

= Iris Cummings =

Iris C. Cummings (born December 21 , 1920) , also known by her married name Iris Critchell , is an American aviator and former competition swimmer who represented the United States at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin , Germany . After an active athletic career in swimming , which included a reign as U.S. national 200 @-@ meter breaststroke champion from 1936 to 1939 , she was accepted into the University of Southern California 's first Civilian Pilot Training Program in 1939 . After graduation , she worked as a flight instructor prior to being selected to serve her country during World War II as a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) . Following the conflict , she returned to California , where she developed and taught a curriculum on civilian flight for veterans returning from the war at the University of Southern California .

After racing airplanes competitively during the 1950s , Cummings and her husband , Howard Critchell , helped found the Bates Aeronautics program at Harvey Mudd College in 1962 . They ran it together until he retired in 1979 , at which point Iris continued alone until the program 's end in 1990 . A long @-@ time certified FAA Pilot Examiner , she is the recipient of several international aviation awards and is a member of the National Flight Instructors Hall of Fame . In her later years , she has remained active as a lecturer , consultant , and curator of the Aeronautical Library Special Collections at Harvey Mudd .

= = Early life and athletic career = =

Cummings was born in Los Angeles in 1920 and attended Redondo Union High School . Her father possessed a Doctor of Medicine from Tufts University School of Medicine and also worked as an athletics coach at the start of the 20th century at Columbia University and as the athletic director at Swarthmore College from 1902 through 1908 . Her mother was a Greek and Latin teacher . Iris attended the 1932 Summer Olympics as a spectator and began competing in swimming the following year , winning numerous local and regional tournaments . When it was too cold to swim , she remained athletically active through cycling . She was not a member of any club during her first year of competition , but nonetheless placed first in several meets in addition to her participation at the 1933 Southern Pacific Amateur Athletic Union and Pacific Coast championships .

Cummings joined the Los Angeles Athletic Club (LAAC) in 1934 and received her first financial support in 1935 , helping her attend that year 's Far Western Championships . She captured the American national 200 @-@ meter breaststroke championship in 1936 , which led to her participation in that year 's Olympic trials and her selection as a member of the United States delegation to the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin . She was required , however , to raise her own funds for travel to the Games and spent much of her time leading up to the tournament collecting money rather than training . In the women 's 200 @-@ meter breaststroke , she placed fourth in her heat in the opening round and was eliminated . Despite this , she remained as national champion in the event through 1939 , although she left the LAAC in 1937 . She placed second at the 1939 National Championships and retired from active competition shortly after , deciding that the 1940 Summer Olympics were unlikely to occur . In 1941 , she earned a degree in physical sciences and math from the University of Southern California .

= = World War II = =

Cummings was among the first people accepted into USC 's Civil Pilot Training Program in 1939 . She completed an advanced aerobatics course and earned her pilot 's license in 1940 and , by her 1941 graduation , had acquired enough training to begin work as an instructor . Having been recruited by Jacqueline Cochran , Cummings joined the Women 's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron in 1942 , which soon became the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) . After graduating from training in Houston in May 1943 , she served in World War II until the organization 's deactivation in December 1944 . During this time , she was a member of the 6th Ferrying Group out of Long Beach , California , eventually reaching the rank of First Lieutenant , and flew 18 different types of military

aircraft . In the same month as her unit 's deactivation , she married fellow military pilot Howard Critchell , whom she had met at a base that was used as a ferry stop for the WASP .

= = Later life = =

Following the war , Cummings was called back to USC to develop and teach a curriculum on civilian aviation for returning veterans . She spent much of the 1950s as a housewife , raising her children , but remained active as a part @-@ time flight instructor , as well as helping develop curricula for Federal Aviation Administration institutions . She also raced airplanes competitively during this period and won the 1957 Powder Puff Derby , capturing the first prize pot of \$ 800 (approximately \$ 6740 in present @-@ day terms) . In 1962 , she joined Harvey Mudd College and , in association with the Bates Foundation , founded the school 's Bates Aeronautics Program . She ran the program with her husband until he retired in 1979 , and continued alone until the program ended with her 1990 retirement . She continued teaching classes on aeronautics , however , until 1996 . Her students include astronauts George Nelson and Stanley G. Love . She also served as an FAA Pilot Examiner for over two decades and was named the organization 's Flight Instructor of the Year for the Ontario district in 1972 .

Cummings was inducted into the National Flight Instructors Hall of Fame in 2000 . She was awarded the Federal Aviation Administration 's Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award in 2006 for her dedication to airplane safety and the Nile Gold Medal of the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale in 2007 for her lifetime of dedication to aviation . Since her official retirement , she has remained active on several faculty projects at Harvey Mudd College , in addition to working as a lecturer , consultant , and curator of the Aeronautical Library Special Collections at the university 's Sprague Library . She has been a member of the Ninety @-@ Nines , an organization dedicated to the support of women pilots , since 1952 .