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County honors woman WWII pilot

Charles K. Wilson  
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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.

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