



Please visit our other sites



Public Notices

Classifieds

Wednesday, March 24, 2010



HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS OPINION COMMUNITY ECO-LIVING CLASSIFIEDS FUN COUPONS

View All Print Ads | Classified Ads | Real Estate Ads

NEWS

Today's Weather

The VA Loan Center

Get a Quote in 2 Minutes! VA Loans now up to \$729,000 with \$0 Down. www.VAMortgageCenter.com

UK army records online

Trace your British army ancestors with The National Archives nationalarchives.gov.uk

Air Force Medals Store

Buy official Air Force Awards. Low Cost. Fast Delivery. Veteran Staff. www.usamilitarymedals.com

Print this story | ShareThis | Comment (No comments posted.) | Rate | Text Size

Worth the wait: Female pilots honored for WWII work

By Ellen Sussman, Special to the Green Valley News

Published: Tuesday, March 16, 2010 8:24 PM MST

Edith Smith of Green Valley and 165 Women Airforce Service Pilots who flew non-combat military aircraft in the U.S. so the men could fly combat missions in World War II were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington last week.

The medal is the highest civilian honor given by Congress. In all, 1,114 medals were awarded, many posthumously. One medal was minted in gold and donated to the Smithsonian Institution after the ceremony. Each WASP received a bronze replica.

As the first women to fly for the military, the WASP flew 60 million miles of missions yet weren't awarded veteran status until 1977.

Determined as she was to become a pilot in the early 1940s, Smith, 88, was just as determined to attend the long-awaited ceremony at the Capitol.

"It was all much more impressive than I thought it would be," she said after returning to Green Valley. "The color guard, the flyover, the speakers and (House Speaker) Nancy Pelosi were very impressive."

Pelosi told the audience, "We acknowledge that for too long the proud service of the WASP was not recognized in word or deed. Today, we honor you as the heroes that you are."

Smith said, "We knew we would love what Tom Brokaw had to say and were not disappointed. He was great. He loved our generation."

"The whole event was unbelievably well thought out... even the weather was beautiful... There were 17 buses of us with dogs sniffing the buses and police on every detail."

Smith said the actual medal ceremony was moved from the rotunda in the Capitol to the Emancipation Room because it was the largest event ever held in the Capitol, with more than 1,700 guests.

A most impressive event for her was in the small theater in the Women's Military Museum on Tuesday only for the WASP.

"The main speakers included four-star general of the Air Force Norton Schwartz, who charmed us all with his genuine feelings of gratitude, his courtly manner and deference to us, his willingness to shake our hands and thank us personally before he went on the speakers' platform.



Edith Smith received her honor from Air Force Master Sgt. Cynthia Seifert.

Green Valley, AZ

68°F forecast...

sponsored by:



"A handsome, very tall, fit, impressive figure he had medals and badges from shoulder to waist — the shiniest stars and wings I have ever seen... he seemed so honored to meet us," she said.

New friends

Each WASP was assigned a military escort from all branches of the armed forces and every state.

Smith's escort was Cynthia Seifert, an Air Force Master Sergeant from Utah.

"She was at our hotel at 5 a.m. on Tuesday morning to see that we would have breakfast and be ready for the day's events... what a jewel she was and seeing that all was OK. She was the one who actually gave me the medal and I will cherish her words forever."

U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., had been informed that a WASP constituent from her district would be receiving the Congressional Gold Medal. She had a sign with Smith's name so the two would meet.

"She congratulated me and I told her I was proud of her and her husband for their public service," Smith said. "She was impressed that I knew her husband was in the military. She was very friendly."

While changing planes at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Smith met a WASP she hadn't seen in 66 years — Mary Ann Dreher. The two first met on a train leaving Southern California for their WASP training.

"At the ceremony I sat with classmates. Seven out of 12 in my bay were there... and 16 of 59 who graduated in my class attended."

Smith recognized former WASP by their photo names tags. She said some were in wheelchairs and one was blind.

"I felt incredibly fortunate. I feel and think so much younger than I am."

Joining Smith at the event was her son Ivan from Seattle, daughter Abbie from Chicago and daughter Keith, her husband, Howard, and their daughter, Kelsey, from New Jersey.

"How proud my kids were. They went to every event. I was surprised by their depth of feeling. My granddaughter was very interested."

After attending this event Smith said her feelings about the nation's capital had changed.

"I used to think of Washington as slow and inept. But this was all so perfect. The whole event was unbelievably well thought-out and every segment was wonderful. It was D.C. at its finest."

Contact Green Valley freelance reporter Ellen Sussman at ellen2414@cox.net.

[« Previous Article](#)

[Next Article »](#)

[BRIEFS: RTA sets two open houses](#)

[It's March Madness. Green Valley-style](#)

Article Rating

Current Rating: 0 of 0 votes!

Rate File:

Reader Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of gvnews.com.

Submit a Comment

We encourage your feedback and dialog, all comments will be reviewed by our Web staff before appearing on the Web site.

Name:

Email: (optional)

Comments:

Image Verification: (Case sensitive)



Search:
[See Our Featured Businesses](#)



[Top Menu](#)

[Cow Palace Menu](#)

Return to: [News](#) < | [Home](#) < | [Top of Page](#) ^



[China Vic Restaurant](#)



[Ragazzi Italian Restaurant](#)



[More TOP MENUS](#)

Google™ Custom Search

Wick
ANA
SNA
NAA
Inland



Copyright © 2010 Green Valley News and Sun - All right Reserved

[About Us](#) / [Subscriptions](#) / [Contact Us](#) / [Advertise with us](#) / [User Agreement](#) / [HUD rules](#) / [Make us your home page](#)