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High Flying: Muriel Martin

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La Feria woman awarded a Congressional Gold Medal

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By MICHAEL BARAJAS/Valley Morning Star

When she entered the military back in 1942, Muriel Martin had no idea she would help make history.

Sitting by her garden in her La Feria ranch house, Martin, 89, recalled being one of the first women to fly airplanes for the U.S. armed forces. "I remember I just really wanted to fly," she said.

In early March, Martin was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal on Capitol Hill alongside 200 or so other women in Washington D.C. for her service during World War II in the Women Airforce Service Pilots, the first group of women to fly U.S. military aircraft. The medal is the highest civilian honor given by Congress.

That group of women, or WASPs, Martin recalled, showed that women could fly just as well as the men.

"That was a real unique part of our lives," Martin explained. "It's still hard to believe there was a war going on back then."

By the start of WWII, the U.S. military was facing a severe shortage as more and more male fighter pilots were needed to serve in combat missions overseas. The military started the WASP program and trained young women to fly military aircraft, freeing up the men to fight overseas.

Martin remembered being trained to fly an AT-6, a WWII-era single-engine aircraft. Looking at a photograph of an AT-6 she keeps in her dining room, Martin smiled and said, "Oh, they were such great airplanes."

Martin was among a group of pilots who towed targets to help give ground and air gunners live-fire training. "We always just hoped that the guys shooting the targets we were towing were good shots," Martin laughed.

A native of La Feria, Martin said she will always remember the women she served with. "We have remained good friends ever since," she said. "It was such a good time."

Martin, who traveled to last month's ceremony with her daughter and two grandsons, said she was ecstatic to visit



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Muriel Martin was a pilot with the Women Airforce Service Pilots during World War II. One of her tasks included flying AT6 planes while dragging shooting targets behind her plane.

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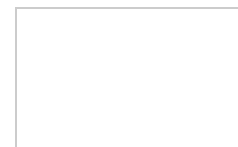
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Washington D.C., adding, "Oh, it was so exciting to be in the Capitol."

Showing off the Congressional Gold Medal for her service, Martin swung her blue Women Airforce Service Pilots scarf around her neck with pride. "That was just such an exciting time for us," she said.

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