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# A Call to Serve

BY JOANNE P. WILLIS

PHOTOGRAPY BY KAREN WEATHERWAX

*Five local women recall their days in the military. Pictured above from left to right are Hilde Evans, Cicely Ward, Betty Reed, Betty Snyder and Genevieve Hewitt.*

World War II changed the role of women in society forever. The United States had supplied weapons to the United Kingdom from the beginning of World War II, but didn't engage in combat until after the Japanese bombed the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. From that defining moment in history until the war ended in 1945, women were called to leave the safety of their homes to help the war effort. Many filled in at work sites for men called to fight overseas. They worked in shipyards and defense plants as welders, crane operators or electricians.

In 1942, while British and American air raids destroyed most German cities, women also began to enlist. An estimated 400,000 women felt a patriotic nudge to wear a military uniform. These women, often unrecognized, heeded the call to *Free a Man to Fight*, as one Army poster beckoned. They performed important jobs; among them were telephone operators, medical technicians, nurses, and bookkeepers. They did whatever was necessary to support the war effort from the home front, so the men could be on the front lines.

Five Tippecanoe Co. Indiana Women Veterans – Betty Reed, Cicely Ward,

Genevieve Hewitt, Hilde Evans and Betty Snyder – all yearned for adventure and wanted to “help out.” They grew up in small towns and were 18 to 22 years old when they enlisted. Admittedly, they were “green” to the ways of the world. Today, they are in their 80s, have lost husbands and two have lost children, but each is content and has a confidence and wisdom that develops only from living courageous lives. They speak of their brief, but impressionable, military experiences with a fire in their eyes, fueled from their hearts. A fire ignited with pride for having served their countries.



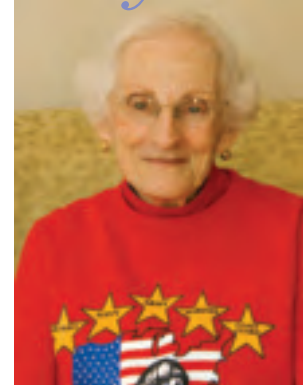
**Betty Reed** was a freshman at Purdue University when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Women weren’t part of the military then, but in January 1944, Reed joined the Coast Guard SPAR. She was influenced by Dorothy Stratton. Stratton was the first full-time dean of women at Purdue from 1932 until 1942, when she was named commander of the SPARS. (The acronym SPAR stems from the first letters of the Coast Guard’s fighting motto: *Semper Paratus*, meaning “Always be ready” and is credited to Stratton.)

“My father also thought it was a great idea for me to join the Coast Guard, which during wartime is part of the Navy,” says Reed. “He was a patriotic WWI veteran and very active with the American Legion.”

With his blessing, Reed went to boot camp in Palm Beach, Fla., for six weeks, where she attended classes on Coast Guard history, learned how to march and did calisthenics on the beach. She was trained as a bookkeeper in the pay and supply department. She was then stationed in New Orleans, where she worked for one year selling military clothes to Navy men and women and another year working in the pay office in Lake Pontretrain.

Reed lived with five other women in an apartment with one bathroom at the foot of the French Quarter. “I loved New Orleans,” she says. “We worked full days during the week for \$50 a month.

## Betty Reed



On weekends, we went to USO dances and parties.”

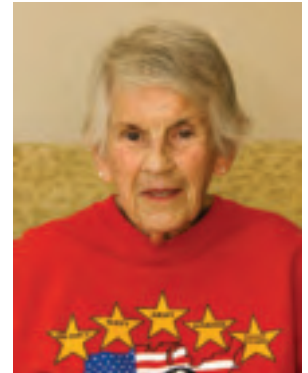
The SPARS were disbanded in 1946, and Reed went to work for the Veterans Administration in Chicago for several years. She married an Air Force veteran who farmed in Shadeland, Ind. At age 50, Reed began work at Ivy Tech in the GED Library Testing Services. She and husband, Bernard, were married 53 years and raised three children. He died in 2003. Today she enjoys living in the patriotic Ninth Street Hill neighborhood.

“I was proud to serve then, and I am proud today. At the spring Conference of Women Veterans in Indianapolis, women in uniform came up to me and said, ‘Thank you for doing a good job, and for opening the doors for me.’”



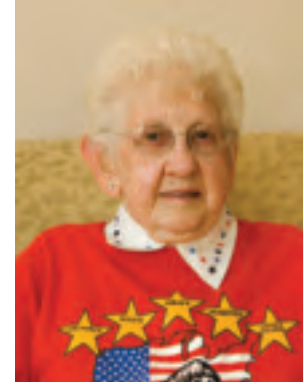
On Sept. 3, 1939 Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. **Cicely Ward** was just 16 years old and recalls the reality – and the fear – of war in your back yard.

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## Cicely Ward

## Genevieve Hewitt



Genevieve Hewitt was the fifth of 11 children. Her mom died at the age of 40 while delivering her youngest sister. At 22, Hewitt joined the Army WAC (Women's Army Corps.), "just because I wanted to help out."

She experienced 12-week basic training in Fort Oglethorpe, Ga. From there she was sent to the Ohio Army Hospital in Zanesville, Ohio, to work as a medical transcriptionist. "There were big wards there. I was doing things the nurses were doing. I was taking care of men in body casts, badly wounded. Many were bedridden.

"I had been so sheltered growing up in Goodland with my seven sisters and three brothers. I got teased a lot by the soldiers coming back from the war. They played a lot tricks on me," she adds with a giggle.

Hewitt was discharged in 1946, married her husband, Richard, and raised four children. She worked for a factory in Lafayette for 21 years. She lost her husband in 2000.



After receiving a psychology degree from the University of Michigan, Hilde Evans soon joined the Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), a division of the Navy, for a 19-month stint.

She traveled by train to New York City for training, and lived with 20 other women in dormitory-style barracks. She stayed in New York and worked as an "interviewer." She participated in the hiring process of others interested in serving her country on the home front. She recalls three uniforms: navy, white and seer sucker. "We were paid about

"I was taught to handle a pitch fork and to kill if someone approached our home," says Ward. "There was one at the front door and one at the back door, just in case. I saw more action as a civilian than I did as a WREN. But given half a chance, I would have done combat, as women are doing today."

Throughout much of England from September 1940 through May 1941, the Germans bombed London and other cities, including Plymouth and Exeter. Those two cities were less than 20 miles from Ward's home. "I would often hear the bombs exploding and even the sounds of machine guns throughout the night."

As soon as she was 18, the minimum age to enlist in England, Ward joined the WREN (Women's Royal Navy Service) in December 1942.

After boot camp in Plymouth, she was sent to Devon Port for 18 months where she was a part of the Ordinary Seaman's Office, doing what today would be considered human resources work. "My job was to get the cards ready for the men, and communicate those orders to them," she says. "I would see those cards come back with the names of the dead sailors. I recall wishing I could pick up a rifle and kill the enemy myself!"

She was transferred to North Devon, near Bristle. She worked in the pay office as a bookkeeper. Her last stint as a WREN was in a Naval hospital near Devonshire. She met a lot of POWs. "Some were blind, most were badly maimed. Remembering those experiences, I would fight today," she exclaims.

Like Reed, Ward lived in barrack-like facilities with other servicewomen. For fun they would play table tennis and go to dances in Bristle. When discharged in 1946, she went to work for a department store in London, and later moved to Australia, where she met her husband, an American. They moved to California in 1959 and then to Lafayette in 1990. They had two daughters, one of whom died in 1996.

Ward officially became a United States citizen in February 2006. That summer she celebrated by hiking the Appalachian Trail – three times!

\$50 a month, and that was enough. We had our room and board, food and clothes taken care of. We always wore a uniform,” she says.

“We were very disciplined. We learned to march. Every day we marched,” she continues. “I don’t ever remember marching in the rain, but we might have. New York was always sunny to me,” she adds with a smile.

When asked how her parents felt about her enlisting, she shrugged her shoulders and says, “Perhaps they had other plans for me, but I never asked them.”

After the war Evans met her husband, Jim, while working for the Veteran’s Administration in Ann Arbor, Mich. The couple married in 1954 and moved to Lafayette, where Jim was a professor of French at Purdue. They raised three children. Her husband died in 2002.



Most of the WAVES were trained in New York City. At the wide-eyed age of 20, **Betty Snyder** looked forward to that. Instead, she was sent to Cedar Falls, Iowa, for Yeoman (a rank in the U.S. Naval Reserve) training for six weeks.

A large number of Yeomans were stationed in Washington, D.C., and that is where Snyder’s first assignment took her. She worked in the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. While there, she was called in

to “take a letter” for a colonel. “I was so nervous, I was sweating,” she recalls. “The colonel asked me what in the devil was I so nervous about. ‘What did you do as a civilian?’ he asked me. I told him I was a dental hygienist. Five days later I received a transfer.”

From D.C. she arrived in Bethesda, Md., helping to care for wounded sailors. She later went to Quantico, Md., to a dental school assisting several dentists. She also lived in dormitory-style housing.

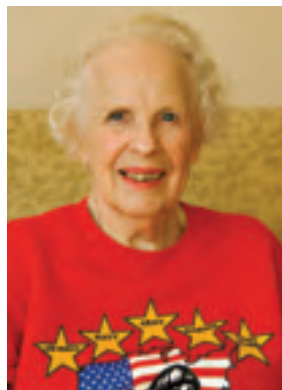
After the war was over, Snyder worked at the Veterans Hospital as a payroll clerk and then for public schools. Her second husband, George, died 15 years ago. Snyder has four grown children.

“The military taught me to take care of myself and to get along with others. We had room inspections every day,” she says. “We learned to do what we were told, to respect others.”

As well as military duties, the women were taught to march and drill at public rallies, recruiting campaigns and troop send-offs. “One of my most vivid memories was marching 16 abreast to see President Truman speak at the foot of the Washington monument. Now, that was thrilling!” she exclaims.



*Hilde Evans*



*Betty Snyder*

