

Cake with a scoop of military honors: Albuquerque woman celebrates 100th birthday with service recognition.

By Rick Nathanson / Albuquerque Journal Staff Writer

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(All photos courtesy of the Blanchard Family)



Dorothy Blanchard turns 100 years old on March 18, and will be presented with the Military Women's Memorial Living Legend Award for her service as World War II WAVE.

Dorothy Jensen Blanchard is getting more than just a birthday cake when she turns 100 years old on Saturday.

The centenarian will also receive the Military Women's Memorial Living Legend Award in a ceremony at the local senior assisted living facility where she resides.

The award recognizes women who served in the military and whose contributions to national defense are inspirational. The award program is part of the Military Women's Memorial and will be presented to Blanchard by Retired Major General Dee Ann McWilliams, the former president of the memorial.

Blanchard joined the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) in 1943 and remained in the service until 1952, when her daughter was born. A division of the U.S. Navy, WAVES was created during World War II, freeing up male personnel for sea duty.

Blanchard's daughter, Linda Blanchard, talked about the military service of her mother, who is in frail health and was unable to speak directly with the Journal.

Blanchard, the former Dorothy Jensen, was known as Dot by family and friends. She grew up in Milltown, New Jersey, "where there was a big military tradition in the town, as well as in her family," Linda said. Dot's father, Louis Theodore Jensen, was a veteran of World War I, and other family members served in various branches of the armed forces.

But it wasn't just their examples that motivated Blanchard — it was also the large, colorful recruiting posters with illustrations of women in naval uniforms and the stirring words imploring women to "Join the WAVES" and "Your country needs you now," said Linda.

Within a few weeks, her mother had finished her training at Hunter College in New York City, was saluted by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and was sporting a uniform like the women in the posters.



Dorothy, a brand new WAVE, 1943

Dorothy Jensen, now Dorothy Blanchard, as a new WAVE in 1943, looking like the women in the colorful recruiting posters that inspired her to enlist.

Her first assignment was with the Merchant Shipping Intelligence Office in the Pentagon. She was later promoted in rank to Chief Petty Officer and was appointed as the private secretary to Admiral Arleigh Burke, who was responsible for all official naval correspondences, including those marked as top secret.



Chief Petty Officer Dorothy served as private secretary to Admiral Burke

Among her first assignments as a WAVE during World War II, Chief Petty Officer Dorothy Jensen, now Dorothy Blanchard, served as the private secretary to Navy Admiral Arleigh Burke.

It was while working for Burke in the Pentagon that Blanchard met the man whom she would marry, fellow Navy chief petty officer Earl Harrison Blanchard. He worked at the Pentagon as an Aerographer, analyzing atmospheric and oceanic data. Ironically, said Linda, they met while her mother was caught outside in a rainstorm while carrying a bag of groceries. Her father was in a passing car and offered her a ride back to her barracks. "He didn't even know her name, but they talked and he was totally smitten with her," Linda said. It took him six months to find where in the sprawling building she worked, and another six months until they were married.

In 1949, with the atomic age picking up energy, Blanchard became part of the team for John F. Floberg, the newly appointed assistant secretary of the Navy. Floberg was a graduate of the U.S. armed forces atomic weapons training center at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque. As Floberg's point-person, Blanchard's administrative duties included setting and tracking his agenda, editing his speeches and touring naval installations around the world with her boss, Linda said.

With the birth of her daughter in 1952, Blanchard left the WAVES, although her husband Earl remained in the Navy for another decade and the family moved around, living in London, Hawaii and various locales in mainland United States. When Earl left the military the family settled in Chapel Hill, where Blanchard worked for the University of North Carolina.

"She basically ran their psychology lab as its administrative assistant and she worked on grant writing, kept

the budget and distributed money,” said Linda. “She kind of took care of everything, relying on skills that she got in the military.”

Blanchard’s husband died in 1989, and in 2000 she moved to Albuquerque to be closer to her daughter.

“Even at age 100, my mother still has very fond memories of the military and has often said that her years in the WAVES were some of the best, most exciting and rewarding times of her life,” Linda said.

And she still appreciates when people occasionally offer the salutation, “Thank you for your service.”

Submitted by LCDR Dennis Ruth, USN (Ret)

Editor’s note: If this article about Dorothy (Dot) Blanchard seems vaguely familiar, it’s a lovely follow-up to “DOC & DOT, A LOVE STORY” published in the February 2021 issue of the Aerograph.