

On behalf of MBF, we congratulate Trudy on a healthy 100 years and for her service during WW II. Trudy is one of our participants at MBF in our Golden West Manor facility.



100-year-old Boulder woman honored for Veterans Day

Trudy Brendecke served in Women's Army Corps during World War II

By Brittany Anas Camera Staff Writer

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A voice pierced the silence of the Women's Army Corps barracks on an August night in 1945, announcing a rumor in the courtyard: "The war is over -- Japan has surrendered."

Trudy Brendecke, now a 100-year-old World War II veteran who lives in Boulder, remembers the initial dead silence. Then, pandemonium.

Women dashed out to the balconies -- some still wet from showers with towels hastily wrapped around them, others in pin curls and pajamas. For that moment, cheers, songs and celebrations interrupted the proper and orderly barracks.

Though it was just a rumor that night, the Japanese surrendered five days later, on Aug. 15, 1945. Brendecke wanted to cry and laugh simultaneously, as she imagined the tremendous numbers of American men who would be spared injury and death.

Today, in advance of Veterans Day, Brendecke will be saluted by U.S. Rep. Jared Polis, D-Boulder, for her service in the Army during World War II. The ceremony will be at the Golden West retirement home in Boulder, and Polis will honor veterans living there.

Brendecke served in the Women's Army Corps from Oct. 18, 1943, to Oct. 22, 1945, and was assigned to serve under Gen. Douglas MacArthur in the Philippine islands. Her division's offices were across from MacArthur's residence and office, and Brendecke remembers snapshots of him pacing back and forth on the veranda, smoking his corn cob pipe.

"She has an amazing life story," Polis said. "She heeded the nation's call for defense. ... This is what Veterans Day is all about."

Polis said Brendecke's friends at Golden West contacted him to tell her story. He said Brendecke served in an era when opportunities for women in the military were limited.

Brendecke remembers that at an Army orientation, a sergeant snarled at the enlisted women: "We didn't want you, so you'd better do a good job."

She said they must have done so because her campground grew to house hundreds of women, and after the war MacArthur thanked women for their military service.

The daughter of Montana homesteaders, Brendecke was living in lower Manhattan in New York City in 1941, and, on the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, she was visiting with a friend in the Bronx. She listened to the news of the attack over the radio.

"Our country was at peace, and the unprovoked attack was unthinkable," she recalled. "One thing I don't believe the Japanese counted on was the unifying effect this would have on our country. From that day on, we were one solid nation with one thought in mind: to defeat the enemy. It was a rallying cry for everyone."

Brendecke had been working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and her job included granting permits to importers of foreign plants and fruits. But by 1942, her workload had slowed because the government started commandeering the merchant ships for transporting military goods.

Her older brother commanded a Navy ship, and two of her younger brothers served in the Army's engineer corps.

At age 31, Brendecke joined the Women's Army Corps.

She reported to basic training and then advanced training -- where the women went through many of the rigorous drills that the men did, including obstacle courses with low wires and mud, five-mile hikes wearing gas masks and learning to detect poisonous gases.

She was deployed to New Guinea and received orders from MacArthur's headquarters in Hollandia -- a picturesque region covered with rugged mountains on one side and a view of Lake Sentani on the other side.

Wearing skirts and short sleeves in the South Pacific was not allowed because of the mosquitoes and the risk of malaria. Instead, the Army allowed the women to wear men's pants -- as long as they removed the zipper from the front and placed it on the side.

Brendecke recalls the war in the South Pacific was staged mostly in the jungle. The Japanese hid in the tops of palm trees and would string jungle vines across pathways, then bury knives with the blades facing up so that when American soldiers tripped on the lines, they'd impale themselves on the weapons, Brendecke said.

The barracks where they stayed was a former boys' school destroyed by bombs. She could hear guns booming day and night, and it became routine to climb into the air-raid shelters out back. To this day, she turns up her nose remembering the bugs that lurked in the shelters.

In December 1944, a Women's Army Corps choir performed a 15-minute concert of Christmas carols that was broadcast over the radio in the U.S. on Christmas Eve. With the help of GIs, the women put on a Christmas party for 250 Filipino children that year --recycling socks, rags and parachutes to craft rag dolls for the kids.

In August 1945, Brendecke said, she was scheduled to move into Japan. She awaited her orders and had all of her shots when the war came to an end.

"I stayed in long enough to win the war," Brendecke said. "And then I went home."

She earned several honors, including an Asiatic-Pacific Theater ribbon with three bronze service stars, a Philippine Liberation Ribbon with one bronze service star and a good conduct medal.

Susan Sullivan-Lefton, an activities coordinator at Golden West, has helped organize the Veterans Day celebration.

"Not too many women can say they've served in World War II or that they've lived to 100," she told Brendecke on a recent afternoon.

"I'd prefer you say 50-50," Brendecke quipped.

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