

Breaking Barriers and Leading the Way: Honoring Hazel White for Women's Month



Throughout history, women in the military have broken barriers, overcome adversity, and paved the way for future generations. Hazel English White, U.S. Navy (1983 – 1998), is one of those trailblazers. Her career in the Navy spanned 15 years, during which she served in a variety of roles, from ship repair to administrative leadership. In honor of Women's Month, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) proudly recognizes her dedication, resilience, and unwavering commitment to equality in service.

A Journey of Service and Strength

Hazel White began her Navy career in November 1983, completing Boot Camp in Orlando, Florida. She initially trained in Molder (ML) A School in San Diego, California, but due to a contract violation, she was reassigned to Basic Electronics & Electricity (BE&E) School and promoted to E-2. After sustaining multiple injuries during training at Great Lakes in Waukegan, Illinois, Hazel demonstrated resilience and determination by continuing her service. She received orders to the fleet in Charleston, South Carolina, where she worked in Port Services on Yard Tug Big (YTB-792), later transitioning to the Electronics (ET) Shop, where she was promoted to E-4.

Her dedication led her to an assignment aboard the USS Sierra (AD-18), where she took on increasing responsibilities, managing female berthing operations as an MAA, serving in the Safety Office and Engineering Department, and participating in two Mediterranean deployments, including service during Desert Storm and Desert Shield. She continued her career aboard the USS Frank Cable (AS-40), where she worked in Nuclear and Electronic Repair before transitioning to shore duty at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY), Japan. In Japan, she was assigned to the Transient Personnel Unit, served as a Watch Stander, and became an Equal Opportunity Officer (EEO).

After 15 years of dedicated service, Hazel was medically separated due to additional ankle surgeries, bringing her military career to an end. However, her contributions and impact on the Navy remain significant.

Recognizing a Career of Excellence

Throughout her time in uniform, Hazel's dedication was recognized through numerous military awards and commendations. She received the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, the Navy Battle "E" with two "E"s, the National Defense Service Medal, the Kuwait Liberation Medal, the Navy Sea Service Deployment Medal with a Bronze Star, the Humanitarian Service Medal with a Bronze Star, the Southwest Asian Service Medal with a Bronze Star, the Navy Good Conduct Medal with two Bronze Stars, and the Navy Achievement Medal.

Each of these decorations represents not only her dedication but also her ability to excel in demanding environments. Her unwavering commitment to service and leadership in both operational and administrative roles paved the way for many who followed in her footsteps.

Fighting for Equality in Service

Hazel joined the Navy seeking training, stability, and equal pay for equal work. At a time when women had only been serving aboard ships for less than a decade, she was determined to prove that she could perform any task, regardless of gender. She recalls that her goal was to prove to the courts that she could support herself and her daughter, ensuring joint custody. Having graduated high school in 1976, just two years after women were first assigned to ships, she was confident that she could meet the same standards as her male counterparts.

Her time in service was not just about fulfilling a duty - it was about setting a precedent. Whether she was working as a Laundry Petty Officer in Boot Camp, a Deck Seaman on a Tugboat, or coordinating operations during hurricane deployments, Hazel lived by the principle of equal opportunity for equal work and pay. She worked tirelessly to show that women could take on the same roles and responsibilities as men, making strides toward gender equality in the military.

A Message for the Future

Even after leaving the military, Hazel remains committed to the idea that success is only achievable if one makes the effort. She believes that the VFW should reflect the same values she upheld in her service - ensuring that every veteran, regardless of gender, is given the opportunity to contribute and lead. As she sees it, success is possible only for those who seek it out and put in the work to make it happen.

As we celebrate Women's Month, Hazel White stands as a shining example of perseverance, leadership, and the fight for equality. Her journey serves as an inspiration to women in the military today and future generations to come.

For her courage, dedication, and impact, the VFW is proud to honor Hazel English White as a Women's Month Honoree.