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Obituary: Katherine Kornblum, 93; WASP pilot, local volunteer

BY RICHARD LIEBSON • RLIEBSON@LOHUD.COM • JANUARY 21, 2011

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Katherine "Ruth" Kupferberg Kornblum, a White Plains resident who last year was among 300 pioneering women aviators awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, died Sunday at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx. She was 93.

As a young pilot, she served her country during World War II. In her later years she served her community as a nursing home volunteer.

In 1943, Kornblum became one of 1,074 female pilots out of 25,000 who applied to qualify for duty as a Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP), flying military aircraft all over the U.S. and Canada.

"You wanted to do something for your country," she said in a March interview with The Journal News. "It didn't matter what. I was a registered nurse and had been planning to work in an overseas hospital, but when the chance came to fly, I took it."

The WASPs ferried military planes to various bases and airfields, transported equipment and passengers and towed targets for anti-aircraft and gunnery training. Kornblum learned how to fly in 1940 and 1941. By the time the WASPs disbanded in 1944, Kornblum had flown about 1,000 hours for her country. She never piloted a plane again.

"For a while it felt strange not to fly, but I got so busy with other interests I never thought about it," she said.

Although they lived in barracks, wore uniforms and piloted military planes, the WASPs were considered civilians and were not recognized as



Katherine Kornblum, in March 2010 at age 92, talks at the Sarah Neuman Center in Mamaroneck, where she was a volunteer. (File photo by Carucha L. Meuse/The Journal News)



Kornblum sits at the controls of a plane she flew as a Woman Airforce Service Pilot, or WASP, during World War II. She was one of 1,074 female pilots out of 25,000 applicants. (Courtesy photo)



Kornblum in her WASP uniform. (Courtesy photo)



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military veterans until 1977. In March, Kornblum and about 300 other surviving members gathered in Washington, D.C., where they received the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest

civilian award.

"It was wonderful, and I feel now that we've been recognized for what we did," she said at the time.

Kornblum was born Aug. 15, 1917, in the Bronx to David and Pauline Kupferberg. She grew up in Eastchester and graduated from Eastchester High School before going on to nursing school. She was a registered nurse at Mount Sinai Hospital before entering the WASPs and returned to the hospital after the war, working for several more years.

She married Ira Kornblum on June 2, 1947 in New York City. The couple moved to White Plains in 1950. Mr. Kornblum died in 1995.

While living in White Plains, she was active in the Fort Hill Players theater group and the Prompters, a volunteer group at the SUNY Purchase Performing Arts Center. She was also active in women's rights and animal rights causes.

For the last 17 years, Kornblum was a volunteer at the Sarah Neuman Center nursing home in Mamaroneck, where Amy Lionheart, the director of volunteers, said she put in more than 10,000 hours doing clerical work, serving as a patient advocate, managing medical records and doing whatever else was needed.

Kornblum is survived by her son and daughter-in-law, John and Mary Kornblum of White Plains; a niece, June Moskovitz of White Plains; and a nephew, Paul Gritt of Detroit. A memorial service is being planned for the summer.



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