

Zipp the Clown; an Unusual WW II Veteran

Zipp McCright got a call one day in May 2014 telling her that as a WWII Veteran she had the opportunity to be part of a V Day 70th anniversary celebration. She was surprised, and even corrected the caller saying she was not a veteran, but the caller insisted; long lost records showed that 70 years ago, she had in fact, done her part in the war and they wanted to show their gratitude. At age 88, she was going to get an exciting opportunity she would never have ever imagined.

Back in 1944, Zipp was a recent high school graduate working in a factory on 7th street in St Paul, MN where she made the wings for B 17 bombers. She was there the day the boss walked in with a huge announcement; V DAY had finally come! It was May 8, 1945 and the war was over! She was 18 years old so she was given a quart of 7-UP and celebrated with a crowd dancing and cheering up and down the street. She soon went off to college unaware that so many years later she would get the surprising call that would transport her back in time.

After college, Zipp worked as a newspaper reporter in Illinois, Minnesota, San Diego, and had a multitude of careers including working as a nurse while raising eight children. At one point, while going through a divorce, she decided to follow a long desired dream and took flying lessons in Concord, California at Buchanan Field where she achieved her pilot's license goal. She remembers once flying a new Piper in San Diego and a crop duster Cessna that she had to emergency land in a field after her radio malfunctioned and only relayed an opera station when she was trying to get emergency landing help.

In her later years, she went to clown school and had planned to be an aviator clown named Michael, but once she had on all her clown face makeup, she put on the WWII helmet and goggles that she had, only to find that they completely covered her face and made it hard to tell she was a clown! Her friends suggested a new name that would exemplify her personality; she was always busy, never still for a minute and that is how she became Zipp the Clown. She went on to run a clown school in Fresno, Pleasant Hill and the Bay Area for 30 years, graduating over 400 happy clowns, including some doctors, nurses and lawyers, who love her and carry on her dream of making the world a happier place.

So on May 14, 2014, Zipp, at age 88 and confined to using a motor scooter, got herself on the LINK bus to the Buchanan Field on June 8, 2014, the day the caller had told her the B 17 bombers would be in her town. There she met Art Thompson, the owner of Pacific States Aviation who escorted her to the tarmac where she was able to run her hands once again, over the B 17 bomber wings she had been a part of making 70 years earlier. She watched as the only two remaining flying bombers in the US, took off and landed and she felt the thrill of all the years of history of the flying fortresses that she had a small part in that had been so critical to winning the war effort.

Zipp, who never turns down the opportunity for an adventure, wanted nothing more than to fly in the bomber. She was rolled out to the B 17 in her wheelchair but since she was unable to climb the ladder into the cockpit, the aviators decided to push and pull her through a small opening in the back of the plane. They strapped her in to the front seat in the radio controller's position and she recounted, "When the rotors roared to life I felt a thrill roll through my tummy! It was thrilling to fly over the delta again and the other landmarks I had once flown over as a student pilot so many years ago."

Zipp was impressed with the kind and attentive men at the air show who assisted her and she returned home with a happy heart and a commemorative B 17 t-shirt. She may not have been a fighting veteran of WW II but she did her own part to contribute and forever carries gratefulness and patriotism for our country with her and her wish is that this part of history never be forgotten.