



PHYLLIS MICHAUX
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news

AAWE

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Phyllis Michaux – A True American Hero



Phyllis Michaux was a pioneering leader in obtaining citizenship rights for Americans abroad and their children, as well as an inspiration to all overseas Americans for more than 50 years. Her vision, organizational skills, and determination led first to the founding of AAWE in 1961 and then AARO in 1973. Phyllis led the effort to

Presentation of the flag to Phyllis' family in recognition of her military service



and to receive Medicare and Social Security benefits, as well as equitable tax treatment. Her book *The Unknown Ambassadors: A Saga of Citizenship* was published in 1996. She received the first Eugene Abrams Citizenship Award from American Citizens Abroad in 1996, and



change laws affecting not only the citizenship rights of Americans abroad, but also their right to vote in Federal elections,



the first Outstanding Service Award from AARO in 2010. Phyllis passed away in Deauville on June 29, 2015.

Commemoration

On Saturday, September 26, 2015, AAWE and AARO members joined with her friends and family at the American Church in Paris to commemorate Phyllis' life. Speakers were: Pamela Combastet, President, AAWE; Carolyn Granier-Deferre, Phyllis' daughter; Isabelle Michel, Founding Member, AAWE; Lucy Laederich, President, AARO, Past President, AAWE; Kathleen



AAWE founder, Phyllis Michaux (photo: James Kigin)

de Carbuccia, Founding Member AARO, Honorary Member AAWE and AARO; Michael Adler, Honorary Member AAWE and AARO; and Kristina Keenan, Veter-

ans of Foreign Wars, Benjamin Franklin Post 605, Paris. Attendees were also asked to share thoughts and memories of Phyllis. In recognition of Phyllis' honorable military service, the



Olive Lorsignol with Phyllis' daughter, Carolyn Granier-Deferre

Speakers Lucy Laederich, Kathleen de Carbuccia, Michael Adler, and Isabelle Michel



“She always gave the glory to others, wanting none for herself. If she is hearing me now, she’s probably scowling and motioning to me to cut the compliments and move on.”

Michael Adler

Betty Abugheida speaking with Kristina Keenan, who represented Veterans of Foreign Wars

commemoration concluded with a stirring Taps and Flag Ceremony. A reception followed in the Theater.

In Isabelle Michel’s words

Marilyn, a Girl Scout leader along with me at the American Cathedral, saw the ad Phyllis placed in the *Herald Tribune* and phoned me immediately. She told me: “There’s this Phyllis Michaux who’s exactly like us, her husband is French, just like ours, and she wants to have American women, just like us, meet her and see what we can do together. I’m going, you must come!” Just after Marilyn had hung up, Carol, another friend, phoned. Her friend Kitty had seen the ad and was all set to go. But Carol had the



same problem as I did: she lived in the suburbs, and she had THREE young ones.... My suggestion to Carol was: “why can’t Kitty drop her two-year-old off at your house and drive you into town for the meeting? I’ll come over with my children, and babysit for the whole gang.” And so it came to happen...babysitting was my contribution to the very first meeting....

In Lucy Laederich’s words

After the first citizenship battle fought with AAWE, Phyllis became concerned that, without the vote, it would be difficult for Americans overseas to win many more. She was also aware that Washington, then even more than now, was run by men, and that a group of women who appeared to have chosen to live in a fancy city in France might lack the gravitas it would take to take on her next challenge.... AARO’s mission from the beginning was Phyllis’s larger mission – to defend the rights of Americans living abroad....

With the former president of FAWCO, Sonia Minçbère, she devised the now-famous “teabag campaign”, protesting “taxation without representation” for Americans



Michael Adler

abroad and organizing a small army of would-be voters all around the world to send teabags to Washington in support of legislation that seemed to be going nowhere. And it worked. Washington was inundated, powerful people like Barry Goldwater realized for the first time that there were potential voters “over here” who should not be lost, and overseas Americans won the right to vote in 1975.

In Kathleen de Carbuccia’s words

What a legacy Phyllis left! First, the family – eight French grandchildren... many of whom have worked or studied in the US and have US nationality. And so many other children who have the opportunity to do the same. Many times Phyllis told me these children would be the hope of the future—so at-

tractive, intelligent, bilingual, and bicultural. She was convinced that US decision makers only had to look at this new, international generation to see what an asset they would be as citizens.

She made friends everywhere.... She wanted to know their stories and she remembered them. She didn’t make a big effort to be polite but she always tried to be helpful, which could mean anything from giving citizenship advice to reading their palms. Even more remarkable is the fact that she did not make enemies. At least I never heard of any.... She may have annoyed people with her prodding, she may have stepped on some toes in Washington, but she did it with well-worded arguments and without animosity....

In Michael Adler’s words

Phyllis was, as are we all, a complicated person. Certainly not a saint. Many words come to mind to describe Phyllis: intelligent, fully engaged, demanding, capable of being a genuine curmudgeon at times, wise, energetic, attuned to life’s mysteries....

She fully understood that accomplishing anything worthwhile was a step-by-



Michaux family exiting with the flag

AAWE President, Pamela Combastet





Corinne Ott, Josh O'Donovan, Jude Smith, and Janine Brimbal

step process. And she embraced that process willingly. She was forever clipping news articles, following up on references she found, identifying people who could be enlisted to the cause, making connections, moving forward....She once sent me a card, the gist of which was: "When you are by the water, always have your hook ready for action because you never know when something useful will take hold of it."...

We are all blessed to have had you in our lives not just for the improvements that were made in citizenship, voting, taxation and the rest for Americans abroad. But also, we are blessed with the many friendships and the sense of deep community that have developed through the AAWE and AARO.

In Kristina Keenan's words

Phyllis said, "I joined the service because I was a war widow, at age 20. There was a lot of steam about WWII at the time. And a great deal

of feeling for that war. And I guess that's why I joined." Phyllis traveled to Europe on the Queen Elizabeth with 15 other OSS women and over a thousand male service members. She landed in Scotland on June 6, 1944, D-Day, and a few days later arrived in London....

Her service paved the way for women like me who would later join an American military that had integrated women into its ranks, where I would earn the same pay as my male counterparts, and where my contribution would be recognized through the medals which I wear today. As a proud veteran, I would like to commend Phyllis Michaux, wherever she may be, for her distinguished military service, for her willingness to volunteer during wartime, and for her bravery. She was a true American hero.

Jane Mobbille

Marianne Calegari, Ellen Lebelle, and Joan Muller



Katia Robinson and Corinne Slama

