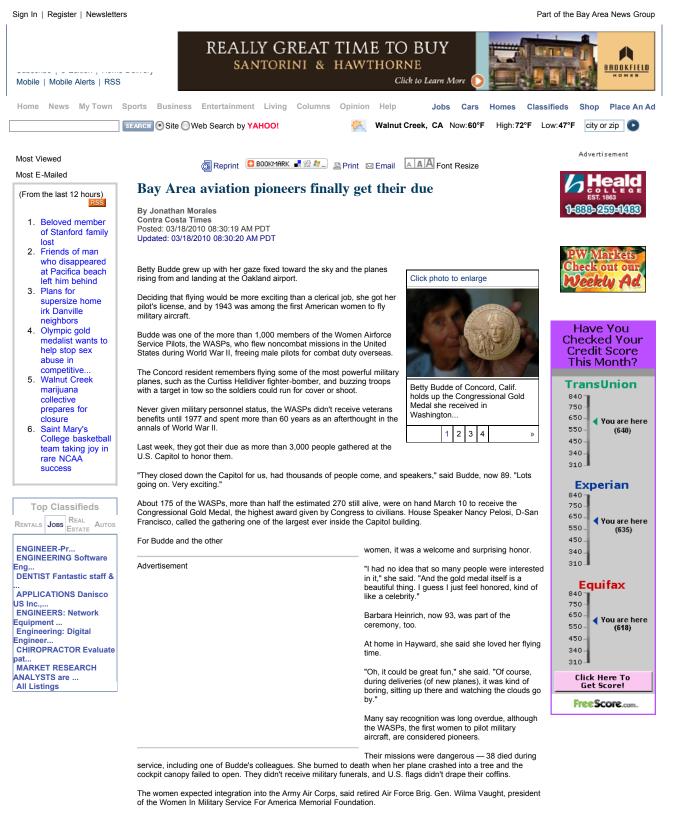
Bay Area aviation pioneers finally get their due - ContraCostaTimes.com



Instead, the WASPs were disbanded in 1944 and had to pay their own way home.

"It was just different times," said Maggie Gee, of Berkeley. "Women were really discriminated against. It's hard to believe today that things like that happened, but they did."

Growing up in Berkeley, Gee also went to Oakland airport to watch the planes. By the time she was 18, she had her pilot's license and the required flying time, so she joined the WASPs — one of its youngest members.

"I felt that I wanted to do something during World War II for the country," she said.

The women became like a family, Budde said, and many wore their WASP scarves throughout their Washington

visit.

"So you see a blue scarf, you run over and start talking to them," she said.

Vaught said many of the women keep up with aviation news and are still active pilots.

"Many of (the WASPs) in their late 80s still fly," Vaught said. "They just have an indomitable spirit, and that's what strikes me more than anything else about them.

Lafayette resident Beth Ferree said when her mother, Mildred, began getting depressed after her WASP service, starting to fly again pulled her out of it. She continued flying until she was physically unable.

"It must have been a really interesting time, and after that kind of experience, when they were disbanded. I wonder what you do from there," Beth Ferree said

Mildred Ferree, who met her husband when he gave her a ride home from the airfield after her unit disbanded, is in a nursing home in Massachusetts and was unable to attend last week's ceremony.

Other surviving WASP members in the Bay Area include: Alice-Jean Starr, of Moraga; Marie Jones, of Walnut Creek; Margaret Phillips and Jeanette Rhamsey, both of Tracy; Margaret Taylor, of Palo Alto; and Madeline O'Donnell, of Menlo Park.

After the war, Gee became a physicist at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. She has even had a children's book written about her service, "Sky High: The True Story of Maggie Gee."

It was remarkable to see how many of the WASPs were still alive and made it to Washington for the ceremony, she said

"We felt that we were honored," Gee said. "We were kind of forgotten for many, many years, and it was a really a wonderful feeling that the nation had remembered us."

Staff writer Eric Kurhi contributed to this story. Contact Jonathan Morales at 925-943-8048. Follow him at Twitter.com/sosavsionathan.

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