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Blanche Osborn, right, returns from training on a B-17 with, from left, Francis Green, Ann Waldner and Margaret Kirchner. The photo, taken in 1943, was used by the War Department to publicize the war effort. Later, the photo appeared in several publications, including Glamour and Elle.

Courtesy U.S. Air Force

## Female pilots honored for WWII service

### Late Bend resident among those recognized by Obama

By [Patrick Cliff](#) / *The Bulletin*

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Blanche Osborn Bross was among 1,074 women who flew for the Women's Air Force Service Pilots during World War II.

Before joining WASP in 1943, Bross was a plumbing company's accountant. WASP existed for more than two years, and during that time its pilots served domestically, delivering planes to domestic military bases and flying cadets on training missions. During that time, WASP pilots flew more than 60 million miles.

Bross flew B-17 bombers during her service.

The group struggled for decades to be recognized as veterans, a designation they received in 1977. On Monday, that recognition went a step further when President Barack Obama awarded WASP the Congressional Gold Medal.

Bross died at 92 in 2008, but the honor would have been important to her, said Charles Bross, her son.

"She would've been really happy," Bross said. "She worked really hard to get recognition."

It wasn't until Nov. 23, 1977, that WASP's service was recognized as active duty, when President Jimmy Carter signed a bill granting the women benefits.

The delay, Charles Bross said, frustrated his mother.

"She didn't like it. She didn't like it at all," he said.

In 2003, Bross told The Bulletin that WASP was part of the war effort and deserved recognition.

"For me, it's not personal, but it needs to go down in history that we were there," Bross said at the time.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Bross lived in Bend with her husband, Willis H. Bross, for about 10 years.

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