

Pi Phi Honored for World War II Service

By Illinois Alpha **LIBBY MEYER**

California Alpha **PATTY BOUCHARD SPRIGG** was only 16 years old when she enrolled at Stanford University in 1939. By the time she graduated in 1943, the Los Angeles native was a member of the United States Navy. She was assigned to a post in Washington, D.C., where she helped track weather patterns in the Pacific Islands during World War II.

Her Navy story began when Patty and her Pi Beta Phi sisters visited WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) Headquarters in California to inquire about enlisting in the military. “We came back after the tests and I said, ‘What did you think?’” Patty said. “They all said they decided not to join. But I said, ‘Well, I leave in two weeks!’”

Patty wasn’t allowed to serve as a military officer because of her poor eyesight, and instead served at the enlisted level. Despite what most would consider a setback, she went on to graduate first in her class of 150 students — mostly men — at aerography school in New York City. “It was the beginning of women’s liberation,” she said of the women’s role in the war effort.



Below: World War II Veteran **PATTY BOUCHARD SPRIGG**, California Alpha (center), recently traveled to Washington, D.C., as part of the Honor Flight of Portland. She was joined by her daughter, Emily Iverson (left), and granddaughter **ALISON BENSON THORNTON**, Oregon Alpha (right).

After she was discharged from the Navy in 1945, Patty held an exciting string of careers in the entertainment industry, journalism and speech writing. In 2016, she published her first novel, “Bel Air,” and has a second book in the works. But of all her achievements, Patty, who recently turned 95, was especially pleased with a trip she took last September to Washington, D.C., with the Honor Flight of Portland.

The Honor Flight Network is a nonprofit formed to escort World War II veterans to the Washington, D.C., memorial completed in their honor free of charge. The organization was started by the son of a World War II veteran and a retired U.S. Air Force Captain after the men realized many veterans do not have the means to travel and see the memorial. The first Honor Flight took place in 2005 and, today, the organization benefits veterans from World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

The trip was arranged for Patty by her daughter, who sent in an application to the Honor Flight of Portland. Her daughter and granddaughter, Oregon Alpha **ALISON BENSON THORNTON**, then joined her for her trip to D.C. The women enjoyed a tour of the Capitol Building, visited the World War II Memorial on the National Mall and attended the Changing of the Guard Ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

Their first night in D.C., Patty and her fellow veterans were honored at a dinner where they were asked to stand and be recognized for their service. “Many guests at the dinner were saying that this generation, the men and women who fought for our country, have not really spoken of their experiences,” said Patty’s daughter, Emily Iverson. “This was our chance to honor them for their service, and have the opportunity to hear their stories.”

When they visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, Patty was one of four veterans on the Honor Flight chosen to lay a wreath at the tomb during a ceremony with the guards. “It was quite an honor to salute the unknown soldier,” she said. “We all needed a lot of Kleenex®.” ◀