

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution

Proudly Honors

Patriot of the Month

May 2023



Judith Gaston

United States Air Force

Sponsored by:
Clark County Chapter, NSDAR

Judith “Judy” Webb Merritt grew up in farm house built in the 1750s on Merritt Old Farm, a dairy farm, located in Farmington, CT where her family raised and milked registered Guerneys. She was learning to ride bare-back by age 3 and showed both Guernsey cattle and horses; winning a Grand Champion Ribbon on “Timmy,” her older brother’s horse when about 8 years of age.



Judy would have preferred to stay of the farm, but that wasn’t meant to be. She was a student librarian in high school and worked in the Music Library at the University of Hartford in Connecticut while attending Hartt College of Music with the intent of becoming a music teacher. However, an accident in high school had injured her left wrist when she “took a little tumble” with a horse. That dashed her hopes of becoming a music teacher since she could no longer contort her wrist to play the flute.

Her older brother, who was in Army, recommended she look at joining the Air Force or Navy. “He said, 'Go in, get your GI bill, and decide what you want to do’”. So, she did – and liked it so well, she stayed!

Judy entered the Air Force in 1969. She started out in Supply as the Maintenance Supply Liaison, first at McChord Field in Decoma Washington then at the research and development base Kirtland Air Force Base Albuquerque, New Mexico. Here, she was the first WAF (Women’s Air Force) assigned to a Maintenance Squadron. Her commander said, “What am I going to do with you?” She responded, “What do you mean? Put me to work!”. She learned how to read Technical (TC) Orders with Illustrated Parts Breakdown and was in on the initialization of the base being used as the test site for microfiche to replace the paper TC books.

Judy was transferred to Rockville Air Station in Iceland, to work in Non-Operational Ready Supply (NORS) where she was responsible for contacting the supply depots in states for replacement parts.

From Iceland, she went to F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming as Launch Control Facility Manager where she worked on control sites for Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) Peacekeeper and Minuteman. Judy said, “Great job – spent 3 days in the field then 2 days off or 5 days

off depending on your schedule.” When she was told she needed a special duty job with a long tour over-sea, Judy requested to go back to Iceland, and it was granted. Once that was over, she was sent back to Cheyenne. There she was able to use her teaching education as Chief Instructor of the Division. In all, Judy spent 17 of the 22 years she was in the Air Force, in Wyoming.

She met Roger Gaston while taking an 1876 Living History class that emersed the participant in the clothes, speech patterns, work, and cooking technique. After a couple years, they were both asked to teach the Living History class for the Wyoming State Museum. Judy and Roger married in 1990.

In her last 6 months in the service, Judy worked at Air Force Museum in Dayton, OH. While there, she noticed the helicopter hanging from cables – after checking the tail number and verifying information on the placard, realized it was one she had ordered parts for while working in New Mexico. “When they pickle your aircraft, it’s time to retire.”

When she left the Air Force in 1991, Judy was tickled pink to live on the 4th generation, Gaston Farm. In addition to serving as Roger’s secretary while he was a professor of American History and Native American studies, Judy was the Archivist for Culver Stockton Library for 10 years. They continued with Living History in Fort Madison, IA, volunteering for 1812 reenactments and got involved with Cowboy action shooting, until Roger passed away in 2014.

After 3 surgeries to repair the damage to her wrist, Judy taught flute to individuals and currently serves the community with her participation in several bands. She is the Music Librarian for both the McNamara Band out of Keokuk, IA and Tarnished Brass out of Keosauqua, IA. Judy is currently in the process of building shelves for a music library under the stairs KC Hall in Keokuk for McNamara Band and plans to catalog their sheet music. She is also a member of Fairfield Municipal Band and the Iowa Military Veterans Band who plays in support veteran’s events (including the traveling Vietnam Wall last year in Sommers, IA), annually at the Iowa American Legion’s State Convention, at the Civic Center in Des Moines on Veteran’s Day for their Salute to Veterans, in addition to 10 or 11 other events during summer). Judy was recently agreed to come to the aid of the VanBuren County Players who needed a flute player for their February production of “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum”.

Judy is an integral part of the community, well known for her involvement honoring veterans. A member of the American Legion Department of Missouri Herman Plum Post 192 of Kahoka, Judy serves as Adjutant and Military Honors Chairman. Former Post Commandeer Wayne Wagner philosophy that the commanders would give a eulogy if a shipmate was lost. She inherited this attitude from Wayne and has been contacting Medals of America and translating the discharge of military service into civilian terms for Acknowledgement of Military Service to be placed in newspapers to honor our veterans since 2007. Judy also assists the joint effort of American Legion and VFW in contacting individuals to honor veterans with firing squads at funerals, encourages veterans to file their paperwork at their local courthouse, marches in Old Settlor’s Day parade, and assists with Proper Disposal of Flags during a public ceremony on Flag Day.

The American Legion post has taken over the care of the County Veteran Memorial in Kahoka and started rebuilding the lost book that contains names, service, and decorations of those listed on the panels. Currently, Judy is in the process of indexing those records with the assistance of the local library, courthouse, and public.

Judy still lives on the farm and up to a couple years ago, she had cattle. If you drive by her place, you may see her outside working in a bonnet – something she started some 20 years ago when she had cancer. She makes the bonnets – to wear, sell or give away, and has given classes on making bonnets upon request. Judy has served on County Board of Equalization for 4 years – overseeing property tax disputes before they go to the state.

Judy's commitment to patriotism further emphasizes the need to remember those who came before us, as evident by her assistance with the Clark County Bicentennial Quilt by gathering information and working on the bottom row of quilt blocks that honored veterans in the 6 wars Clark County residents were involved in, including Julia Townsend, a Civil War Metal of Honor recipient.

Since 1978, Judy has served as a Storm Spotter for National Weather, first in the service and now as a civilian. Every day at 5 am and 4 pm, she records the wind and temperature in addition to the start and end of precipitation and snow-board measurements. Occasionally, she will receive a call checking to see if the Medill transmitter still working. Judy considers this an item of public safety, "Even if it is 2 am! I was in the military – it's what I did, just call!"