



**Reading Eagle: Ron Devlin** | Linda Thompson displays some of the items from her mother's World War II memorabilia, which she brought to her recent speech at Heritage of Green Hills retirement community in Cumru Township. With her are David Morton, center, association president of the Heritage Veterans Association, and Ethan Smith, 92, who served in the Army Air Corps in World War II.

## Reading woman's collection provides singular view of WWII

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By [Ron Devlin](#)

In 1943, Mary Jane Painter quit Albright College to join the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, or WACS.

A Reading Eagle photograph shows Painter and several other young women leaving the Franklin Street Station to join "Uncle Sam's feminine ranks."

That 21-year-old woman who left Reading at the height of World War II could not have imagined the saga that would unfold over the next two years.

Painter would be trained as a cryptologist with the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency, and would spend tours of duty in North Africa and Italy.

When she died in 2000, Mary Jane Painter Thompson left behind a treasure-trove - scrap books, insignias and her uniform - that paint a portrait of the war seen through the eyes of a young Reading woman.

Linda Thompson, her daughter, has assembled her mother's memorabilia into an impressive collection that is being sought by the World War II Museum in New Orleans.

Recently, she displayed the collection at a meeting of the Heritage Veterans Association in The Heritage of Green Hills retirement community in Cumru Township.

"My mother was an extraordinary woman who led an extraordinary life," said Thompson, featured speaker at the meeting. "She was part of the Greatest Generation of men and women, who selflessly served their country in time of war."

David Morton, president of the Heritage veterans organization, was impressed by Thompson's dedication to her mother's memory.

"She sure has a great remembrance of her mother," said Morton, 84, who served in the Air Force during the Korean war. "It's nice that she can preserve things that tell us so much about what happened during World War II."

After World War II, Thompson completed her degree at Albright College. She held offices in the Veterans Of Foreign Wars, to which she belonged for 30 years.

Linda Thompson, president of the Pagoda Writers Group, said her mother's writings and photographs of people she served with stand as a monument to that generation.

"I believe the huge cache of memorabilia she left behind is a treasure," Thompson said. "She would be very humbled, but very honored, to be recognized for her lifetime achievements."

Because of her mother's service, Thompson has been invited to attend The OSS Society annual banquet Nov. 7 at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Washington.