

30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*

‘The whole country banded together’

Army Nurse Corps veteran Harriet Swanson talks about hard work stateside, abroad during WWII

By Dan Richter

For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

Harriet Swanson was 21 when she and two of her friends from nursing school decided to serve their country.

Swanson joined the Army Nurse Corps in 1943 — during the height of World War II — because of a deep desire to help out the war effort.

“Everyone was thinking about our country at that time. We had just graduated from nursing school and wanted to serve our country the best way we knew how,” said Swanson, 94.

Swanson recently looked back on her time serving abroad and the Honor Flight she shared with her husband, Ralph, in 2010. Ralph will be profiled in Monday’s edition of 30 Days of Honor.

Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?

A: I worked as a nurse in an operating room in England, France and Germany. I spent my first five or six months in the States and then went on to Europe. We went to France shortly after D-Day and landed on Utah Beach. We were soaking wet and had to operate in a tent in a cow pasture until Paris was liberated because we couldn’t get to our hospital there. We went around on temporary duty to different places until we could finally get to Paris.

Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?

A: When we were in England, we didn’t know when D-Day was going to be, so we’d have lots of dry runs so that we’d be prepared. On the morning of D-Day, we knew that was the day because the planes flew over us and covered the sky like a cloud. We were the first hospital where they sent the wounded and I remember so many men being operated on. I was working in eye surgery that day and one young man, about 18 years old, came in because he’d gotten a bullet through each of his eyes and kept asking when he was going to see again.

Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?

A: When the war was over, we thought it was the war to end all wars, but it wasn’t. What I remember now is how everyone in the States worked as hard as we did overseas. My mother made bandages for us to use. Everyone was very loyal and the whole country banded together. They would send us packages and letters and we’d be so excited when the mail came.

Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.

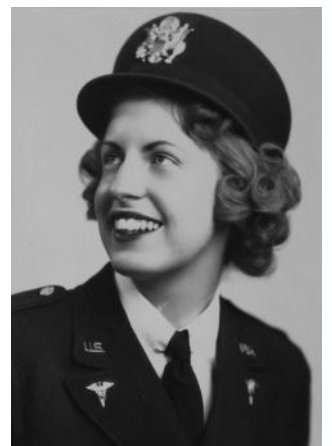
A: I worked at Trinity Hospital in Ashland in the operating room for about a year and a half after the war. I met my husband, who was also in the war, and we started dating and eventually married. We’ve been married for 68 years now. I’ve also kept in touch with a French operating room nurse that I met in Paris, and we even went back to France and stayed with her for the 50th anniversary of D-Day.

Q: What did going on the Honor Flight mean to you?

A: I have a sister that lived in D.C., so I used to go there a lot. I hesitated at first about going, but it was the trip of a lifetime. I would certainly advise any veteran who hasn’t gone on an Honor Flight to go. It was emotional for us all — I don’t think there was a dry eye on the trip — but everyone was so gracious, and it was great to see those memorials.

ABOUT HARRIET SWANSON

Age: 94
Residence: Winchester
Conflict involved in: World War II
Military branch: United States Army Nurse Corps
Years of service: 1943 to 1945
Rank upon discharge: Captain



CONTRIBUTED
 Harriet Swanson is shown in military uniform.

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Harriet Swanson was photographed at her Winchester home, Wednesday, May 6, 2015.



A FLIGHT TO NEVER FORGET

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken more than 1,700 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>

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