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# Local woman WW2 pilot to receive medal

## Mildred Jane Doyle was a 'WASP'

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Tony Tagliavia

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) - It was more than sixty years ago that Grand Rapids native Mildred Jane Doyle first sat in the cockpit of a military plane -- and took off.

The uniform she wore Friday is a replacement, but the feeling -- the exhilaration -- is still fresh in her mind.

"It was just wonderful -- just to fly -- the sound of the engine and the power of the plane," Doyle recalled in an interview with 24 Hour News 8. She was one of the 1,000 or so to serve as Women Airforce Service Pilots or WASPs during World War II.

"My brother was in the service, in the Navy at that time, my sister was in the Red Cross and so I decided I wanted to do something," Doyle remembered. "I wanted to fly."

She already had a pilots license and Doyle spent seven months in Sweetwater, Texas beginning in 1943, training just like male cadets did.

"We did all the acrobatics and everything to because we had to do that in case of emergency," she said.

WASPs were the first women to fly military planes. Theirs were non-combat missions but they were not missions without danger. Thirty-eight WASPs were killed on duty.

One of Doyle's jobs was to take planes out for test flights after male pilots reported problems and the planes were sent in for service. She was in line to fly a B-26 with what's called a towed target.

-- and it was live gunnery that would shoot at it for gunnery practice," Doyle said. "So they used the women for that."

But just before her B-26 work was set to begin, the WASPs were disbanded, because, in late 1944, Congress voted against giving the women military status.

They didn't get veterans status until the late 1970s. Now, after a bill passed in the House and Senate and was signed this week by President Barack Obama, the WASPs are getting more recognition: the Congressional Gold Medal.

"It's quite an honor to receive it," Doyle said.

She said she now understands just how pioneering the WASPs work was. But back then? It was just good to serve and fun to fly.

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