

Generations of women celebrate moving forward

By Scott Woosley, DDC Command Affairs

Women have a rich history of contribution to the historical fabric of the United States. From Molly Pitcher during the Revolutionary War to Rosa Parks during the Civil Rights Movement to current secretary of state, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, women have contributed to the often lively history of our country.

That history is being celebrated throughout the month of March, Women's History Month.

When JoAnn Schopman, manager of the Defense Distribution Center's Women's Employment Program, was deciding how to best celebrate the month, however, she decided to make it a personal celebration for the center's employees.

"I decided to display images of women who have been influential to the DDC workforce," she said. "The display is, in a small way, a celebration of the countless women who have lived their lives quietly contributing to their families, communities and places of work."

Schopman, with the assistance of Leslie Whittaker a management assistant in Acquisition Operations, began contacting employees to get interesting stories either about them, if they were women, or about female members of their families who might have interesting life stories.

"I have received 21 photos so far," Schopman said. "I am thrilled that I have received such a variety of photographs of grandmothers, mothers, aunts and sisters and equally thrilled to hear all the stories behind the photographs."

Schopman obtained photos of many of the women she learned about and put together a display in the lobby of the DDC headquarters.

One of the women in the photographs is Shirley Yager, mother of Mark Libeck, a customer support representative in DDC's Logistics Operations Directorate. Yager broke new ground for women in many ways, according to her son.

"She was considered

a trail-blazer in terms of what women hadn't pursued before," Libeck said. "She was among the first group of commissioned WAVES, or Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, officers to be sworn in from Pennsylvania."

She received a master's degree in chemistry from Bucknell University, in Lewisburg, Pa., and then accepted a commission in the U.S. Naval Reserves. Neither career choice was considered an appropriate one for a woman in those days. In fact, Libeck says his mother originally applied to Lehigh University and was denied admission merely because she was a woman.

"She used to show us the letter," Libeck explained.

His mother attained the rank of lieutenant, and while in the reserves, was assigned to Washington, D.C., in the Ordnance Department, part of what was then the Navy Department. Her duties included ensuring quality control standards were met, a job that was not generally considered one for a woman.

His mother was never one to accept established societal roles. Libeck explained that while looking for opportunities to better herself, his mother would often search the classified ads, which at that time were divided into jobs for men and jobs for women. "She would always pursue the jobs that were listed for men, and never took no for an answer," Libeck said.

After her Navy career she continued to work in non-traditional jobs. Her career included professorships at several institutes of higher learning, including Drexel University and Trinity College. She worked as a chemist with the U.S. Army Petroleum Center at Fort Belvoir, Va., until she retired.

She passed away in 1996, but many of her personal effects from her naval career were donated to the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and are periodically on display there.

Libeck says his mother has inspired him in many ways, including career decisions.

"Her service in the Navy inspired me to enlist," said Libeck who served as a radioman on USS Nimitz from May 1974 through September 1978.

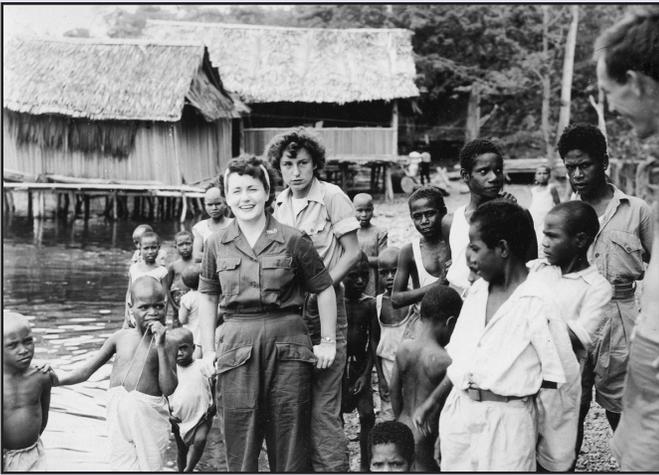
Another of the women in the photographs is Mary Ellen K. Knode, the mother of Susan Williams who works in the DDC command suite.

Williams' mother died recently, but left her a lasting legacy.

"I think I am just now beginning to realize the impact she had on my life and the quiet lessons she



Shirley Yager, mother of Mark Libek of the Defense Distribution Center's Logistics Operations Directorate, poses in her Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, or WAVES, uniform.



Mary Ellen K. Knode, foreground in dark uniform, mother of Susan Williams who works in the Defense Distribution Center's command suite, poses with locals in New Guinea. Knode served in New Guinea during World War II.

taught,” Williams said. “She was always supportive and always believed in me.”

Williams’ mother was a master sergeant in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II and served part of her time in New Guinea. Williams recalls her mother telling her about flying over Pearl Harbor in the cockpit of a plane getting a first-hand look at the carnage and witnessing Japanese troops surrendering. She adds that it was still a difficult time for women.

“Even though WAC (Women’s Army Corps) contributions (to the war effort) were invaluable, they were not always looked upon favorably by the service men,” Williams explained.



Mary Ellen K. Knode, mother of Susan Williams who works in the Defense Distribution Center's command suite, sings during an Army Band performance.

Her mother, a member of what has been called the Greatest Generation, did her part to support the war, then returned to the United States, put her uniform and medals away and resumed life in what was very much a man’s world.

“My mother was like a lot of people of her generation, they

went about their business, worked hard, and did it all without expecting fanfare and recognition,” Williams said

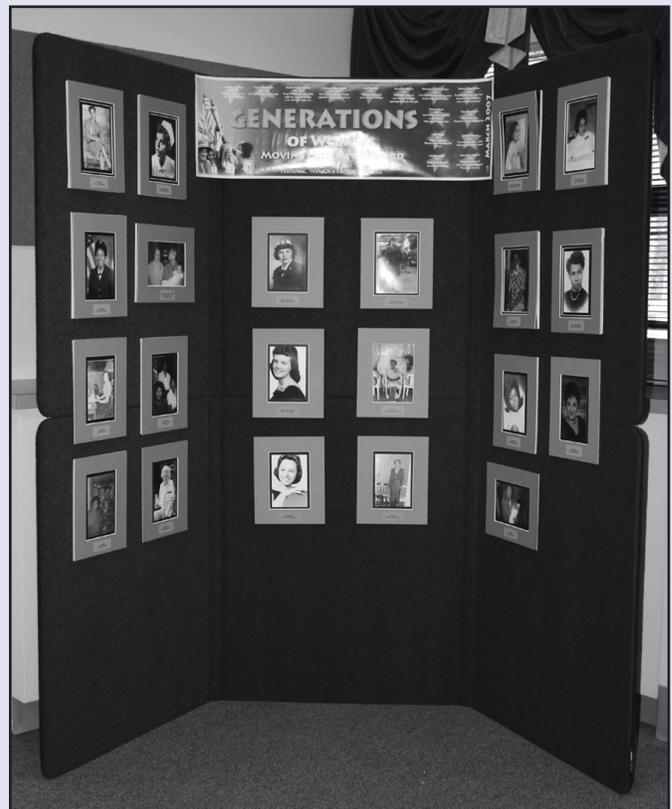
A talented woman, Williams’ mother taught Hawaiian guitar, sang in the Army band, played the piano and organ and became a talented seamstress and crafter. Williams regrets that she inherited little of those talents, but does appreciate the legacy her mother did leave her.

“I do like to think I have the same work ethic and put my all into whatever I do,” Williams said.

Williams believes that Women’s History Month would be important to her mother and is very proud that one of her mother’s service photos is on display for Women’s History Month in the DDC headquarters lobby.

“I’ve always felt she was brave to have joined the Women’s Army Corps and leave her family to serve overseas in war time,” Williams said. “My mother was very proud of her service. It was generations such as my mother’s that paved the way for women of future generations.”

The Women’s History Month display will be in the DDC headquarters lobby through the end of March.



A display with photos of several female relatives of Defense Distribution Center employees, stands in the DDC headquarters lobby to commemorate Women’s History Month.