



Mary Connelly, center, is escorted by U.S. Army Captain Melinda Cooper and Sgt. Al Rugani of the Canton Area DAV. Rugani is also a Waynesburg native.



Jennie (Aquino) DelCorso accepts her pin and a handshake from Army Major General Robert D. Haas



Jennie DelCorso, left, is ushered into the reception that followed the ceremony at the National First Ladies Museum in Canton by Gayle Taylor, who is dressed as a military Red Cross worker

By KAREN MUNDY

The Press-News  
Sept. 1, 2010

"It is proper and fitting for us to do this. I don't know why we have not done it before this. This place is all about women"

Those were the words Mary Regula spoke on Saturday at a "Special Salute to Women in Uniform," which was held at the National First Ladies Library in Canton. Women who served during World War II were honored, and they included two women with Sandy Valley area ties. They were Mary Connelly, who also served for many years as mayor of Waynesburg, and Jennie (Aquino) DelCorso, who was born in Magnolia but lived for many years in Waynesburg. Others who were honored were Mary Adams, Esther L. Davis, Mary E. Umberger Devies, Geraldine German, Ilene M. Hall, Harriet Jones, Harriet Laubacher, Betty Richie Tucker Loudon, Bea Shaheen McPherson, Elaine O. Ostergren, Ruth Mary Tscholl, Joyce Bloeser Theken, Lucybelle Weldon and Audrea Hitz Winn.

All the women who escorted in by Captain Melinda Cooper, who had earlier in the day portrayed Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, who served in the Civil War and is the only female to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. "She blazed a trail for women like these," Cooper said as she welcomed everyone to the ceremony. Speaking to those being honored, she said, "Thank you for your service. You deserve it."

Mrs. Regula, president and founder of the National First Ladies Library, gave information about how Martha Washington, the original First Lady, served her country during the Revolutionary War. Regula said Mrs. Washington was an accomplished equestrian and she often rode her horse to deliver messages and to provide warm clothing and supplies to the soldiers. She reported that soldiers who saw her ride by would often say, "God bless Lady Washington."

In the same way, Mrs. Regula said that Mrs. Washington's service was not forgotten, she wanted to assure that the service of the many other women to their country would also be remembered.

Melissa Seibert of the Red Cross of Stark County and U.S. Congressman John Boccieri also spoke, while Major General Robert D. Haas, honored the women by participating in the pinning ceremony. Sgt. Al Rugani, also a Waynesburg native, and Chief Warrant Officer III Barbara Hickman also took part in this special time for the ladies.

According to the biographical information given about the women veterans, they had served in a number of ways including driving jeeps and large trucks, as nurses, in secretarial positions and much more. Harriet Laubacher had a 31 year career in the military, serving in Korea, Japan and Germany. Harriet Jones, who returned to America on the Queen Elizabeth ship, said the guys she served with were a "bunch of good Joes."

Connelly had this to say about Saturday's events: "I want to express my thanks and appreciation to tall those who sponsored this special tribute to women in the military. It reawakened the pride I had in serving my country."

Connelly served in the United States Army from Jan. 23, 1943 to July 4, 1936 in Washington, D.C. She worked with top secret material, behind a sealed door. The department analyzed intelligence materials. All personnel signed oats of secrecy and are still bound by those oaths.

Connelly was also a member of the Pentagon Choral Club, which performed for such dignitaries as Gen. Wainwright, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and President Harry Truman. She was awarded the Victory Medal, American Theater Ribbon and Good Conduct Medal for her service.

"This was wonderful, really wonderful," remarked Mrs. DelCorso, whose "jewelry" of the day included her dog tags. This brought back many memories and gave me a good feeling about our country."

DelCorso served in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) from February 1943 to October 1943. She served as a secretary to the adjutant, Capt. LaCaze. While at Fort Devens, Mass., she interviewed for a special assignment by officers from the Manhattan Project," researching the development of the atom bomb. She was accepted and with 10 other women, sent to New York where they were stationed on the 12th floor of the Collingwood Hotel on Herald Square.

The Manhattan Project Headquarters was located on Fifth Avenue, where DelCorso and others served. She was assigned to serve as a TWX operator in a code room with other women. Their duties were sending and receiving coded messages to and from various sites that were researching the development of the bomb. DelCorso said she and her comrades did not know what the project was until the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

DelCorso's service to her country was cut short, due to a perforated ear drum. She regrets not being able to serve longer, but she said her brief service was interesting and

rewarding. She received a Honorable Service Lapel Button for her duties.