

U.K. rep thanks W.Va. Rosies for role in WWII

By Veronica Nett November 20, 2010

INSTITUTE, W.Va. -- The women who filled the nation's factories during World War II -- producing weapons, airplanes and ships -- were the backbone of the war effort and the key contributor to the allied victory, a representative of the British Embassy said Saturday at West Virginia State University.

"Without the armories produced by you, we would not have been able to hold out," Maj. Annabelle Janes of the British army told about 20 women who'd worked in factories and in shipyards.

"On behalf of my nation, I'm here to say thank you," Janes said during a ceremony called "Give Thanks to Our Rosies." Thanks! Plain and Simple, a West Virginia nonprofit group that honors veterans, organized the event.

Women were the "civilian heroes" of the war, Janes said.



Maj. Annabelle Janes (second from right) of the British army and a U.K. exchange officer at the National Guard Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Va., is introduced to Rosies Q.D. Woods (left), Gloria Farmer, Vienna Hurt, Dorothy Foster and Neva Rees.



Rosies (from left) Gloria Farmer, Dorothy Foster, Vienna Hurt, Garnet Kozielec and Mary Ann Diamond, as well as U.S. Marine Corps ROTC cadets from St. Albans High School, salute during the playing of the national anthem Saturday during the "Give Thanks to Our Rosies" event at West Virginia State University to honor the women who worked in the nation's factories during World War II.

"Without your contribution, Britain would have been in terrible peril as the rest of Europe," Janes said. "The United Kingdom is so extremely grateful for your critical role in defending our [borders]."

The addition of the "vast supply of U.S. armories" and allied airpower were the main factors that stopped the German Nazi invasion of the United Kingdom and eventually won the war, Janes said.

There are about 140 Rosies living in West Virginia, but just 20 or so were able to make it to the ceremony.

On Saturday, three shared their experiences.

Garnet Kozielec, 93, of Dunbar, remembers the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the moment she realized her fiancé and her four brothers would be going to war.

Determined to do her part, she quit her job at a department store and enrolled in a defense school set up at Stonewall Jackson High School in Charleston.

She graduated with 28 other girls from the Charleston and Dunbar areas and was sent to a California naval dock, working on F6F Hellcat fighter aircraft.

The day Japan surrendered, she was at work, and the women waited anxiously for confirmation that the war was over.

"The tension was almost overpowering," Kozielec said. "Then a voice came over the intercom and said 'The war has ended, go home. Good job.'"

"The place went berserk," Kozielec said.

She remembers running down the hall sobbing, and then she began to make plans to return home to West Virginia, she said.

"I was so thankful that I could have been a part of that era," she said. "Quitting never entered my mind because, as long as my boyfriend and brothers were in the service, so was I."

Vienna Hurt of Bradley was a junior in high school when she left home to work in the Norfolk Shipyard in Virginia. The second daughter of Italian immigrants, Hurt said she grew up in a very protective and strict family.

Hurt and her sister were approached by a family friend about going to Virginia to work in the shipyard, but didn't think her parents would allow it.

"Daddy wouldn't let me go to the movies," she said, "let alone work."

But her father approved, and she and her sister moved to Virginia, where they repaired damaged parts from U.S. Navy ships and airplanes.

The women in the plant never knew what parts they were repairing, Hurt said.

"We weren't told and we didn't ask," she said, "and when an employee did ask, they were told, 'loose lips sink ships,'" she said.

During their time in Virginia, Hurt and her sister also went into a prison of war camp in the area holding Italian soldiers and made a big spaghetti dinner for them.

Gloria Farmer of Omar moved to Detroit right out of high school to work as a riveter making B-24 Liberator and B-29 Super Fortress heavy bombers in a converted Ford Motor Co. plant.

Farmer said she left home to work in the factory as a way to contribute to the war effort.

"I had met a handsome soldier who was going overseas," she said, "and I wanted him to come home."

"These women can tell you more about our history than the history books can," said Anne Montague, executive director of Thanks! Plain and Simple.

The role of Rosies "is more than a war issue, it tells the fuller story of human issues and humanity," Montague said.

After the war ended, many Rosies left their jobs to care for the men who returned - some physically wounded and mentally traumatized, Montague said.

These women and their contribution to the country created a new image of women, and set the stage for future generations, said Airman 1st Class Beth Ott of the West Virginia Air National Guard. Women filled the voids left in the workplace by the men shipped off to war.

Many left their homes and families for the first time to travel across the country to work in factories, she said.

They were the women behind the men with the guns, Ott said. Their unification and the patriotism is what helped ultimately win the war, she said.