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Honoring Women Veterans This Fourth Of July



Reporting
[Heather Brown](#)

ST. PAUL (WCCO) — At first glance, 85-year-old Betty Strohfus from Fairbault doesn't look like a World War II pilot. That is, until she starts telling stories. And then you can't picture her as anything else.

"I flew the B-17 as a co-pilot," she laughed. "I was too short to be a first pilot."

Strohfus said her first plane ride as a teenager was love at first sight. She knew would fly someday, so she went to the banker for a \$100 loan for a few lessons.

"I said, I'm going to fly airplanes," she said. The banker told her, "Oh, women don't fly, and I said, 'This one's going to' and I did."

And fly she did with the Women's Air Force Service Pilots throughout World War II.

On Thursday night, Strohfus was one of 18 women veterans honored at the St. Paul Saints game.

It's part of a series the Saints do to recognize people they consider heroes right before the Fourth of July.

Retired First Lt. Joan Paulson served in Vietnam for the Army Nurse Corps.

"I worked at the 67th Evac. Hospital, so our job was to get their soldiers stabilized in order to go back home or get them back out to duty," she said.

Jodi Bean was an Air Force Captain stationed in Qatar during Operation Iraqi Enduring Freedom. She worked in military intelligence.

"I coordinated rescues for any downed aircraft that was shot down or people on the ground. We also had mudslides," she said.

The women were taken out on to the field before the game started and treated to cheers from the crowd. They each threw out a first pitch after watching a missing woman formation fly over Midway Stadium. That formation was to remember the women they lost.

For Paulson, it was emotional. She lost a fellow female nurse in Vietnam after that nurse's medical plane crashed into a mountain.

"It's always very touching," she said. "It's always hard to watch that flyover."

For Strohfus, it was an honor to simply be recognized. She did have a rank while she served and was only recognized as a veteran 35 years after the fact.

Bean understood that as she stood alongside her fellow veterans on the pitcher's mound.

"They're incredible. They blazed the trail for us to come into the service. They really took down barriers that otherwise some of us might have not had the chance to serve," Bean said. "My heart appreciates them over and over because I love my opportunity to be in the military."



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Betty Strohfus (left) was a pilot with the Women's Air Force Service Pilots throughout World War II and Ret. 1st Lt. Joan Paulson, Army Nurse Corps (right) served in the Vietnam War.
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