from Italy's war with Abyssinia; was the first reporter on the scene when the Spanish Civil War began in 1936; and covered the outbreak of World War II for Hearst's INS (International News Service) wire service. In 1941, the *Chicago Sun* picked him as its chief foreign correspondent, and he reported war news from battlefronts in the Pacific, North Africa, and Europe.

After the war, Knickerbocker joined WOR, a New York metropolitan radio station, as a news analyst and commentator. He died in July 1949 with 13 other leading U.S. journalists when their KLM plane, en route to Amsterdam from a press tour of Indonesia, crashed near Bombay.

—Bill Bradfield, Dallas



COURTESY BILL BRADFIELD

**J**ournalist H.R. Knickerbocker interviews Josef Stalin's mother, Ekaterina Dzhugashvili, in Tbilisi, Russia, in 1930.