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World War II vets from Hanover community turn back the clock

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HANOVER — As the country looked back on the recent 70th anniversary of D-Day, three Wheelock Terrace women remember their war efforts on the home front.

During World War II, on June 6, 1944, the Allied invasion of Normandy was the turning point in the effort to liberate Europe from the Nazis control.

The assisted living community Wheelock Terrace boasts three “Rosie the Riveter-type” residents who served stateside during the war: 90-year-old Arleen Gerstenberger served in the U.S. Army, 93-year-old Barbara Easton served in the U.S. Navy, and 91-year-old Muriel Pieklik served in the U.S. Army Air Force.

Easton graduated from Michigan University in 1943 and taught school in Lansing for one year before entering the Navy.

“I was ready to start the second year of teaching, but they were urging woman to join the service and I got coached into it and I never was sorry,” Easton said.

She was an ensign in the U.S. Navy stationed as a code transmitter in Washington, D.C., in charge of sending and receiving codes.

“They worked us round the clock in that coding room,” Easton said.

Because of her job, Easton had top-secret knowledge of D-Day before it occurred.

“I wasn’t supposed to tell that I even worked in the coding room to anyone,”



Three Wheelock Terrace veterans, Arleen Gerstenberger, Barbara Easton and Muriel Pieklik, recall their service as women in the Army, Navy and Army Air Force during WWII. (COURTESY)



Pictured on her wedding day, Wheelock Terrace resident Muriel Pieklik was in the Army Air Force during WWII. (Courtesy)

Easton said.

Gerstenberger joined the U.S. Army as a nurse right after graduating from Lawrence General Hospital's nursing school in Lawrence, Mass., in 1944.

"There wasn't many opportunities. The atmosphere all over was to get as many of the nurses to join up," Gerstenberger said.

She was stationed in Fort Devens, Mass., where she cared for wounded soldiers.

"I would have gone overseas if I was needed, but I was happy to be a fresh face for the men who were sent home because of their injuries," said Gerstenberger. "I was an orthopedic nurse, so I dealt with soldiers who had broken limbs and shattered bones. I am grateful that I helped so many of these brave soldiers heal and that I could send them home to their families."

Pieklik was working in her hometown of Buffalo, N.Y., for the New York Telephone Company when she enlisted in 1944, hoping to be sent overseas. Her twin brother had been injured in the war, so Pieklik also wanted to do something to help in the war effort.



Wheelock Terrace resident Arleen Gerstenberger as an Army Nurse in 1944. (Courtesy)

Because of her experience before enlisting, she was stationed in Newark, N.J., as a telephone operator.

Pieklik's birthday is June 6, D-Day, so she remembers when news of the invasion came out. She had taken the day off to spend day at her aunt's home in Long Branch, N.J.

"Everyone was very excited about it, they were in the streets. They were hugging each other celebrating and everything. All I remember was the war was ending," Pieklik said.
