

Margaret Ray Ringenberg

Fort Wayne, Allen County

June 17, 1921 – July 28, 2008



Photo: *Wikipedia*

Born in Fort Wayne, Margaret Ray Ringenberg was an American aviator who logged more than 40,000 hours of flying time. She became interested in flying when she was eight years old and trained at a flight school. She made her first solo flight in 1941 when she was 19 years old. In 1943, she joined the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). After the WASP Corps was disbanded in 1944, she was devastated. However, she became a flight instructor, teaching privately and logging the most flight hours of any instructor. In August 1945, when Japan surrendered, she dropped 56,000 leaflets from an airplane over downtown Fort Wayne, announcing the end of the war. Both city newspapers were on strike so a local radio station hired her to make the historic "news drop."

In the 1950s, Ringenberg began racing airplanes. She entered every Powder Puff Derby from 1957 to 1977, and every women's Air Race Classic, the Derby's successor, from 1977 to 2008. In 1994, she headed a team of two other veterans in the Round-the-World Air Race. All three were members of the Ninety-nines, an association started by Amelia Earhart and other female pilots in 1929, to change the rules preventing women from flying. Their flight was riddled with problems, including their radio dying mid-Atlantic and being blown off course by a typhoon. They came in last, but were the most-applauded of all competitors.

Ringenberg co-wrote her story, *Girls Can't Be Pilots* (1998), and her daughter told her story again in *Maggie Ray, WWII Air Force Pilot* (2007). Tom Brokaw devoted a chapter to her in his book, *The Greatest Generation*. With honors and ovations continuing, she was invited to represent the WASPs at the dedication of the air force memorial in Washington, DC in 2006.

Spending her whole life around airplanes, she died where she was most happy. On July 28, 2008, Ringenberg died in her sleep at the age of 87, after spending a day at the Experimental Aircraft Association fly-in in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. While there, she inspected new planes and met other veteran women pilots.

- For more information about Margaret Ray Ringenberg, go to: <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=100557166>.
- For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Additional and more detailed references available at the end of Women's History Month

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