

# Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution

Proudly Honors

Patriot of the Month

November 2021



## Hazel E. Welter

### United States Navy WAVES



Sponsored by:  
Nancy Hunter  
Chapter

It is not often that a 96-year-old resident in a nursing home participates in a pageant for queen of the nursing facilities let alone a woman of such unusual circumstances and background.

Such was the case when Mrs. Hazel Elizabeth Welter was crowned queen of Southeast area nursing homes competing via ZOOM with five other women (60 years old and above) in the finals for District 5 Ms. Nursing Home Queen in September. And, she is not just a pretty face.

Born a native daughter of Cape Girardeau in 1924, Hazel Elizabeth Welter (nee Buckner) was the daughter of a World War I combat Army veteran who was left for dead in a morgue. She saw many of her Cape Central High School male classmates go off to war; however, it was when her next door neighbor boy joined the US Navy and died in battle aboard a ship off of Japan she decided she wished to join the WAVES. The WAVES did not form at the same time as the WAACs. After graduating from high school, she and her mother went to the Navy recruiting office and presented Hazel's birth certificate, the date December 1924, too young to enlist. Mrs. Buckner swiftly took the certificate from the recruiter's hands, declaring there was a mistake, indeed her daughter was 19 years old, changing Hazel's birthdate to a date before June 20<sup>th</sup> to qualify for enlistment. (Why not? Many young men were doing the same thing!) After all, this was war time and the military needed every hand the Armed Forces could get. She hoped to be a parachute seamstress as she would sew on a sewing machine at home many of her siblings' clothes.

Hazel was sent to Hunter College in New York where both enlisted and officer women receive basic training: exercise, learning how to march, first aid, etc., even included the six flights of stairs she climbed to her small room Hazel shared with two other women. With no further training, she was assigned to Hutchinson Naval Air Station, Kansas (in 1939 formerly a Naval Reserve flight training base); however, Hazel's hopes were dashed as she wasn't tall enough to be a parachute seamstress as one had to reach across the diameter of a chute. Instead she was assigned to the Log Office in a hangar to keep track of various records. SM6 or 5 (today's E-3) Buckner was a quick study although she "thought I was a dummy." She learned how to keep record flight schedules, maintenance of aircraft, aircraft parts received, etc. for the pilots as well as the Liberator bombers. The opinion



of the Navy was that women were not suited for flight training or traffic control. Here is the amazing part of SM1 Hazel Buckner's supposedly lack-luster career.

Hazel says that she felt a need to do something herself for the war. So many changes were coming about and patriotism was high. "It was a time to pull together and do the job!" she says. With a quick mind, SM1 Buckner by the end of her tour had reached the pay grade equivalent today of E-7 or Chief Petty Officer. In her day she would have earned \$126 a month. Today, with her responsibility as a "high grade petty officer Division Team Leader, ground equivalent leadership" (Navy description of rate) with eight WAVES to supervise, she would be paid at least \$3,114.30 a month. She had earned her position and carried it out well. Bravo Zulu! In March 1946, Hazel was honorably discharged from the WAVES at Algiers, New Orleans, having taken her first airline flight to Memphis to finally get home.

Marrying Mr. Welter, a discharged US Army Sergeant, they set up a household in what is now Scott City. Hazel joined the VFW there until it closed. She worked for Scott City in the Collection dept. part time, then appointed to Chief Deputy Clerk, retiring after 23 years with Scott County. While in Scott County, she participated in Scott City High School's Booster Club organizing events and encouraging school spirit, and coordinating toy drives for the holidays. Her husband having died, she moved back to her hometown of Cape Girardeau. There she joined the VFW Auxiliary 3838. Mrs. Welter has been a continuous and life member. She worked for Montgomery Ward and volunteered with the Girl Scouts, helped organize food for the needy as well as fund raising with the VFW. Hazel now lives at the Missouri Veterans Home in Cape Girardeau after working tirelessly for others since she was a young girl and is enjoying her retirement years now. Mrs. Welter has one daughter, Tracy Le Grand.

Best advise came from her father: Don't ever go in debt for anything you can eat or wear as it won't last once it is gone (and you are left with the debt).

Hazel's best advice: Work hard, never be late, be pleasant and attentive.

What experience helped her in life: Take the time to figure things out first.

Hazel's most interesting time: Seeing Mardi Gras for the first and only time in New Orleans after her discharge, with sailors on liberty, throwing beads from their balconies.

Nancy Hunter Daughters are proud to honor and recognize Hazel E. Welter as Patriot of the Month for her very patriotic and dedicated service to our great nation.