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Lake George Superintendent of Schools Lynne Rutnik hands an honorary diploma to Lake George resident William Frederick Miller Jr. at a special ceremony held on Wednesday. Miller had to leave school after his junior year in 1944 when he was drafted into the U.S. Navy.

'A tremendous honor'

Lake George WWII veteran receives a high school diploma

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LAKE GEORGE — William Frederick Miller Jr. did not want to come to the high school on Wednesday.

Miller, 94, left what was then Vincentian Institute in Albany

after his junior year in 1944, when he was drafted into the U.S. Navy. Lake George school officials found out he never returned to get his diploma and they wanted to fix that.

Elected officials and friends and families gathered on Veterans Day to award him not only a honorary diploma from Lake George, but one from Vincentian Institute. That school no longer exists but is now part of Bishop Maginn High School.

Lake George Principal Francis Coccozza said Miller's daughter, Kathy Gowen, told him her father thought he wasn't worthy of any recognition.

"So, we lost a little sleep wondering whether he would come," Coccozza said.

He said all of those assembled could not disagree more strongly. Miller is deserving of recognition.

Sen. Betty Little, R-Queensbury, said she was trying to

imagine what was going through the mind of a high school junior being drafted into war.

"My country needs me. I'm going? Those had to be words going through your head constantly," she said.

State Sen.-elect Dan Stec, R-Queensbury, said he was pleased to recognize a fellow Navy man.

"From one trusty Shellback to

Miller

From A1

another, I say Bravo Zulu and well done," he said.

A Shellback is a sailor who has crossed the equator, and Bravo Zulu is a Navy flag symbol that means well done.

Mayor Robert Blais said Miller is a symbol of all the men and women who had to leave their homes and give up their lives to protect this country.

After the ceremony, Miller was still humble.

"I am not deserving, because I was just one more guy in service, and whatever came, came. And I managed to get through it, luckily," he said.

Miller said growing up he had been involved in Boy Scouts. He and his friend decided to start a Sea Scout patrol, and he immersed himself in anything to do with water or boats.

"When I enlisted into boot camp, it was kind of a breeze for me because I had that former training," he said.

He went to radio school and was shipped to the Pacific theater during the war.

"At that point in time, it had been the biggest turmoil that our country had ever gone through. I lost a lot of friends and some relatives," he said.

He does not share many stories about the war but said one of his missions was to protect the Solomon Islands from the Japanese.

After the war, he was offered a trip to Antarctica to assist naval researchers. That would



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William Frederick Miller Jr., of Lake George, is pushed down the hall of Lake George Junior-Senior High School by his grandson Isaiah Gowen. Miller had to drop out of school in 1944 when he was drafted into the U.S. Navy. He received high school diplomas from Lake George and the Vincentian Institute at a special ceremony on Wednesday.

have meant signing up for another four-year stint, however, so he got out of the service.

He returned home to Albany, where he worked as an assistant manager in a men's clothing store for a time. His father worked as an agent for the American Oil Co. and asked if he would come up to Glens Falls to help run the business.

Miller married his wife, Marie, in 1949. His father bought a piece of property on Glen Lake and eventually sold it to him, and in 1951 they built their home, where they still reside.

Marie has been by his side for 71 years.

"Love each other. Care for each other, but talk.

That's the secret," she said when asked what makes a long-lasting marriage work.

"We've had no problems for 71 years, and I'll give her more credit than I will take," he agreed.

One of his grandsons, Isaiah Gowen, has followed his example and is currently serving with the U.S. Navy. He presented his grandfather with a paddle, which he said is a powerful naval symbol.

"No matter how rough the seas get, you can always paddle back to shore," he said.

Gowen said his grandfather inspired his desire to go into the service.

"He would tell some stories growing up, but not in great detail because we were so young," he said. "When he told those stories, he had a sparkle in his eye."

Kathy Gowen said she believes her father is happy he now has the diploma from Vincentian Institute.

Miller said it means a lot to him.

"I hadn't really given it that much thought all these years, but it certainly is a wonderful gesture," he said. "This has been a tremendous honor."

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