

She delivered: World War II Veteran Maj. Fannie Griffin-McClendon

Phoenix VA recently honored Maj. Fannie Griffin-McClendon (Ret.), the last surviving member of World War II's 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the "Six Triple Eight," all-Black unit of the Women's Army Corps.

"I am honored to be recognized for the work the women did to get mail to the troops all over the world," said McClendon. "I just wish some of the other women were here to see it too."

'No Mail, Low Morale'

Birmingham, England, 1945. It was the thick of World War II. Back home, civilians worried about their brave service members. They poured their concern and love into millions of letters, notes, gifts, and photographs.

Constant troop movements led to massive mail delays that damaged morale across the military. Expected to fail, the women of the Six Triple Eight were tasked with clearing the backlog in six months, working in frigid, barely lit warehouses.

The women did it in half that time, working around the clock in three shifts. Their motto was "No Mail, Low Morale." By the war's end, they cleared over 17 million pieces of backlogged mail, making sure the troops stayed in touch with their loved ones back home.

Part of the difficulty of the work was finding the right service member. Mothers would write to "Buster, U.S. Army," or "Junior, U.S. Army." They'd send fried chicken from home or other food, and the women battled mice and rats while sorting the huge stacks. And there was the heartbreaking task of returning hundreds of pieces of mail because the service member had died.

A celebration of service

The Phoenix event was a celebration of McClendon's service. She spent more than two decades in the military, switching to the Air Force in 1950 and becoming a squadron commander of an all-male squadron.

The 104-year-old Veteran received a VA Centenarian certificate, a lifetime membership to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a proclamation from the City of Tempe. Rep. Greg Stanton (Ariz.) spoke at the event; in April he presented the prestigious Congressional Gold Medal, granted to the battalion. He also interviewed McClendon for [the Library of Congress Veterans History Project](#) in 2019.

Nearly 300 attendees gathered for the celebration, which featured a presentation of colors by the Luke Air Force Base Honor Guard, the National Anthem performed by Britahn Newbill, and a keynote address by Col. Wanda Wright (Ret.), director of the Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement at Arizona State University.

Guests also could view artifacts from the Six Triple Eight traveling museum, curated by Vietnam Veteran James Marshall, whose late mother, Odessa Taylor Marshall, served in the battalion.

"The living history of the World War II generation is coming to a close, and at VA, we are committed to honoring them," said Elijah Ditter, Phoenix VA interim Medical Center director.

A bronze plaque honoring McClendon and the Six Triple Eight will be permanently displayed at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center.

Submitted by Shevonne Cleveland, Phoenix VA, chief of Public Affairs.