

Celebrating 90 Years of Service Not Self for Veterans, God and Country

American Legion Auxiliary

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TRACING OUR ROOTS

The powerful story behind the ALA poppy program

WOMEN WARRIORS

The changing face
of veterans healthcare

FEMMES IN FLIGHT

WWII pilots awarded veteran status
and Congressional Gold Medal

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the last 30 years – so why do so few use the healthcare
system that is part of their hard-earned benefits?

On the Cover: Inspired by the the poem "We Shall Not Sleep" (later renamed "In Flanders Field") by Col. John McCrae, M.D., the poppy was named the official flower of the American Legion Auxiliary in 1921. The poppy remains our poignant symbol still today, representing the sacrifices of soldiers who served and died for their country and as a sign of hope and renewal for those who lived. Learn more about the ALA poppy program in our feature story on page 30.

A Wise Woman said...

“We served because our country needed us.
It wasn’t just me...everyone in America was inspired.”

—WWII Veteran Odean “Deanie” Bishop Parrish, WASP Class 44-W-4

Sixty-five years ago, Deanie Bishop was one of 25,000 women who applied for a program that taught female pilots to fly military aircraft. She was one of 1,830 accepted, and after training for seven months at Avenger Field, Texas, she graduated and became one of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). She was assigned to Greenville AFB, Miss., as an engineering test pilot and then Tyndall AFB, Fla., to train combat gunners using live ammunition. In just two years, the WASP flew more than 60 million miles for our country before they were unceremoniously disbanded in 1944. In 1977, WASP members were granted veteran status, and in March 2010, they were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their World War II service.



Parrish currently lives in Waco, Texas, where she is a motivational speaker and assistant director of Wings Across America. To learn more about the WASP, visit www.wingsacrossamerica.us.

“There were other women who were driving ambulances and fire trucks, rolling bandages and working on airplanes. Even little kids collected gum wrappers and rolled them up in balls to donate. Everyone was doing what they could do best. It was the mindset of America. That’s the way the war was won. We served because our country needed us. It wasn’t just me...everyone in America was inspired.

Up to that point...boys took things like chemistry and physics. Girls took home economics and shorthand. We weren’t supposed to be professionals. World War II changed that forever. It was a time to step up and do whatever you could. I think that’s when everyone found out just how much women are capable of.

I believe every WASP shared certain traits. Courage. Honor. Commitment. Integrity. Serving and patriotism were values we learned and grew up with. We held to those values and never gave them up. Every girl I knew in the WASP thought it was her patriotic duty to do something. I think we had something to prove because I don’t think America on a whole thought that women could fly military aircraft.

Love was in the air...We were in the same squadron after he was rescued and returned to the States. During a target-towing mission at Tyndall, 1st Lt. Bill Parrish instructed his gunners to aim close so he could meet the "cute girl pilot" towing the target. They came so close; they put a few holes in my tail. When I landed, I started to give Bill a piece of my mind, but instead, I fell in love, and we were married for 47 years. I was proud of what I'd done, but he was the hero—he and the men in combat, the soldiers on the ground.

Achieving veteran status...It wasn't until 1977, 33 years after we were disbanded, that the Air Force Academy put out a statement that they were graduating 10 women pilots, the "first women in America to fly military aircraft." Some WASPs saw that and said,



'Now you've crossed the line. We're going to make them recognize what we did.' They lobbied for months, and they gave us our veteran status. What I cared about was that it gave us the right to have an American flag on our coffins. Three weeks before I graduated, one of my class members died. Not she, nor any of the 38 WASP who died in service, were allowed to have a flag on their coffin, and yet we raised our right hands and took the same oath that male pilots did. I felt that it was a privilege to be able to serve our country. I still do.

On receiving the Congressional Gold Medal...The medal was nice, but what really mattered was that it helped shine a brighter light on the history of the WASP. It was a missing chapter in the history of America, the Air Force, and aviation."

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