



GLORIA COLLINS



Gloria Lorraine (Nelson) Collins, 84, died June 19, 2007, at home in Anchorage, surrounded by her family, after a brief illness.

In accordance with her wishes, no funeral is planned. In recognition of her military veteran status, her ashes will be buried at the National Cemetery at Fort Richardson. A celebration of life will be held later this summer.

She was born March 8, 1923, in South Bend, Wash., to Herbert and Ina Bourke Nelson. The youngest of seven children, she graduated from Ocosta High School near Westport, Wash., in 1940. She had a passion for flying airplanes and in 1944 entered the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program. Her family

wrote: "These were the first women pilots in our nation's history trained to fly military aircraft, and they flew every type of American military aircraft during World War II. These civilian women completed, in nine months, the same pilot training as men in the military completed in 13 months. Of more than 25,000 women who applied for this program, 1,830 were accepted, but only 1,074 completed the training. Gloria graduated with the class of 44-W-9 at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas. The program was deactivated as the war ended. In 1977, the women who had completed the WASP program were awarded military veteran status."

Following graduation from the WASP, Gloria was assigned to operations at Merced Army Air Base in Merced, Calif., where she flew AT-6s. After the WASP program was deactivated, she worked as a civilian instructor pilot in Spokane, Wash. Later, she started the Sea Treats seafood gift and mail order business for Nelson Crab Co. in Tokeland, Wash.

In 1947, she met and married Lt. Mandle "Rip" Collins, an Army Air Corps pilot, and moved to Florida. She continued working with Sea Treats for several years, until devoting her time to raising a family. In 1954, they moved to Moses Lake, Wash., and in 1960 to Tacoma, Wash., following her husband's Air Force career.

After he retired, they moved to Anchorage in 1968, where she was a homemaker. In 1981, after her family was grown, she became a real estate agent. She retired in the mid 1980s to join her husband in retirement activities, with favorites being gardening, fishing, and camping. Gloria was intrigued by growing plants; her last new project this summer was to try to grow a watermelon in their new greenhouse. She loved music and discussing current political and financial events.

Gloria was a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots organization, and she was honored to be featured in the limited edition book "WWII Airmen: On Common Ground" by Doug Allen, published in 2005.

Her family said: "Gloria loved her family above all else in this world. Kind, compassionate and spirited, she always put others before herself. People enjoyed her keen intelligence, gentle humor, and incredible energy. Her strength, determination, and great courage are an inspiration to us all. She always seemed indestructible. Her loss will be felt by all who knew her, especially her many wonderful friends and WASP classmates. We miss her beautiful smile, her warmth, and most of all, the love she showed us every day."

She is survived by her husband, Mandle "Rip" Collins of Anchorage; her daughters, Gloria Ann Collins and Deborah L. Collins, both of Anchorage; and many nieces and nephews.

Condolences may be sent to rip@gci.net.

Local arrangements are with Witzleben Family Funeral Home & Crematory.

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