

VFW Post 1308 highlight female veterans during Saturday's ceremony

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer
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ALTON - “We can never fully repay our debt and gratitude to the 1.1 million services members who have died in conflicts throughout our history, or the more than the 3.1 million that were wounded. We can however recognize the 20 million veterans that are still living today. This morning it is our privilege to say thank you to all of America's veterans, to let them know that we appreciate their service, honor them for their sacrifices and thank them for keeping this nation the land of the free and the home of the brave,” Col. Sue Jano USAF NC said to open the powerful and moving Veterans Day ceremony at VFW Post 1308 Saturday morning.

This year the VFW Post 1308 highlighted the service of women and women veterans.

“According to the VA,” “Women have proudly served in every conflict since the American Revolution. In Iraq and Afghanistan women have served in unprecedented numbers making up eight percent of U.S. veterans. Currently women account for 20 percent of new recruits, 14.5 percent of the 1.4 million active duty forces and 18 percent of the reserved forces.”

Col. Jano thanked everyone present for recognizing the contribution from service women, stating that about 280,000 women have served since 2001, yet continue to feel invisible in regular society.

After a brief moment of silence and a prayer, Mayor of Alton Brant Walker thanked everyone for their service and read the proclamation from the city of Alton recognizing Saturday, Nov. 11, as Veterans Day.

Mayor Walker said he was incredibly thankful to be at the VFW Saturday, stating that it was an honor to be in attendants for the ceremony.

The feeling of respect and honor felt by Mayor Walker quickly spread among the crowd after hearing the incredible careers of keynote speakers Capt. Liz Wszalek USAF and Maj. Nicole Vallareal Batian USMC.

“I feel very fortunate that I have been able to experience the career progression that I have as female in the armed forces,” Capt. Liz Wszalek said. “However I know that wasn’t the case for others, even in my in my early years of service I would hear comments from men such as “women aren’t even veterans,” and “women don’t belong in the military.” But I am so happy to report today that for the most part those beliefs seem to be a thing of the past. Throughout my time in the military, it’s been exciting to see the military extend more opportunities to women.”

“We’re veterans too, absolutely veterans too,” Maj. Batain said as she told her personal story as a service member who accomplished many “first as a women.”

With a list of accomplishments, that include becoming one of the first women to graduate from the Citadel, being the first female Citadel graduate to earn a law degree and working as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff of the G1 in Okinawa Japan, Maj. Batain said she never would have been able to accomplish such feats without the help of family members and veterans before her.

“On this day we honor all military veterans with the respect and gratitude they so richly deserve,” Maj. Batain said. “Their’s is a legacy of selfless service and unwavering devotion to duty. We salute all who have stepped forward to defend America and promote freedom throughout the world.”

“I found myself in several first and only situations,” Batain said. “Being one of the first women at the Citadel was a very interesting experience to say the least. It’s a great place to be from, but it was a tough place to be and they didn’t like us during that time. We were different and it made people question their traditions.”

Maj. Batain said all of her experiences and opportunities were proof of the growth in the military, and a challenge to the traditions, that have been broken for the better.

MSgt. Dave Stout USAF said he was there when the Air Force transitioned female members to what were called “non-traditional roles,” and has seen the tremendous accomplishments that have been made because of that transition.

“That’s mechanics, truck drivers, bomb loaders, gunners, all of that sort of thing that has to happen to make the mission happen,” Stout said. “At that time, there was a resistance to that change. At times it was almost brutal, but you see what 30 years has done. Women now are fully interrogated to the service of this country. They’re soldiers first, and each one of them have a specialty. They have added so much to our mission capability, in defense of this country,

Following the speakers, wreaths were laid for and by the following:

Medal of Honor - Annet and Glenn Wilson

POW/MIA - 2nd Lt. Robert Ryan USAAF

Gold Star Mother - Lynn Lenker

District Commander - Chris Retzer

Dept. Of IL Officers - Aux Sr. Vice Pres. Sue Parris

Alton Post 1308 - Commander Tom Wilson and Aux. President Robert Goodwin

Alton Leathernecks - Mark Nelson and April Butler

American Legion - Wally Ozark

A Few Good Men - Bernie Caldwell and Ed Irwin

Army - 1st. Lt. Amanda Zelnick and US Army Art Moore

Navy - Petty Officer 3rd Class Alice Thompson and USN Bob Hillen

Marine Corps - Sgt. Shannon Yount and USMC Jack Fessler

Air Force - Dana Reams (Desert Shield/Storm) and USAF Bob Isringhausen







