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Tuesday, May 24, 2005

County honors woman WWII pilot

Charles K. Wilson
El Paso Times

With a bit of esprit de corps, former Women Airforce Service Pilot Lois Brooks Hailey was honored for her World War II contributions Monday.

Hailey, active at 90 years old, told Commissioners Court "thank you" and then said she was ready for questions. The commissioners asked her if she had met aviator Amelia Earhart (she hasn't), what kinds of planes she piloted (all kinds), and if she'd ever jumped out of a plane.

"No," she said smiling, her white hair and print dress suggesting her 31 years of teaching music more than her flying at Biggs Air Field in 1944. A parachute "wasn't necessary unless your plane fell apart," she said.

Commissioners on Monday honored Hailey as an exceptional El Pasoan for her service. The 1,074 women who took part in the Women Airforce Service Pilot program during WWII were the first women trained to fly U.S. military aircraft.

"As one of the hundreds and hundreds" of Hailey's students, Xavier Banales said, "My thanks for all the years. Mrs. Hailey stands alone" as a teacher.

Skip Trammell, director of the War Eagles Air Museum in Santa Teresa, said the work Hailey and other WASP members did during WWII was invaluable.

Trammell said that some of Hailey's flying included being shot at as she towed a target banner behind her aircraft. "She didn't have the best job," he said.

Charles K. Wilson may be reached at cwilson@elpasotimes.com; 546-6137.



Rudy Gutierrez / El Paso Times

Betti Flores, center, presented Lois Hailey, 90, with a proclamation Monday. At left is Skip Trammell of the War Eagles Air Museum. Xavier Banales, one of Hailey's former students, is at right.

Hailey's honors

Some of the citations included in the Commissioners Court resolution honoring Lois Hailey:

- 3,600 hours of flying time.
- First chairwoman of the El Paso Chapter of the 99s (group of international women pilots).
- Inducted into the El Paso Aviation Hall of Fame.
- Inducted into the Texas Aviation Hall of Fame.
- Honored for her service at the WASP Museum in Sweetwater, Texas, and the War Eagles Museum in Santa Teresa, where her uniform is on display.

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