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WEEKEND

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WOMEN AT WAR



Edna Brackett, now Moon, served in the U.S. Army Air Corps in WW II.

Army Air Corps nurse gets medal 60 years later

By TRAVIS ROBERTS

SOUTH KINGSTOWN – Edna (Brackett) Moon didn't know it at the time, but she and her fellow flight nurses were helping to change perceptions about women during their service in World War II.

Moon, a native of Kingston and a 1938 graduate of South Kingstown High School, was amongst the first group of women ever admitted into the U.S. Army Air Corps as flight nurses.

More than 60 years later, she and her fellow nurses were finally recognized for their service with a "Greatest Generation" medal, awarded by the Noncommissioned Officers Association Sept. 1 at the flight nurse's reunion in Colorado.

"We had a table right up front and my daughter knew about [the award] but I didn't know it was coming," said Moon, 87, who now resides in San Marcos, Texas.

Moon along with eight other nurses

from the war were called up on stage and presented the award, which was for "valor, sacrifice and fidelity."

Her niece, Martha Bradley, jokes that Moon carries the medal everywhere she goes. And Moon does in fact often keep it in her pocket.



Edna Moon today with the medal she received in September.

It was a medal long overdue, for actions performed during one of the most trying periods in the history of the world.

Moon, initially got into nursing right after high school because her mother Lois, was a nurse with the South Kingstown-Narragansett Visiting Nurse Association.

After graduating from Rhode Island Hospital School of Nursing in 1941, Moon came back to South Kingstown and worked at South County Hospital for a few years.

Not liking the job, Moon decided she wanted to be a nurse somewhere else, so

she and some friends decided to sign up with the Army during the height of WWII.

"We went up to Boston to sign up in 1943, we had difficulty convincing them to let us sign up because the [Women's

MEDAL, 7-A

South Kingstown woman honored for role in WW II

MEDAL, from I-A

Army Corps] was just forming up then," said Moon from Highland Farm where she was visiting her sister and niece.

"After they signed us up, they sent us to Grenier Field in (Manchester) N.H. and the chief nurse told me they were training flight nurses at Bowman Field, Ky. So we went there and trained for six-weeks then they put 25 of us into the 812th squadron of the 7th Air Force," she said.

After leaving Bowman field, Moon was shipped off to Hickam Air Field on the Hawaiian Island of Oahu, a field that had been attacked only two years earlier during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

"When we first got there, they weren't ready for us to fly yet. I remember every day you could look down and see all the ships in the harbor, then you'd wake up the next morning and they'd all be gone."

After a brief wait, orders finally came through for the 812th and Moon began flying missions out of Hickam to islands in the South Pacific to pick up wounded soldiers.

"We flew in C-54 transport planes that carried 28 men back on the sides and down the center. We had five planes and 10 crews. Our first mission was to Tarawa. Then, we flew to Guam."

Moon's job as a flight nurse was a bit different than jobs that flight nurses perform today. Her unit's job was to transport wounded soldiers from combat zones back to Hawaii, then to Hamilton Air Field in the United States.

However, when Moon received the soldiers, they had already been patched up and stabilized.

Her job was to simply watch over them and keep them com-

"I loved every minute of it, it was an honor and a privilege to serve my country. People said we were brave, but we weren't brave, we were just going to work every day."

-Edna Moon

fortable during the flight.

"I remember one time when we were coming into Hamilton, the pilot circled the Golden Gate Bridge so the patients could look. I lifted the head of one guy so he could see, his head had been crushed and it felt like crushed eggshells.

"He said 'I never thought I'd see that again'."

Flying back and forth with cargo in addition to wounded soldiers, Moon said that most the time they were only sent to islands after they had been secured.

However, after Allied forces took the island of Guam, Moon said there was still some fighting occurring.

"When we landed on Guam we could still hear them firing in the hills. The soldiers had to go in there with flame-throwers to get the Japanese out.

"One time we even had a fighter escort of P-51 Mustangs to the island."

While never there during an actual air raid, Moon said some other nurses had been on the island when the Japanese conducted nighttime bombing missions.

"I was there one night when we had an alert, but we were never bombed."

While the war provided its fair

share of sad moments, Moon said there were also a few amusing events.

"We used to have to take off after midnight to leave Hickam and go back to the islands.

"Well one night they had to work on the engines before we left. There was a life raft on the ground nearby where they would brief people about ditching at sea, and I went over to lay in it and fell asleep.

"The next thing I know, I hear [roaring plane engines] and I woke up to a guy briefing people about using the life raft. When he walked over to the raft he looked in and said, 'the flight nurse is not standard equipment'," she remembered laughingly.

While in Hawaii, Moon met her husband Howard, who was a navigator on one of the planes, and married him in Honolulu.

After the war, Howard Moon was offered a teaching position at Texas State University and that's how the two ended up residing in the state. They had five daughters together before Howard passed away last year.

After living through WWII and receiving a medal 62 years after wars end. Moon said she was glad that she had volunteered all those years ago.

"I said to the person escorting me back to my seat (at the award



Edna Brackett served as a flight nurse in the U.S. Army Air Corps during WW II.

ceremony) that I'd do it all over again.

"I loved every minute of it, it was an honor and a privilege to serve my country.

"People said we were brave, but we weren't brave, we were just going to work every day."

Edna Moon

MINI REUNION - 812th

Much reminiscing, laughter and some tears were shared when five of the 812thers got together at the home of Mary Manis in Hemet, CA.



What a great looking group ! Edna Brackett Moon, San Marcos, TX
Mabel Irwin Stohlmeyer, Phoenix, AZ Mary Neal Manis, Hostess
Liberty Lee Sakryd, Melbourne, FL and Elizabeth N. Pukas, Chief Nurse,
Walnut Creek, CA

Army Air Forces
School of Air Evacuation

This is to Certify that

Edna Brackett

Has completed the prescribed course of instruction in this School
and is qualified as a

Flight Nurse

Given this 1st day of October 1943

No. 235

R. J. Shrewson
1st Colonel, Medical Corps
Commandant

