

Military Women Honored by the National First Ladies' Library



Lisa Berarducci

Ester Davis, of Massillon, gets her hospice/veteran pin from Maj. Gen. Robert Haas during a ceremony Saturday at the First Ladies Museum. Davis was a member of the Air Force during WWII.

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CANTON, OH —

When Lucybelle Weldon and Ester L. Davis decided to enlist in the military, men and women were still on uneven ground.

Over the weekend, the Western Stark County veterans were recognized for their trailblazing achievements during World War II.

Weldon, 86, of Massillon, and Davis, 87, of Perry Township, were introduced to each other Saturday during a ceremony hosted by the National First Ladies' Library in Canton.

The event, A Salute to Women in the Military, honored local women who served in the military during World War II. A special pinning ceremony was conducted by Maj. Gen. Robert Haas. The event also was sponsored by Hospice of Tuscarawas, Stark and Carroll counties and the Stark County Red Cross.

Davis was 21 when she enlisted on April 24, 1944. As the middle of three sisters, Davis said she needed "to do something." Prior to her enlistment, she was working at a factory that installed radar on airplanes.

It was in the military that Davis learned how to be independent.

“You know, when the women first went into the U.S. Army, they weren’t very well respected, then it all changed,” said Davis who was born and raised in Massillon.

Davis was stationed at Lockborne Army Air Base until she was discharged Dec. 1, 1945, achieving the rank of corporeal. Davis trained pilots how to read instruments to fly the B-17 bomber.

“It’s hard to explain. They had a dummy plane on a desk in a room. The pilots sat in this dummy plane, and then we were out at a desk and we told them what to do,” Davis said.

Davis also was assigned to a military hospital where she assisted in a surgical unit.

“I started out sort of like a nurse taking care of the patients,” Davis said.

Following her discharge, Davis considered a career in nursing, but it did not materialize.

For more than 20 years, Davis has volunteered in the gift shop at Affinity Medical Center. She also is active in the Massillon Woman’s Club and Lincoln Ladies.

“I’ve been busy, but hey, you know what, when I retired I decided I wasn’t going to retire to a chair,” Davis said.

Davis said she respects women who are serving in the military today.

“They are seeing active duty. We did not,” Davis said. “They have to have a lot of guts because you know what you are going to face.”

Weldon, 86, was employed at the Timken Co. when she decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy at the age of 20 in Nov. 1944.

“I was unhappy. It was an opportunity to further my education,” she said.

Two days before her enlistment, Weldon’s brother, Ernest Edward Chambers, was killed during the Battle of the Bulge. Weldon’s request for a deferment was denied. However, Weldon never considered backing out of her commitment.

“We were doing the work for the men who were gone. I guess it was part of that, helping out while the young men were away,” she said.

Weldon was stationed in Washington D.C. until April 1945 as a Yeoman 2nd Class. After receiving training in secretarial and stenography, Weldon was assigned to the bureau of aeronautics.

Weldon said Saturday’s ceremony was an unforgettable experience.

“They went to such an extent to make it such a wonderful day,” Weldon said. “It’s something that was never expected. I’m not sure deserved by me. It was deserved by a lot of the ladies who served overseas as nurses and took care of the men.”

Davis, who has two children, five grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren, also was grateful for the recognition.

“I’m so glad I went. I was debating about whether I was going to go,” Davis said.