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Beverly Stone rose above much adversity

Friday, November 11, 2005

By **PATRICIA C. McCARTER**
Times Staff Writer patriciaacm@htimes.com

American Indian made mark as pilot in WWII and after

It's hard for Eve Stone Jenkins to find the starting place of the story of her mother.

Should she start with Beverly Stone's adventures as not just a female pilot in World War II, but an American Indian female pilot? Or maybe how her mother taught men to fly in a time when there were only a handful of female pilots. Or she could talk about her mother's courage after a plane crash that broke 128 bones.

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"I was so proud of my mama, I don't know what to say," Jenkins said. "She had the best heart. Even though she was in pain for the rest of her life after that plane crash, she helped me raise my children and my grandchildren.

"Everybody loved my mama. She took in people and let them sleep on her couch. Unless you knew her, you can't understand what a wonderful woman she was."

Stone, who moved to Madison County 15 years ago to be near her daughter, died on Tuesday. She was 82.

She grew up on the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Arizona and New Mexico, in a situation her daughter called "horribly depressing." Because there were no jobs "and all the men took to drinking," Stone knew she wanted something different for her life. She got a sponsor family from Catholic

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Charities to help her off the reservation at age 16.

"I don't know what would have become of her if it hadn't been for the Catholic Church," Jenkins said. "The Church was so good to her, and that's why she was so good to everyone else."

From there, she joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots, fibbing about her age so she could get in two years early. In that role, she helped ferry bombers from Texas to Hawaii and the Philippines. Sometimes the WASPs carried personnel or munitions on their planes, too.

"It was an amazing thing for an Indian woman to do," Stone's daughter said. "She was unique. She was rare."

After the war, Stone went to work for AT&T. Jenkins said that on the weekends, her mother taught flight school for the Federal Aviation Administration. Also, the state of New York hired her to oversee pilots' recertification.


She found time to teach her children - Jenkins and her two brothers - to fly. Jenkins said she used that knowledge to get a pilot's slot in the U.S. Marines, where she flew C-130s.

In 1965, Stone's flying career ended when one of her students had a grand mal seizure, lost consciousness and crashed a two-seater plane. Jenkins said her mother, who was 42 then, was in and out of hospitals for years after the accident, and continued to suffer from those injuries until she died, 40 years later.

Jenkins said her mother had a wish for her ashes to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, but the family doesn't have the money to take her ashes there. Maybe one day, Jenkins said.

"She got communion right before she went into her coma, so I know she's in heaven," her daughter said. "And now she has her real wings."

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