

## Remembering the Thirty-Eight

A ceremony honoring the service of the WASP and a presentation of a Resolution to formerly recognize the 38 women pilots who died in the service of their country during WWII took place on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2003 at Long Island National Cemetery at Pinelawn.

Convening beneath the mast of the cemetery's central American flag, a podium was positioned and faced about 100 attendees. Beside the podium were seated two former WASP Margaret Gilman, Eleanor Faust and the daughter of WASP, the late Fran Laraway Smith. On the other side of the podium was Rep. Steve Israel and myself. Behind us all, 38 students from Farmingdale schools stood including my daughters, their friends, members of the Jr. Historical Society, the Jr. Fire Dept. and 3 Girl Scout cadets....all youth. Each of the children held a white lily bouquet, individually wrapped with a ribbon of red, white and blue.

After the playing of the National Anthem with a Marine Color Guard and many Veterans in attendance saluting, I was asked to step up to the podium. I read the "Forward" from "In Memoriam, Thirty-Eight" and then introduced Congressman Steve Israel. Rep. Israel stood at the podium and spoke of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, the former WASP attending, and of the family of a former WASP who were there on their mother's behalf. The Congressman spoke of the 38 WASP who died in the service of their country during WWII and presented a Resolution honoring the achievements of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, thus seeking the formal recognition of the Thirty – Eight who gave their lives during WWII. He presented me a framed copy of the Congressional Record containing the names of the 38 WASP that he read to the House of Representatives "Honor Women Airforce Service Pilots" dated Nov. 7 and of the H. Con Resolution dated Nov. 11, 2003. I was then introduced by Rep. Israel and asked to stand at the podium to read the names of each of the 38 WASP. I first read an excerpt by Archibald McLeish from "In Memoriam, Thirty-Eight", and then proceeded to read each of the 38 names individually, briefly pausing between each. Those present bowed their heads and paused silently as each name was read. Upon completing the reading of names, a moment passed and then down the long promenade that approached the area where we were assembled, a P-47 Thunderbolt from the American Airpower Museum flew overhead and the official ceremony ended.

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Having recalled hearing that National Cemetery, Pinelawn was the final resting place of a WASP, Rita McArdle, (who passed on in 1998) and in lieu of having the 38 students place their lilies beneath the mast of the flag where we had stood, we walked to WASP Rita McArdle's grave which was located for me by a fellow museum volunteer and situated near where we had assembled. (Appropriately, Rita McArdle had been one of the WASP who had flown P-47s in the skies above, from the adjacent Republic Air Field 60 years earlier.) The Congressman and myself each placed a lily, then each student came forth individually, placing their lily down in a deep arrangement that cradled her marker. We took a moment to remember all Veterans on that Veterans Day, the WASP and particularly the 38 WASP.

Julia Lauria-Blum -November 11, 2003