

July 25, 2016

Oh, what a night? Do you love history (like me)? Well, tonight was one of those once in a lifetime moments I wish could have been shared with everyone. Lois Pempsell, a Korean War veteran and member of American Legion Post 655, spoke to the Auxiliary tonight on her experience during the Korean War.

I only wish that her children could have been present to see their beautiful mother tell us of her childhood and transformation into a young woman.

Lois was completely prepared. Bringing in her "PT's" and uniform shirts, pants, socks, boots, hats and a cuddly (not so fluffy) stuffed dog and kept with her all the time. Above and beyond that she opened an old plastic bag that contained letters to her mother from a young Army WAC her mother had preserved all of these years.

It was amazing to touch and feel the very uniforms she had worn so many years ago and to go through her photo album with pictures of her as a young woman with her brother at her side. She began to tell us how she and her high school friend wanted to join the Air Force and of the dilemma they had (her friend was 4'11", too short to join the Air Force) and Lois' eyesight being another factor. After their short disappointment being rejected by the Air Force our heroines decided to take another route...the Army.

We got a first hand account of what she experienced at basic training. Her's was the last class of WAC's to complete basic training at Fort Lee, Virginia and the women's barracks. A two story building with exposed 2x4's; a tub on one floor and three (3) spigots for a shower. The latrine divided into stalls to give some sense of privacy. Lois went on to tell us about the one Black female member of their class and how even now, she will never forget her. She recollected the time they had all gone out to eat and how the dinner was segregated. She went on to tell us that even though the young nurses were united and surrounded her in a show of support, increasingly they went out fewer and fewer times.

Lois stopped by a recruiting station today and told us that today 31% of all of the Army WAC's are Black; but, this wasn't a study of racism...this was the story of a young woman from Minnesota who went to Okinawa and survived typhoons and delivered babies under the worst conditions. This was the story of a young woman who felt safe while on the adventure of a lifetime. She recollected the decency of the young Army men they worked with and how she felt threatened after they had left and the Marines had taken over the island. She told us about opening WWII rations and pouring them into a pot to feed all of the pregnant women who had been evacuated from quonset huts to the infirmary when a typhoon hit for two (2) days. She told us about delivering babies after a change in the bariatric pressure and of the close relationships that have survived to this day.

Kudo's Lois Pempsell, your mother and father should be very proud of their little girl, Pidge!

Thank you and John for a wonderful evening I will never forget and thank you for sharing all of your treasures.

Mary Johnson

American Legion Auxiliary

Department of Texas, 12th District

Unit 655 Chaplain

Division 1 PR Committee Member