

Dot Merck: Mother had colorful life, including building P-38s in WWII

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By DAVID RENFROW / The Dallas Morning News

Dot Merck helped put P-38s in the skies and had brushes with the stars.

Mrs. Merck died of pneumonia Tuesday at Presbyterian Hospital in Plano. She was 81.

Services were Saturday at Restland's Wildwood Chapel.

Mrs. Merck was born June 6, 1924, in Los Angeles, the youngest of 12 children.

As a teenager, she baby-sat film stars' children and worked on singing cowboy Gene Autry's ranch, family members said. She was acquainted with enough Hollywood celebrities that she once was offered a screen test, but her mother forbade it.

After she graduated from high school, Mrs. Merck and her best friend went to work for Lockheed Corp., where they were among the first women to help build P-38 Lightning twin-engine fighter planes during World War II.

"She really liked the work, and she liked the camaraderie," said her son, Harry Merck of Augusta, Ga. "It allowed her to be independent. Being the youngest of 12 children, she was always either babied or bossed around."

In her spare time, Mrs. Merck volunteered to serve coffee at the Hollywood Canteen, a club for service members visiting Hollywood. Mrs. Merck eventually left Lockheed to join the service herself, enlisting in the Women's Army Corps, in which she served two years.

After she married Chuck Merck, the family moved frequently because he was promoted by his financial firm and transferred to regional offices. They lived in Albuquerque, Denver, Chicago and Kansas City before settling in Dallas in 1965.

Mrs. **Merck** was athletic, her family said. She played in women's softball leagues in the late-1940s and early '50s. She also was an amateur bowling champion who rolled several 300 games.

"When my mother was at her peak, she had the most unbelievable strength in her throw," said her daughter, Nancy Ladymon of Dallas. "It was all power."

But Mrs. **Merck**'s strength wasn't confined to her bowling arm. The sense of independence she found assembling aircraft so many years before remained with her, particularly after the passing of her husband. She remained active, developed passions for bingo, blackjack and poker, and steadfastly refused to give up driving.

"She was stubbornly independent. She was going to do things her way," Mrs. Ladymon said. "She was 5 feet and one-quarter inch, but she was a giant."

In addition to her son and daughter, Mrs. **Merck** is survived by another son, Richard **Merck** of Dallas, and two grandchildren.

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