

Ex-cabinet member, media executive Oveta Hobby dies

Associated Press



Hobby

HOUSTON —

Oveta Culp Hobby, the first secretary of health, education and welfare and the woman who ensured the Women's Army Corps was taken seriously during

World War II, died Wednesday at home. She was 90.

Hobby, whose media holdings made her one of the nation's richest women, suffered a stroke April 17 and had been ill for a long time, said Saralee Tiede, a spokeswoman for Hobby's son, former Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby.

In addition to her work for the federal government in both Democratic and Republican administrations, she was a key executive in *The Houston Post* and other family enterprises.

While still in her teens, she learned about politics from her father, a member of the Texas Legislature.

Her husband had been governor before their marriage.

Forbes magazine listed her as the country's 287th wealthiest person in 1994, estimating the worth of her and her family at \$400 million. But she was reluctant to be described as powerful.

"If I had to define power, I really couldn't," she once said. "Power is a word people perceive in many different ways. The world is full of

IN COLORADO

Oveta Culp Hobby's daughter, Jessica Hobby Catto, owns a Woody Creek home near Aspen. She hosted British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during the Aspen Summit in 1990.

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powerful people who render a great service to society . . . but we never hear of them."

Hobby was helping her husband, William P. Hobby Sr., run the *Post* when in 1941 she was

named head of the War Department's Women's Interest Section and moved to Washington.

She was named colonel and head of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps the following year.

She was nicknamed the "Little Colonel," but she was tenacious in seeing that her 200,000 charges were taken as seriously as their male counterparts. She got the word "Auxiliary" taken out of the organization's name, and during her tenure the number of Army jobs that Congress acknowledged women could perform jumped from 54 to 239.

In 1944, she became the first woman to receive the Distinguished Service Medal.

After the war, she returned to Houston and helped run her hus-

band's newest acquisition, television station KPRC.

But she remained active in politics, and in 1953 President Eisenhower, a friend from her Army days, named her head of the Federal Security Agency. Later that year, the agency was renamed the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and its secretary made part of the cabinet.

When a reporter asked Will Hobby if he thought his wife was the smartest member of Eisenhower's cabinet, he replied, "Course she is. But if she weren't, she'd have them thinking she was."

Mrs. Hobby served in the post for 31 months, overseeing the annual disbursement of \$4 billion in welfare funds.