

## KAY BONNER NEE

Born Plummer, MN (n.d.) Lived on a farm. Attended College of St. Catherine's. Joined Red Cross after college and shipped overseas 1943. Quickly assigned to Special Services Division, 5<sup>th</sup> Corps as entertainers needed. Learned to drive a 2.5 ton truck which she and another female entertainer converted to a stage for shows. She apparently performed with Dinah Shore near the front lines. Landed in France 3 weeks after D-Day. First women to arrive in Europe. Went across France and was present for the liberation of Paris and the subsequent allied parade down the Champs Elysee. They moved on through France and through Belgium for the Christmas show in Eupen, miles from Monceau where the Germans attacked at the start of the Battle of the Bulge. Her co-entertainer, Katie Cullen, was killed during the retreat from Eupen. Later, in 1945, she went with the 1<sup>st</sup> Army into Germany and arrived at Buchenwald with the first wave of liberating troops. Germans had tried to kill as many prisoners as possible before liberation. Kay was overcome by the stench, "still burning hair and flesh." "Impossible to describe." She saw the camp commander's office where his wife, "the bitch of Buchenwald," displayed human skin lampshades. The ovens were still smoking and bodies were stacked nearby. She was shown a concrete torture chamber by a man whose wife and 2 sons had been hung on meat hooks and killed. The barracks contained "living dead." She also saw muslims, living zombies. She mistakenly gave concentrated food to prisoners and she now fears some died from the rich food. She did see a number of people die. The army brought a number of townspeople to the camp to view the horror. Many denied responsibility, blaming Hitler and some denied knowledge of the camp. People were told "you allowed it to happen." She stayed at Buchenwald for 1 ½ weeks. Later saw former prisoners on the road with no place to go. At the end she was the only woman present when the US and Russia linked up with much celebrating.

After the war, she was injured in Paris and was sent home after being awarded a Bronze Star, a rare award for a female civilian. At home, she was told to forget about what she saw and even knew Holocaust survivors who were encouraged not to talk about their experiences for fear of scaring children. In 1982 she began speaking at Mt. Zion Holocaust Memorial and later at many churches and universities and later on behalf of the Holocaust Museum in DC.