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## HLOM Feature: Daughter of Batavia doctor was World War II pilot

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Barbara Jane Manchester was born Oct. 17, 1921, in Batavia to Dr. Ward B. Manchester and Jennie George Manchester.

She had two older brothers, Ward II and John Alan. Barbara grew up in Batavia and graduated from Batavia High School in 1939.

She entered Russell Sage College for Women in Troy in September 1939. Barbara heard about a program offered at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute offering civilian pilot training to 30 students, sponsored by the federal government.

Of the 30, there were three places allotted for females in the training program. RPI gave these three spaces to Russell Sage, since RPI was all male at the time. Barbara was one of the three selected.

She earned her private pilot license in the civilian training program in the fall of 1941. After Pearl Harbor she was determined to get her commercial pilot license. She wanted to help the war effort by instructing pilots. During the summer she earned her commercial pilot license. She also met Bill Robinson in 1942 and he was quite smitten by this determined pilot.

In March 1943, she got a telegram from the famous aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran's office offering a position as a pilot in the newly formed Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron, to release male pilots for combat duty. After completing college she got her orders to report Aug. 5 to Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas.

From August 1943 to February 1944 Barbara underwent further regular Army pilot training, graduating in February 1944 in WASP (Women Air Force Service Pilots) class 44-W-1, at the top of her class in instrument flying and earned the treasured Green Instrument Card.

She also had special increased training in weather and instrument flying because the Weather Service had requested 10 specially trained WASP to replace 10 male pilots which Weather Service was releasing for assignment to combat duty.

Barbara was assigned to the headquarters of the Army Air Force Weather Wing at Asheville, N.C., and flew non-flying officers mostly to and from Washington, D.C., on official business most often using an A-24 dive bomber with the single passenger riding in the rear (gunner's) cockpit.

With more passengers she flew a twin-engine UC-78. The Weather Wing had been dispersed to Asheville as part of the effort to decentralize critical agencies from Washington for safety from possible enemy action.

In May 1944, she was transferred to Kansas City, Mo., the headquarters of the 23rd Weather Region on temporary duty while a WASP stationed there was sent to Orlando, Fla., for Officer Training School.

After one flight with Barbara, the CO of the Weather Region asked for Barbara's assignment to be permanent. She flew as staff pilot for the commander from May until December 1944. She was required to fly him to his inspections of 43 weather stations monthly. She flew him in a UC-78 for a couple of months and then was assigned a brand new Beechcraft C-45, (Twin Beech). She loved flying this truly great plane.

In June 1944, she was engaged to Bill Robinson. She attended OTS in Orlando, Fla., in July of 1944 in preparation for the expected commissioning of the WASP. The WASP were denied military status and General Arnold disbanded the WASP on Dec. 20, 1944.

At that time Barbie had logged about 1,000 hours of flying time. There were no benefits, no GI Bill for the WASP. For 32 years, WASP records were classified and unavailable to historians writing about WWII. Nothing of their service was ever published in history books.

In 1976, Bruce Arnold, General Arnold's son, and an active group of WASP began working for the recognition of their service as having been active military duty in the Army Air Force. The WASP were finally recognized in 1977 as having been in the Army Air Force for their duty during WWII, and were awarded Honorable Discharges in 1979. Barbara is entitled to wear the American Campaign Medal and World War II Victory Medal II.

She was recently honored at the Beechcraft Heritage Museum in Tullahoma, where a permanent exhibit tells the story of the WASP in WWII, and Barbara Manchester Robinson's part in it. She and all of the WASP or families of those who have died were given the Congressional Gold Medal in a ceremony at the capitol, Washington, D.C., on March 10, 2010. This action followed the passage of Public Law 111-40 by Congress to honor all WASP.

Let's hope that the history books now being written or reprinted will include the WASP service during World War II and that the Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to these courageous women to do just that — to make folks aware of their service. There were also two other courageous woman from this area to be remembered as WASP pilots with Barbara — Bettina Bonner and Jeanette Simonds.

Barbara and Bill were married on May 23, 1945. They have traveled and lived in many places but today they reside in Tullahoma, Tenn. Barbara is 88 years old and suffered a stroke in 2005.

I had the pleasure of speaking to Bill and Barbara recently. Her story is told through the eyes and loving heart of her husband Bill. Their love story spans 68 years, their marriage 65 years and five children.

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If you have a memory you would like to share, please e-mail me at [amstarowitz@gmail.com](mailto:amstarowitz@gmail.com). You can also call the director of the Holland Land Office Museum at (585) 343-4727. Please stop and visit the Holland Land Office Museum. There are many photographs about this WWII pilot.

This article was written and researched by Anne Marie Starowitz, a board member for the Holland Land Office Museum. Information for this article was gathered from Bill Robinson, husband of Barbara Manchester Robinson. As he so eloquently stated, this is Barbie's story, not mine.

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