

I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE

I am the Infantry wife. For two centuries, I have stood beside you. Not always visible, often in the background, but always there. Fearfully waiting but strong and willing, rendering aid, giving support anytime, anywhere, regardless of the cost. I've paid freedom's high price with my tears and heart's blood in war, in threat of war, and in peace . . . I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

From our nation's birth, as we weaved the soldier's tapestry, I was there. I ached with uncertainty and a fearful perception only a woman feels at birth. I've been on the battlefield, I've bandaged the wounded, I've loaded and fired a cannon and, yes, I've held the hand of a dying soldier giving him strength for the final battle . . . I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

When this great nation was torn with strife during the Civil War, I was there. I stood helpless against your pride as brother fought brother, neighbor fought neighbor. I walked the blood-stained ground at Gettysburg. I was there at Appomattox and I was relieved . . . I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

When duty called you "over there," I stayed behind. I worked your factories and your farms. As FDR kept me informed of your progress, I kept my ear to the radio and my eyes toward heaven, but my heart was with you. I've been dubbed a "camp follower" and even a "war lover" by some. They didn't understand that I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

With the big wars over, our nation flourished with a healing wave. Times were good! We were united. Then, I sent you to Korea. Somehow amidst that confusion, I gathered strength and stood tall. What's the difference between a war and a conflict? Sometimes I don't understand, but I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

And then, another conflict – I sent you to Vietnam. As I waited, I watched the protests from Berkeley to Kent State. Young Americans burned their draft cards and fled to Canada. Even our flag went up in flames. Through my tears, I held my head high and with pride I welcomed you home, for I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

Maybe that was the most bitter time, certainly the most bitter test for you. You were called a murderer and a child killer. I cringed at the rejection you received but I stood calmly and proudly beside you. I never judged, I never wavered. You leaned on me, for I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

When the time comes for me to join the men who have fought and died in freedom's cause, may I take my place beside you and through eternity. I AM THE INFANTRY WIFE!

*Sylvia Birdwell
Fort Richardson, Alaska*