

OBITUARY

Dorothy H. 'Dottie' Davis WWII WASP pilot

By Eric Brazil
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

Dorothy H. "Dottie" Davis, one of a handful of Women Air Force Service Pilots who flew military aircraft during World War II, died Wednesday in her San Francisco home.

She was 77 and had suffered from Parkinson's disease and cancer.

Miss Davis, a retired official with the Veterans Administration, was born in Illinois and reared in North Carolina and became a San Franciscan after a 1942-44 tour of duty as a WASP.

The WASPs were an elite branch of the service. Just 1,074 qualified for their wings. The then-War Department activated WASPs to free up male pilots for combat. WASPs flew trackings and searchlight missions, towed targets for male combat pilots and ferried planes.

"We were the first," Miss Davis recalled in a 1993 interview, after a reporter sought her out for comment on news reports that the Air Force was poised to train American women to fly military combat aircraft. "We were flying combat planes and just about every other plane they had back then."

As World War II wound down, the WASPs were disbanded and virtually forgotten. The nation refused to recognize them as veterans for the purpose of disability and other benefits.

It was Miss Davis who personally launched a successful campaign for official recognition of WASPs as military service veterans.

Her approach to the problem was characteristically direct: She donned her WASP uniform and, armed with a petition to Congress, solicited signatures from the long lines of patrons on Market Street



EXAMINER/1993

Dorothy H. Davis stands next to type of plane she flew as one of few women pilots during World War II, in photo taken at Livermore Airport.

waiting to get in to see the film "Star Wars."

An Examiner feature story on her campaign piqued the interest of its owner, the late newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst Jr., who lent the power of his name and publications to the campaign. In 1977, Congress passed the GI Improvement Act, which authorized the Secretary of Defense to determine that WASP duty was active military service. That determination was made on March 8, 1979.

"Dottie was never afraid to try things," said her friend and fellow WASP Florence Wheeler of Healdsburg. "Right to the end, her spirit was so great. She was a generous, kind, loving person."

A trim and athletic woman —

she fitted neatly into her World War II WASP uniform for a photograph last year — Miss Davis was an avid sailor, taught sailing and swimming, and was a world traveler until stricken by multiple illnesses and severe injuries suffered in a recent traffic accident.

"She had an indomitable spirit," said her old friend Richard Corville, an Alameda engineer. "She was just a very caring, generous person. She was quietly great."

Miss Davis is survived by a niece and a nephew.

There will be no funeral service. Friends wishing to remember her are asked to make a donation to the San Francisco branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or to their favorite charity.