

From Barnstormers to Military Pilots:
The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II

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HISTORY 489

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I: Abstract

Women have been flying since 1910, and since that time, they have faced discrimination.¹ During World War II, women pilots were utilized for the first time by the government for the war effort. This paper will argue that early women “aviatrixes”, a female pilot/aviator, were able to set the stage for the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II. It also will argue that in order for women to become military pilots, they had to overcome adversity in many forms, including denial of flight instruction, lack of access to jobs, low pay, onerous and often dangerous assignments. They had the misfortune of facing disparaging public opinion in mid-1944, which led to their military deactivation. Women aviators were able to overcome the gender stereotypes in early aviation, and because of their success, women were able to fly every type of plane the Army Air Force (AAF) had in their arsenal the second world war. This paper utilizes numerous secondary sources as well as various news articles, oral histories, autobiographies and government documents to explore the adversities and discrimination faced by America’s first female aviators.

¹ I would like to thank the Texas Women’s University at Denton, TX for all of their assistance in finding, and getting a hold of countless number of the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots’ oral histories.

II: Historiography

Women in the early 20th century faced many challenges and they had to live and abide by the traditional ideals of women's roles of that time. Women's role in aviation was not different, which challenged those ideas of separate spheres. During this time, there were two different spheres of influence: the domestic sphere, and sphere of industry. The first was designated for the women; they were expected to run the house, raise the children and provide a stress free environment for their husbands. The men were expected to earn the money and provide for their family. Women pilots did not just stay at home. They pushed against the social constraints in order to fly. From the Wright brothers' first flight in 1903, women were just as driven to get into the air. With the ever-changing gender roles, women overcame great obstacles for their piece of the sky. The battle fought by the early aviatrixes were shortly rewarded during World War II, when women were trained and hired by the Army Airforce to ferry planes and were assigned to bases all over the country.

The secondary historical literature on the subject of women as military pilots is relatively new. The oldest is from 1979. The United States, which did not offer the WASP veteran status until 1977, had forgotten about its flying heroines of World War II. In 1977, the WASP's were finally granted veteran status, which led to a resurgence of WASP literature. For the past thirty years, people have been fascinated with women in aviation who overcame the traditional ideals of women's place in society. Books written about women in aviation, however, do not directly focus on the question of discrimination. The United States, which did not offer the WASP veteran status until 1977, had forgotten about its flying heroines during World War II. The secondary sources are primarily biographies of key individuals, works that focus on popular culture, or general histories of women in the early years of aviation.

Mike Walker's *Powder Puff Derby: Petticoat Pilots and Flying Flappers* (2004) outlines the history of the first ever "Powder Puff Derby" in 1929. He gives brief biographies of a few of the

participants. Louise Thaden won the first ever Powder Puff Derby, which stretched from Santa Monica, California to Cleveland, Ohio.² Another participant was Florence “Pancho” Barnes, who did not complete the race, but was a big star at the time. Barnes was an ex-society daughter, who lost her fortune pursuing her dream: flying. Another American pilot Walker biographies is Bobbie Trout. She differed from Barnes because her family was usually in debt. She financed her flying by pumping gas. She also took part in aviation’s first refueling endurance flight by a woman. She stayed aloft for 42 hours straight.³ This book is instrumental in outlining key women in aviation around 1929. However, it does include women from France, England, Australia, and Germany. This book is relevant to my topic because it discusses the difficulties that women encountered in their pursuit of the skies.

Another book that gives a good background of women pilots before World War II is Claudia M. Oakes’ book, *United States Women In Aviation, 1930-1939* (1991). She goes beyond talking about just pilots to include information about early flight attendants, engineers and women who worked in manufacturing. By giving the history of all women who worked in aviation, it gives a better background on the topic. Since it is primarily a chronicle of the history of aviation from 1930-1939, it has no real argument, but it is vital in finding specific primary sources, as well as giving information in a clear and concise way. It also has a great appendix which gives quantitative data on topics, such as air races of the 1930’s in which women participated,⁴ and records set by U.S. women in the 1930’s.⁵ Finally, Oakes’ study provides a good list of who the women pilot pioneers were. One major program women pilots were engaged in was the National Air Marking Program. It is the first U.S. government program that was comprised, run by, and flown by an all women staff. The

² Mike Walker, *Powder Puff Derby: Petticoat Pilots and Flying Flappers*, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2004.

³ Walker, *Powder Puff Derby*, 152-159.

⁴ Claudia M. Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991, 56-64.

⁵ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 65-68.

program was designed to help pilots navigate, by choosing a flat building where there was one, and writing the name of the town that could be seen from the air. The Air Marking program was financed by the Works Progress Administration. The women involved were Louise Thaden (she won the 1929 Powder Puff Derby), Helen Richey, Blanche Noyes, Nancy Harkness (future head of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron) and Helen McCloskey.⁶ This is one of the rare times that women pilots were not underutilized. Since this book is primarily a time line of women in aviation from 1930-1939, it does not have a central argument. It gives detailed information on the roles women had prior to the outbreak of World War II. This book also informs the reader about the different jobs women were able to hold, and the ways in which they were underutilized. For example, women were blocked from flying for commercial airlines.

Another good source for the history of early female aviators is a book written by Eileen F. Lebow, titled *Before Amelia: Women Pilots in the Early Days of Aviation* (2002). She goes in depth on a number of key aviators, but she does not focus directly on American women. It has sections pertaining to women from France, Germany and England.⁷ However, this may be useful to comparing how women were treated in other countries during the same time. She discusses the discrimination women felt in the early days of aviation. One problem women often faced was the fact that most flight instructors refused to instruct them because they were women. She mentions notable pilots, such as: Blanche Scott, Jessica Raiche, Harriet Quimby, Matilde Moisant, Katherine Stinson, Ruth Law, Majorie Clare Stinson, Julia Clark, Bernetta Miller, Florence Seidell, Mrs. Richberg Hornsby, Dorothy Rice Peirce, Hilder Smith, Alys McKey Bryant, and Lily Irvine. Ruth Law is a particularly interesting example of early efforts by women pilots to combat resistance to their service. After the U.S. declared war on Germany during World War I, Law, working with Murray Hulbert, a Democratic congressman from New York, lobbied for women to be in the military

⁶ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 9-14.

⁷ Eileen F. Lebow, *Before Amelia*, (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2002)

In December, Murray Hulbert... introduced a bill in Congress to let women serve in the military. While he wasn't urging women to join up, he felt that some "intrepid, persistent spirits, like Miss Law" would be of greater value to the government using their flying skills in some capacity.⁸

Unfortunately, Law's and Congressmen Hulbert's plans fell on deaf ears. Women were not to be used in a flying capacity until World War II. Lebow argues that these women succeeded even at a time when a woman's work was to stay home and have babies. These women challenged the gender roles of the early 20th century and took from it a great experience and a newfound sense of self sufficiency.

Henry M. Holden's and Captain Lori Griffith's book, *Ladybirds II: The Continuing Story of American Women in Aviation* (1993), provides information on women in flight from 1783 to the 1990's. Women would often go up in hot air balloons and flew gliders. It also gives in depth information on the lives and diverse career histories from women in aviation in the 20th century, including details on the WAFS, and WASP. It discusses the many roles women had during World War II, be it ferrying air craft or testing recently repaired airplanes, women held many roles.

A good book that highlights the dynamic personalities making up the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) administration is Sarah Byrn Rickman's biography of Nancy Love, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II* (2008). Prior to the Depression, she and her family were part of the wealthy elite. She learned to fly shortly after her 16th birthday. This book gives background knowledge into Love's life, and how her experiences shaped the leader she became in World War II. 11 June 1942, Love's plan was put into effect. The Air Transport Command, headed by Col. Harold L. George, began the process of hiring women ferry pilots. The original plan only looked to hire, at the maximum, 50 women pilots.⁹ This book, since written from Love's perspective, naturally gives more credit to her, and the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron

⁸ Lebow, *Before Amelia*, 219.

⁹ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 67.

(WAFS). Since it's a biography, its main argument was that Nancy Love had a large effect on women in aviation and was instrumental in their use during World War II. Love was an example of a female aviator who did not directly experience discrimination; she was treated well, and most of the men she worked with had nothing but respect for her. Moreover, when she faced adversity, she waged the battle and won.

Doris L. Rich gives a detailed biography of Jackie Cochran, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane* (2007) provides contrast to Nancy Love's biography. Cochran had a very different background from Love's well to do upbringing. This has an effect on her administrative and political prowess. Cochran originally started flying in order to facilitate her business. She quickly became a major name in aviation. Cochran was the first woman to place in the Bendix race in 1937 and the first woman to win the Bendix race in 1938.¹⁰ The Bendix race went from Burbank, California to Cleveland, Ohio.¹¹ These different experiences led her to become one of the greatest pilots of all time, regardless of gender. Rich's book argues that Cochran helped women to contribute to the war effort in a unique way, and her determination led to new and exciting opportunities for her girls. Because of her more combatant attitude, Cochran faced discrimination from all those who were against her. One of her biggest mistakes may have been refusing to align the WASP to the Women's Army Corps, which cost her and all the WASP militarization. The fact that the WASP were not militarized, it illustrates the discrimination at its utmost.

This paper contributes to the existing literature by detailing the professional roles women aviators were forced to play, as well as the discrimination they faced in order to qualify for and fulfill these roles. The paper also remedies the fact that only a few sources focus specifically on the discrimination women faced. A few existing studies discuss discrimination against women aviators,

¹⁰ Doris Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2007, 70-86.

¹¹ Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 89.

but they do not focus on the types of discrimination, and how women aviators were able to overcome them. The central issues in my books are that women were breaking stereotypical gender roles, and because of that, they faced discrimination, not only from men but from other women as well. Still, they were able to overcome this discrimination time and time again, starting with the first flights in the early 20th century, and eventually end up flying every airplane that the Army Air Force had. I feel that some of these sources might be lacking some more personal information, which I will supplement by using information from a number of autobiographies and oral histories.

Some pilots accepted women pilots, but others were angered by the jobs the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) and the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) were given during World War II. Civilian pilots who had been exempt from the draft could be facing combat duty as infantry soldiers. The male combat pilots that were returning from overseas after they reached their maximum number of missions looked at ferrying aircraft as a waste of their talents. Other civilian male pilots believed some of the jobs that women took over were too dangerous. Even from the beginning of aviation women were often used to by companies, or in the case of the WASP, the government to illustrate that planes were safe. Some planes were viewed as too dangerous to fly, so Army Air Force commanders utilized the WASP in the manner of showing that these planes were "flyable" and safe, when handled correctly. While the roles of women pilots had changed since the early days, the discrimination had also evolved into a system where women were held to double standards and were also victims of sabotage. The varying discrimination directly correlated with the jobs they performed in the period of 1910-1944. Women were banned from jobs they were qualified to hold, and the only jobs they could get were more dangerous, as well as less rewarding. They had the misfortune of facing disparaging public opinion in mid-1944, which led to their deactivation. Women were able to overcome the gender stereotypes in early aviation, and because of their success,

women were able to fly every plane the Army Air Force had in their arsenal during 1942- December 1944.

III: Women in Aviation from 1910-1939

America's attention was centered on the war overseas and most of the general public was not aware of the WASP effort. Civilians often mistook WASPs in uniform for airline stewardesses, and even military personnel found them oddities. A typical reaction from many male pilots upon seeing a WASP...Reactions to women climbing out of a P-51 were varied, mostly startled. I flew into a field that was off limits, but the weather was bad and I had a mechanical problem so I called for permission to land. I kept radioing "P51 ready to land." They couldn't believe it (that a woman was flying a P-51) - they were looking for a Piper Cub or something.¹²

A common thought at the time is best stated from anonymous author in *Look* magazine dated 9 January 1943. "The U.S. has found it hard to believe that women make good pilots. Like women doctors, they have grown in number and amassed their impressive records of achievements through sheer feminine doggedness."¹³ That was a common thought that was illustrated time and again during the brief two years that the WASP served. Men at the bases that WASP visited did not understand that these women were actually pilots. Whenever they would climb out of a heavy bomber, men were flabbergasted that women could fly them. Women were also used in order to get men to fly planes that they believed to be too dangerous. It was thought that if a woman could fly it, it must be safe... and effortless.

These women were considered oddities at the time. Women were suppressed by society and those who persevered, fought to get equal status in the air. Those women who strove to learn to fly before WWII were able to make it possible for women to be used as military pilots. While women had trouble getting instruction early in the twentieth century, men would go on to remark that women make better students, as well as instructors.

¹² Henry M. Holden and Capt. Lori Griffith, *Ladybirds II: The Continuing Story of American Women in Aviation*, Mount Freedom, (NJ: Black Hawk Publishing Company, 1993) 63.

A Piper Cub is a small single engine plane. It was a plane that was used in flight instruction.

¹³ Holden, *Ladybirds*, 64.

Ever since the Wright's first attempts at heavier than air flights, women have been yearning to fly. Women pioneers such as Ruth Law, Bobbie Trout, Pancho Barnes, Blanche Stuart Scott, Harriet Quimby, who was the first US woman to gain her license, Amelia Earhart, Nancy Love, Jacqueline Cochran, and Bessie Coleman all pushed their social restraints in their pursuit of the skies. These women came from different backgrounds, but they had a single goal, flight, that joined them together. These women, through much adversity, allowed women who followed them to fly during WWII. Women during the early twentieth century faced discrimination and there were many trials for the Women Airforce Service Pilots to overcome.

Between 1910 and 1920, women began to take to the skies. The early female pioneers had many challenges to overcome. Many instructors at the time refused to teach women, because they did not think women had the right constitution to handle flying. They were constrained by attitudes dating back to the Victorian era. Women of that era were expected to stay at home and take care of the children, not go up into the skies. The first licensed woman pilot was Harriet Quimby in 1911. Shortly after Harriet Quimby gained her license, her friend Matilde Moisant received her license as well. When Quimby died in 1912 in an airplane accident, "The New York papers opined that her death should make it clear that women had no business of flying and should get out of it."¹⁴ Prior to any woman receiving her pilot's license, Blanche Stuart Scott became the first professional female pilot in 1910 when she made her debut as a member of the Curtiss exhibition team. There, she earned her nickname of "Tomboy of the Air." Another visionary aviatrix was Ruth Law. She earned her license in 1912, but she was visionary in her idea that women could help the war effort during WWI. She tried unsuccessfully to get legislation passed that would allow women to fly in combat. She was, however, the first woman authorized to wear a military uniform. These women were able

¹⁴Walker, Mike, *Powder Puff Derby: Petticoat Pilots and Flying Flappers*, (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2004), 86.

to overcome the gender restraints forced upon them by society, and cleared the way for women who came later.

Women pilots from 1921-1939 were able to use the ground that the women before them had paved. Such notable pilots included Harriet Quimby, Bessie Smith, Amelia Earhart, Louise Thaden, Bobbie Trout, Jacqueline Cochran, and Nancy Love. Amelia Earhart is undoubtedly the best well-known American aviatrix. Her first introduction to flying was as a passenger aboard a trans-Atlantic flight. After that, she earned her own license, and began flying. She raised awareness about women pilots, and she also advocated commercial aviation. Earhart was also the first president of the Ninety-Nine's, a women pilot's organization, which still exists today.¹⁵ Her name will always be associated with pushing the limits of flight when she disappeared trying to circumnavigate the globe near the equator on 11 July 1937.¹⁶ Male pilots before her had circumnavigated the globe, but they had done it further north, where the distance, and risk was less.

Another pioneer of the air was Bessie Coleman. Coming from a humble background, she not only had to break the social constraints of the time because of her gender, but she also had to overcome racial constraints because she was black. She received help from a Chicago black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, and shipped off to France in order to receive instruction.¹⁷ She became the first African American licensed pilot, as well as the first American of any gender to gain an international pilot license. Her main goal as an exhibition pilot was to set up a flight school for African American men and women, but she was killed in a plane crash before she could establish her dream.¹⁸

¹⁵Mike Walker, *Powder Puff Derby: Petticoat Pilots and Flying Flappers*, (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2004) 258.

¹⁶Mike Walker, *Powder Puff Derby*, 274-275.

¹⁷Mike Walker, *Powder Puff Derby*, 222.

¹⁸Mike Walker, *Powder Puff Derby*, 224.

Another famous woman aviator, nicknamed “Pancho” Barnes, was an enigma to the flying world. She was a rich debutant who shunned her wealthy background and became a tomboy of the air. She smoked cigars, wore pants and swore. She received her nickname after heading south to Mexico to smuggle illegal liquor into the US. Since no one would allow a woman to come along, she cut her hair to pass as one of the boys.¹⁹ When they reached Mexico, they ran into trouble and fled the coast. As she and another man on the liquor expedition road horseback towards the US, she earned her nickname Pancho.²⁰

Louise Thaden was most well known for having won the Woman’s Continental Derby, given the moniker the Powder Puff Derby of 1929.²¹ It was the first all female cross-country air race. She also won the Bendix race in 1936.²² The Bendix Race was started in 1931, but women could not compete until 1935. 4 September 1939, Thaden, with her copilot Blanche Noyes, won the Bendix Race.²³ Thaden credits Cliff Henderson with allowing women into the Bendix Race saying, “Cliff (Henderson) firmly believed women pilots were just as good as men pilots and it was he who made it possible for women to compete in this exciting annual event.”²⁴ At this time, the mid 1930’s, air race officials did not believe that women pilots “could- or should- compete against male pilots.”²⁵

Two final famous women pilots were Nancy Love and Jacqueline Cochran. Love was instrumental in the Air Marking Program, which helped pilots get their bearings when flying cross-country. The Air Marking Program was designed to involve every state in a program “to better identify its towns and cities from the air.”²⁶ “The state would be blocked off in sections of 20 square

¹⁹Walker, *The Powder Puff Derby*, 26.

²⁰ Walker, *The Powder Puff Derby*, 27.

²¹ Walker, *The Powder Puff Derby*, 35.

²² Claudia M. Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 30.

²³ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 30.

²⁴ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 31.

²⁵ Oakes, *United States Women In Aviation, 1930-1939*, 31.

²⁶ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 9.

miles. Wherever possible, a marker with the name of the nearest town would be painted on the roof of the most prominent building at each 15-mile interval. Where towns were too far apart, it was suggested that ground markers or rocks or bricks painted white would be used.”²⁷ Jacqueline Cochran was very involved in air racing and was in dogged pursuit of every record in aviation. She won the Bendix Race in 1938, a mixed sex cross-country race.²⁸ Nancy Love and Jacqueline Cochran gained much experience in flying prior to World War II that shaped female pilots forever. Their experiences in the 1930’s influenced the way they shaped the Women Airforce Service Pilots’ administration during World War II. These women pushed the boundaries that were in place during the early twentieth century and many went on to help the Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) in WWII.

Flying during the 1930’s was difficult, unless one was wealthy. Many women financed their flying by working. They were usually only able to buy an hour at a time, so it was difficult for them to get enough hours to get their private license. For example, Bobbie Trout financed her flying by working at a gas station.²⁹ Once they got their private license, they could do a number of different jobs. They could fly exhibitions and air races, become a barnstormer, or work for an airplane manufacturer to demonstrate how the plane flew. Women who were able to get flying jobs were lucky and as a result, increased their flight time on someone else’s bill. During this decade, women were also employed to prove the safety of air travel. The first flight attendants appeared in 1930. One condition, however, was that they had to be registered nurses.³⁰ There were several other requirements for a woman to be employed as a stewardess. A candidate had to be single, could not be

²⁷ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 9.

²⁸ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 307.

²⁹ Walker, *The Powder Puff Derby*, 134-136.

³⁰ Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, 20.

more than 25, weigh more than 115 lbs, and not more than 5'4.³¹ By using women as flight attendants was an example how the industry promoted the safety of flight.

One shining moment for women who wanted to fly was the introduction of the Civilian Pilot Training program (CPT) in 1938. In the years prior to World War II, the US government realized that they did not have enough pilots in the case of a major military conflict. This innovative program accepted men and women, who were enrolled in ground school, and given flight instruction. All training fees and tuition was provided free of charge by the government. The program accepted people who had some college course work, but they did not need to have backgrounds in math or sciences. This program made it easier for women to fly during the Depression, because they were able to fly for no expense to themselves. Their enrollment was on a ten percent scale: out of every ten students, one had to be female. This 1:9 ratio was to limit women's involvement, because it was mainly for creating a recruitment pool should a major military conflict break out. Because money was tight during the Depression, the CPT program made it easier for women to learn to fly.

Women's enrollment in the CPT program was suspended after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. The name was changed to the War Training Service (WTS). One major change was that men had to sign a contract agreeing to enter into the military after completion of the program.³² The U.S involvement in the war was unquestionable; however, despite the fact that women such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Jackie Cochran spoke out against such wartime restrictions, the role of women pilots in the war effort was very much in question.

³¹ Oakes, *United States Women In Aviation, 1930-1939*, 20.

³² Roger Guillemette, "Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP)," U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission, http://www.centennialofflight.gov/essay/GENERAL_AVIATION/civilian_pilot_training/GA20.htm, (accessed 23 February 2009.)

IV: The Debate of the Use of Women Pilots (1939-1941): The Formation of the WASP, WAC and WAVE.

Long before World War II involved the U.S. in December 1941, Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Love approached officials in Washington, D.C. about the utilization of a then underappreciated resource: women pilots. They approached different people by different means. Their tactics succeeded in founding a women's pilot branch of the Army Air Force later established and how they ran their respective organizations during the war.

Jacqueline Cochran wrote a letter to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt dating 28 September 1940, discussing the idea of women pilots serving in supportive roles in the war effort. She argued, "Should there be a call to arms it is not my thought that women pilots go out and engage in combat, but every male pilot will be needed in active service."³³ She knew other countries had already started utilizing their female pilots in different duties, and she thought that women pilots could be useful here as well. "England's Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) had women pilots who ferried planes under combat conditions and the Soviet Union formed several battalions of women combat pilots, including bomber units and fighter plane squadrons."³⁴ Several years later, Eleanor Roosevelt petitioned the US public in her column "My Day" on September 1, 1942. She stated

I believe in this case, if the war goes on long enough and women are patient, opportunity will come knocking at their doors. However, there is just a chance that this is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with all of our ability and every weapon possible. Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used... Hence I am speaking up for the women fliers, because I am afraid we cannot afford to let the time slip by now without using them.³⁵

³³ Doris L. Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 99.

³⁴ Central Flying Training Command, Army Air Forces. *History of the WASP Program*. (Wright Patterson Air Force Base: Ohio, Air Force Museum Archives, 1945).

³⁵ Eleanor Roosevelt, (New York), 1 September, 1942.

Roosevelt understood how vital it was to use every resource that was available for the war effort. By 1941, Cochran had approached the Army Air Corps and suggested that women be used for ferrying aircraft. The time, however, was not opportune for the officials to agree to her plan.

Cochran spoke to the Air Corps commander, Major General Henry “Hap” Arnold, who suggested that she recruit women to fly for the British Ferry Command.³⁶ Before that mission, however, she was recruited to fly a Lockheed Hudson Bomber across the Atlantic. By using Cochran to ferry the bomber across the Atlantic, male pilots were shown that it was safe. Using her to fly the bomber across the Atlantic was in true form of the time: if a woman could do it, it could not be that difficult. This tactic often embarrassed men into accepting missions. In this historic flight in 1941, she became the first woman to ferry a bomber across the Atlantic Ocean.³⁷ After her return to the United States, Cochran recruited twenty-five women to go to England in 1942 and serve in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). While Cochran was in England, she observed how the ATA was organized. She observed how women went through a training period, and worked their way up from primary trainers to fighter airplanes.

Nancy Love approached Lieutenant Colonel Robert Olds, who was in the Plans Division of the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, about the possibility of women ferrying airplanes for the US Army Air Corps (AAF). Her plan was to recruit a small number of women pilots who possessed the following qualifications: 500 hours of flight time, a commercial license, an age of twenty-one to thirty-five, a high school diploma, a 200-horsepower rating, two letters of recommendation, and US citizenship.³⁸ In short, Love wanted to take already highly trained pilots and use them to ferry airplanes. She drafted a plan to employ women pilots as Civil Service employees hired into the Air

³⁶ Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 103.

³⁷ Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 103-107.

³⁸ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 73-74.

Transport Command (ATC)³⁹. Her plan was put into effect on 10 September 1942⁴⁰. Love recruited twenty-seven women, not including herself, who met the standards and were recruited into the Air Transport Command (ATC)⁴¹. Nicknamed “the Originals”, they flew the heaviest bombers and the fastest pursuits. Betty Gillies, the first woman to be recruited by Nancy Love, flew a number of planes including the B-17, P-38, P-51, P-61, A-20, and the PT-22⁴². While Cochran was in England, Nancy Love’s plan was initiated by Major General Harold L. George⁴³.

Just shortly after the creation of Love’s Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), General Arnold created the Women’s Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), which was to be headed by Jackie Cochran. Cochran looked beyond the ferrying goals of Love’s program and sought to train a minimum of one thousand women to fly the army way. At the WFTD, women were trained to forget everything that they had learned from their civilian pilot days. Flying the army way entailed clearer landing patterns and learning skills such as night flying or “flying under the hood,” which was flying in conditions where the pilot did not have a clear field of vision. Her original requirements for admittance to the WFTD were: women had to be aged twenty-one to thirty-five, have a high school diploma, a minimum height of 60 inches, 200 hours flying time, American citizenship, and a personal interview with an authorized recruiting officer. The trainees had to pass the same physical male pilots training for combat had to⁴⁴. Her goal was for her pilots to take over all domestic flying jobs.

³⁹ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 72-73.

⁴⁰ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 79.

⁴¹ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 97.

⁴² Dawn Letson, *Betty Huyler Gillies/Barbara London Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1996).

⁴³ Sarah Byrn Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 70-77.

⁴⁴ Government report, Headquarters, Army Air Forces: “Final Report on Women Pilot Program,” Jacqueline Cochran, 1 August 1944

These jobs included: ferrying, target towing, flight-testing, flying daytime tracking missions, nighttime searchlight missions, utility flying and administrative flights.⁴⁵

While Love and Cochran had different goals for their women's auxiliaries, they both saw a deficit that needed filling. With the increasing shortage of domestic pilots, women pilots began to be considered for jobs that could release men for combat. Although Jackie Cochran and Nancy Love had different means of securing a place for women pilots in the war effort, they shared a similar passion: their desire for flight. Their two auxiliaries were combined on 5 July 1943 as WASP under command of Jacqueline Cochran.⁴⁶ These women and their programs were under a microscope to see if it was possible for women to fly military aircraft.

V: 1942 and the Two Women's Auxiliaries

Despite the discrimination, biases and lack of opportunities faced by women pilots, they made real and tangible contributions to the war effort. This section argues that at the very beginning, women pilots had to overcome barriers in order to be used effectively for the war effort. Be it restrictions on their sex or biases on the leader of the group, women were able to fly and prove their worth.

*Would you like to swing on a star, ferry AT's home from afar, and be better off than you are,
Or would you rather be a WAC?*

*A WAC may be an officer with bright bars than shine. Her olive green and everything looks
fine, She's very proud of the name she bears, As for you, you don't want her cares, Her olive
green was never meant for you, You want the Santiago Blue!*

*Would you like to loop 'round a star, Ferry AT's home from afar, And be better off than you
are, Or would you rather be a WAVE?*

A WAVE may be an ensign or a seaman first class, Her uniform of Navy blue will pass, As

⁴⁵ Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 130-132.

⁴⁶ Nancy Parrish, "WASP WWII Timeline," WASP on the Web (Wings Across America), <http://publishing.yudu.com/Freedom/Agp6m/WingsAcrossAmericasW/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wingsacrossamerica.us%2Fwasp%2Fresources%2Findex.htm> (accessed 13 May 2009).

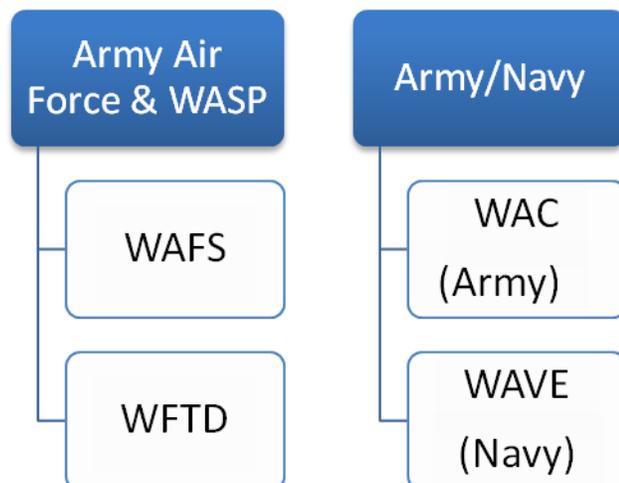
the Navy says her weight in gold she's worth, But who would want to be confined to earth, As for you, she can keep all of those things,

You'd rather have your silver wings. You made a choice and carried it through, You've got your wings and your Santiago Blue-- So now that all your training is through, You will be flying near and far, And truly swinging on a star!

-Lyrics to "Swinging on a Star"⁴⁷

This song, which came from a CD that was a compilation of WASP songs, describes how different the WASP auxiliary was from the Women's Army Auxiliary (WAC) or the Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVE). The WAC and the WAVE were women's auxiliaries in the army and navy respectively. They were recruited to work as desk clerks, secretaries: in short, jobs that were considered jobs suitable for women to have. (See **Figure 1**) The WASP were not officers, but they played different roles in the war effort. In little over a month, the US went from having no women's pilot auxiliary to two. With the creation of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), women pilots had the chance to help the war effort in a unique way. They were able to release men from duties in the United States and free them to fly in combat.

Figure One:



⁴⁷ Swingin' on a Star, WASP variation on the song of the same title, lyrics from: Wings Across America- <http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/songs/swinging.htm> (accessed 1 March, 2009).

Before the women of the WAFS could start ferrying, they had to complete a thirty-day ground school. There, they learned proper military procedure, particularly in regards to filling out paperwork. Barbara London, an original WAFS, said the following about their initial training:

It took us about a month to get organized as to how to do the paperwork and how to deliver an airplane. Not to fly the airplane, but how to get from one place to the other with a T/R, how to get transportation, what to do when we got to the other end, how to sell the airplane, how to do the things, and the rest of it just kind of fell into place.⁴⁸

Women in the WAFS were faced with less discrimination than other branches of the WASP during the war. Nancy Love was well respected among the administration in ATC (Air Transport Command). The ATC was responsible for all ferrying missions within the continental US. The WAFS were under command of the ATC, but were still part of the WASP. Because of Love's efforts, there was no limit regarding the airplanes her WAFS could fly. Love pushed for admittance to pursuit schools, and pushed her pilots to transition to bombers. Pursuit planes are what fighter planes were called during World War II. The WAFS were spread out between three bases: Love Field in Dallas under the 5th Ferrying Group, at Romulus, Michigan under the 3rd Ferrying Group, and at Long Beach, California under the 6th Ferrying Group. While Nancy Love was stationed at Love Field, "she planned to check out on every available aircraft in an effort to pave the way for her pilots to fly any and everything in the Army's aviation arsenal."⁴⁹ Since these women were the cream of the crop of women aviators, they were responsible for a great number of firsts among female aviators. For example, WAFS Betty Gillies was the first woman to deliver a P-47 in May of 1943.⁵⁰ A tragic first accomplished by a WAFS was the distinction of the first woman pilot to be killed on active duty. On 21 March 1943, Cornelia Fort died in a mid-air collision.⁵¹ An amazing anecdote of her flying career is on the morning of 7 December 1941, she was in the process of

⁴⁸ Letson, Dawn, *Betty Huyler Gillies/Barbara London Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women's University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1996).

⁴⁹ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 106-107.

⁵⁰ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 115.

⁵¹ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 116-120.

instructing civilian student when a Japanese plane passed directly below her. She looked over at Pearl Harbor when she noticed billowing black smoke. She was able to land safely in a hail of bullets.⁵² Most of the WAFS did not die because of pilot error, but rather from problems with the planes they were ferrying. One such example is Evelyn Sharp. She died while ferrying a P-38 when her left engine failed. Due to that engine failure, she was unable to maintain sufficient airspeed to prevent the plane from stalling.⁵³ Eventually, with no more lift she crashed into a cluster of trees. She was thrown from the plane, where she perished.⁵⁴

One form of discrimination the WAFS encountered was occupational limits based upon notions of propriety. On 17 March 1943, the Ferrying Division passed down the decree that women were not allowed to fly copilot with a male on bombers.⁵⁵ Women's flight schedules at the Romulus base were limited even farther to avoid contact with men. The regulations stipulated that:

- Women of the 3rd (Ferrying Group) would be allowed to fly only light trainer aircraft
- Women would not be given assignments as copilots on bomber ferrying missions
- Women would not be allowed to transition on any high-powered single-engine or twin-engine aircraft
- Women would make their deliveries on alternate days from the male pilots. And if possible, sent in opposite directions.⁵⁶

These restrictions greatly interfered with the duties of the WAFS. Because they could not copilot with male pilots on bomber ferrying missions, it took longer for the WAFS to return to their home base. Instead of accepting a ride with a male pilot, WAFS would have to Remain Over Night (RON), and catch rides on trains or commercial airlines. Another restriction on all women pilots was they

⁵² National Museum of the United States Air Force, "Cornelia Fort", <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=1546>, (accessed 25 Feb 2009).

⁵³ A stall is defined as when the air flowing over the wing cannot produce enough lift to support the weight of the aircraft. (Aviation-terms.com)

⁵⁴ Diane Ruth Armour Bartels, *Sharpie: The Life Story of Evelyn Sharp*, (Lincoln, NE: Great Americans Publishing, 1996) 5-10, 247-248.

⁵⁵ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 122.

⁵⁶ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 122.

could not fly during their menstrual period.⁵⁷ Love was able to petition the Chief of Staff of the ATC (Air Transport Command) to reverse the decision regarding women pilots' restrictions. While Nancy Love understood the propriety protections, she spoke out against the restrictions on transitioning. Transitioning is a pilot moving up to a different class of airplane: for example, moving from a primary trainer to a basic trainer, or a basic trainer to an advanced trainer. General Smith, a friend of Love's, issued the statement that any pilot, regardless of gender, would be able to transition to the extent of each pilot's ability. Because of this statement, women were not restricted in any means, and could transition to any plane, if they were capable. This last statement illustrates how women were able to overcome discrimination in the ATC.

After the battles aforementioned had been won, the WAFS serving in the ATC were better treated. Women were often favored in the Ferry Command. On average, they returned more quickly than male ferry pilots and delivered their planes more efficiently. When the WASP were deactivated, women were responsible for 100% of the deliveries of P-47 Thunderbolts. "Every Thunderbolt shipped to Britain, and later in the fall, to liberated France and Italy, had a woman pilot in the cockpit during the first leg of its journey."⁵⁸

Trainees of the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) had more difficulties because the WFTD trainees needed additional training than the WAFS. Women who were accepted for the WFTD had fewer flight hours, and less experience over all in comparison to the WAFS. The WFTDs also had more problems with discrimination because conflicts between their director Jacqueline Cochran and other heads in the Army Air Force (AAF). Women were sent to Howard Hughes Field in Houston, Texas. The situation in Houston was not ideal for the program. There

⁵⁷ Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 123.

Women pilots were not allowed to fly one day prior and two days after their menstrual periods ended. This greatly cut into the number of hours a woman could fly a month.

⁵⁸ Sally Van Wagenen Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines*, (New York: Rowson, Wade Publishers, Inc., 1979), 265.

were no housing or dining facilities, and restrooms were not a manageable distance from the hangers. They received lessons in civilian planes rejected by the Air Force, and their Commanding Officers were adverse to the program.⁵⁹ Early on in the program, Cochran's opponents were trying to get the WASP under the command of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC, later Women's Army Corps, WAC).⁶⁰ This would have been disastrous to the future of the WASP. There was a provision in the WAC bill that forbade women from piloting a plane. While the General Arnold agreed with Cochran, stating: "There are certain technical difficulties to this program due to the deficiencies of the existing legislation under which the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) operates. There is at present no authority for the commissioning of flying officers in the WAAC, nor is there any authority for flying pay."⁶¹ Had the WASP been put in with the WAC, they would have been reduced from flying to deskwork. With Cochran's abrasive methods of getting her way, she made many enemies along the way. Powerful enemies included C.R. Smith and Generals George and Tunner, who suggested the WFTD's be incorporated into the WAC. However, Cochran was able to convince General Arnold that "the WFTD program was too experimental to risk associating it with the independent service that he wanted."⁶² She did succeed in attaining a vast variety of different jobs for the WASP. In 1943, the WFTD was transferred from Houston to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, TX. There, the trainees had barracks, appropriate training facilities and adequate planes.

Poor plane maintenance and even suspected sabotage were among the problems faced by the women pilots in the WASP. At Sweetwater, and some other bases later on, the pilots had some accidents that were suspected of sabotage. One WFTD trainee, Lorraine Zillner, was flying a BT-13⁶³, when her plane went into an inverted spin (meaning she was upside down). She was able to get

⁵⁹ Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 117.

⁶⁰ Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 118-119.

⁶¹ CWO J. Merton England- "Women with the AAF", AAF Historical Office, 1946, 14.

⁶² Rich, *Jackie Cochran*, 119.

⁶³ BT stands for Basic Trainer. It is the first aircraft pilots are trained in.

out of it and land safely. Later, it was discovered that prior to her flight, the rudder cables had been cut. “They were cut through just part way, so I took off and when up and then, just when I was doing some maneuver, they snapped and that was it. No rudders.”⁶⁴ One WFTD trainee, Mary Ellen Keil, had two bad experiences with poor maintenance. One time, she was flying an AT-6⁶⁵ when the engine caught fire. When she landed, they found out that the mechanic “had left an oil rag on top of the engine. We never knew if it was carelessness or sabotage.”⁶⁶ Her second bad experience occurred when “all the flight controls came loose from the side of the airplane, and I was left holding them in my hand- the prop, mixture and throttle controls...I had no controls because I didn’t dare touch them-I didn’t know what might happen next... I don’t think that it could have been anything but sabotage.”⁶⁷ Whoever had been working on the plane, had “forgotten” to screw in the panel, which seems like more than just oversight or an accident.

There were also rumors about poor maintenance and sabotage at Camp Davis. According to WASP Lois Hollingsworth Ziler, “...we didn’t want to refuse to fly, otherwise we weren’t doing our mission.”⁶⁸ One WASP at Camp Davis who was not lucky enough to survive her malfunction was Mabel Rawlinson. According to the Army Air Force Accident Report No. 129, something went wrong with the throttle. 2nd Lt. Robillard, who was her instructor in the A-24⁶⁹, told his student to jump before the plane landed. She wasn’t able to escape the burning plane, and pilots on the runway could hear her screams. In the report, there is no mention “of a faulty latch in the front cockpit where Mabel was seated.”⁷⁰ Another WASP who perished at Camp Davis was Betty Taylor Wood. She was killed in a landing accident when the plane rolled and dived into the ground. Betty and her

⁶⁴ Jean Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1995), 40-41.

⁶⁵ AT stands for Advanced Trainer. It is the last trainer plane before a pilot transitions to bombers, or fighters.

⁶⁶ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 45.

⁶⁷ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 45.

⁶⁸ David A. Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue: Target-Towing WASP at Camp Davis*, (Sugarcreek, OH: Carlisle Printing, 2006), 95.

⁶⁹ A-24 was a converted navy Douglass Dauntless dive bomber.

⁷⁰ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 129.

passenger were both killed when they “were crushed between the canopy and the plane. It is said that the throttle was sticky and when she hit full throttle the delay allowed the wheels to hit the runway and the plane rebounded then torque the aircraft over with the late surge of power.”⁷¹ When Cochran went to investigate, she left without a word. She had talked to the mechanics and came to the conclusion that “the accident was caused by sabotage, sugar in the gas tank.”⁷² The Army Airforce never confirmed these reports of sabotage, but most of them seem like obvious negligence. Had these findings been released among the WASP, the whole program could have been at risk of failure. However, one WASP, Virginia Dulaney Campbell, found a clever way to test to see if a plane had been fixed. It was a well-known fact at the bases that the mechanics and crew chiefs “loved to fly- they loved to go up as copilot, and when they didn’t (want to go up), you [knew] damned well that you don’t want to take that airplane up. So I’d say, take it back and fix it.”⁷³ This playful way of determining if a plane had been properly fixed may have saved her life numerous times. Somehow, Cochran was able to keep the rumors of sabotage to a minimum, thus saving the program...for the time being.

Because of Cochran’s drive to give her trainees more opportunities than just ferrying, she worked with Lt. General Yount. It was under his directive that the trainees were given the opportunity to diversify from just ferrying. However, the original plan for the “utilization of women pilots should be divided into two classifications: 1) Enlistment and training: 2) Subsequent employment in ferrying operation.”⁷⁴ Women who graduated from the WFTD were expected to be hired by the Ferrying Division. Cochran worked to give the graduates more duties because she wanted her women graduates to take over all domestic flights. Through Cochran’s efforts, women

⁷¹ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 129-130.

⁷² Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 130.

⁷³ Cole, Jean Hascall, *Virginia Dulaney Campbell Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1989).

⁷⁴ CWO J. Merton England- “Women with the AAF”, AAF Historical Office, 1946,19.

of the WASP could be utilized in a number of different ways: towing targets, flight-testing, administrative flights, flight instruction and propaganda flying.

One new opportunity beyond ferrying, the WASP had after graduation was target towing. The first cohort of Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) reported at Camp Davis, North Carolina in July of 1943.⁷⁵ The WASP assigned there were under a Commanding Officer that had no use for women pilots. However, being an army man, he had to follow orders.⁷⁶ Originally, they were given orders to fly light planes as administrative pilots and tracking flights. When Cochran discovered this, she demanded that they begin flying A-24's and A-25's to tow targets.⁷⁷ This job was deemed to be a dangerous job, so by Cochran securing this job for the WASP was a big step. The A-24 was the Douglas Dauntless, which was a Navy dive-bomber plane. The A-25 was the Curtiss Helldiver, which was also a dive-bomber.⁷⁸ They helped train the anti-aircraft artillery soldiers. In places like Camp Davis, they were fired at with live rounds.⁷⁹ Ann Baumgartner Carl, a WASP stationed at Camp Davis, has this to say about working as a target tower: "When towing a target sleeve, it was sobering to realize that the queer round blots of smoke outside the window were live ammunition exploding a bit ahead of the target. Some airplanes came back with holes in them."⁸⁰

Another task given to the WASP was flight-testing. To most, this meant testing planes that had been in accidents or had mechanical troubles, but to one it meant testing new experimental equipment and airplanes. Ann Baumgartner Carl, originally stationed at Camp Davis, was transferred to Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. There, she was assigned to "test high-altitude and low

⁷⁵ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, XXII.

⁷⁶ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 48.

⁷⁷ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 49.

⁷⁸ Greg Goebel, "The Douglas SBD Dauntless, and Curtiss SB2C Helldiver", In the Public Domain, <http://www.vectorsite.net/avsbd.html> (Accessed 25 Feb 2009)

⁷⁹ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 55-56.

⁸⁰ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 96.

temperature equipment proposed for the WASPs.”⁸¹ During World War II, she was the only woman assigned to experimental flight-testing. While at Wright Air Force Base, she also tested a relief tube designed especially for women. At the time, women were forced to “hold it” during cross country trips because the only relief tube was designed to fit the male anatomy. Often at the bases they landed at, there were not facilities for women to use. She later began to test new equipment, and ultimately, became the first woman to fly a jet-propelled airplane.⁸² While Ann Baumgartner Carl was at Wright Air Force Base, she had to overcome some gender-based discrimination. She had to prove her worth working in the office to prove that she “was serious enough” to be a test pilot. However, the experience she gained working in the office allowed her to learn the all the protocol associated with flight-testing. After several weeks, she was given the OK to actually flight test an airplane.

Other women working in flight-testing were assigned to test airplanes that had been damaged. Their lives were worth less than the future combat pilots who would be training in the airplanes. This job is described as “aerial dishwashing” in the sense that it was slow and tedious work. After they first took up the plane, they had to “slow time” the engine, which meant flying it slowly to break in the new engine, for nearly an hour. After that, they were able to do some aerobatics to test that the wings were securely attached. WASP who held these jobs viewed them as important. Madge Ragan Leon Moore said “When a plane was sent in to be worked on you know, it had to be tested before it was returned to duty.”⁸³ This job was important because the women who tested them made sure they were safe enough for training male cadets. Making sure it was safe before it reached the cadets ensured that one less life would be lost in the process of training.

⁸¹ Ann Baumgartner Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles: A Woman Military Test Pilot in World War II*, (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institute Press, 1999), 55.

⁸² Ann Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles*, 97-101.

⁸³ Dawn Letson, *Madge Ragan Leon Moore Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2002).

Women were also assigned to bases doing administrative flying. At those bases, they would fly non-flight rated officers (officers who did not have pilot licenses) around to different bases. Many WASP welcomed this assignment because it allowed them to visit family and friends near the various air bases. At first, however, they were met with skepticism and fear, as many male officers were nervous of flying in planes piloted by women. After a few flights, most men began to lose their nervousness and actually enjoyed flying with a woman at the controls. One WASP who did administrative flying was Phyllis Toby Tobias Felker. She was assigned to take a man somewhere. “But oh, this one man, he didn’t want to fly with me, but he was a good soldier so he went fearing and trembling. By the time we got back, we were the best of friends. But you know, he’d been in the Army a long time and he hadn’t had to put up with women pilots.”⁸⁴ Another woman pilot who was met with fear on an administrative flight was WASP Patricia Bowser Gibson. She was the last pilot on the flight line (where pilots would wait for their next assignment) when a man needed to get to Tallahassee. While flying there, the plane hit some rough weather. “But I guess he was getting pretty nervous. He must have been. I know he wet his pants...I had a smooth landing. Got up there in the flight line, I hadn’t even unbuckled yet, when this guy was out of the plane, running as fast as he could. He was scared to death.”⁸⁵ This was one time that a man did not enjoy his flight with a WASP.

A select few women were assigned at Shaw Field to instruct Army Air Force cadets. One such WASP was Ethel Meyer Finley. She did such a good job instructing, that the official report of WASP activities at Shaw Field stated, “The three WASP instructors were the outstanding members of the squadron at this station due to their instructional abilities and their flying background...their work was considered excellent in all phases. WASPs who served as instructors were well

⁸⁴ Dawn Letson, *Phyllis Toby Tobias Felker Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2004).

⁸⁵ Sarah Rickman, *Patricia Bowser Gibson Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2005).

disciplined.”⁸⁶ The three women stationed at Shaw Field Army Air Force Base were used to test a theory: “to see if this was going to be a feasible thing for women to teach men.”⁸⁷ Remarkably most male pilot cadets, WASP like Finley taught, were very accepting of their teachers. “And the guys accepted us ‘cause they wanted to go out to combat anyways, so that anybody who wanted to do that job would be just fine with them.”⁸⁸

Women were also used to prove bigger and faster airplanes were safe. When men balked at flying the B-26’s, women were sent to B-26 school. “It was a hot plane, difficult to fly, and the landing gear was narrow, contributing to danger in landing. The men could hardly refuse to fly an airplane that women could handle, and time proved that the women could handle it very nicely.”⁸⁹ The plane was not so affectionately called “the flying prostitute”, because of the aforementioned problems. Mary Ellen Keil, a WASP who attended B-26 school, found that “we outscored the men in B-26 ground school and they couldn’t believe it. Here we were, supposedly uninformed women and we got better scores than they did.”⁹⁰ Women were used effectively to “shame” men into flying planes that many considered to be too dangerous.

Another plane that men were adamant about not flying was the B-29. Then Colonel Paul Tibbets took two women and showed them how to fly it. He first got the idea when he saw a “curly-headed little girl” come in and “stopped a B-26 stop right in front of the operation door. And I thought that was an entrance.”⁹¹ That was his first exposure to a WASP. “I (Tibbets) didn’t have any use to recall it until over a year later when I was confronted by a man from General Arnold’s office in Washington with the fact that they were having trouble in Clovis New Mexico, trying to get

⁸⁶ Nancy Durr, *Ethel Meyer Finley Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2001).

⁸⁷ Nancy Durr, *Ethel Meyer Finley Oral History*.

⁸⁸ Nancy Durr, *Ethel Meyer Finley Oral History*.

⁸⁹ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 72.

⁹⁰ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 82.

⁹¹ Dawn Letson, *Paul Tibbets Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1997).

college football heroes to fly the B-29. They said it was unsafe.”⁹² He was asked what he would do in order to get men to fly it, and he remembered the WASP. He chose two WASP, Dora Dougherty and Didi Moorman. The major fear attributed with the B-29 was the belief that if a pilot lost an engine, they were dead. On their Civil Aeronautics inspection ride, they went down to two engines (of four) and even did a few engine stalls. When she was about to land, one of the two working engines caught on fire. Dougherty and Moorman were able to land the plane with only one engine. After everyone had evacuated the plane on landing, the Civil Aeronautics Inspector came up to Dora, “put his arms around her and he said honey, give me your log goddamned logbook. I want to sign it.”⁹³ They then chose an airplane, which they named “the Ladybird”, to fly around to the different B-29 bases to prove to male pilots that the B-29 was safe. Paul Tibbets reflects on the experiment “It was a success. Airplanes that had not been flying at Clovis started to fly. It worked out—it worked out real well.”⁹⁴

The WASP were used in a variety of ways. In each of the functions they performed, they proved that women could fly just as well, if not better, than men. They were able to do what the programs set out to do, release pilots for combat duty. They were able to help with the war effort, in a real and tangible way.

VI: Adversity and the Push to be Militarized (1944)

In 1944, the war in Europe was starting to come to an end. Pilot casualties were lower than expected, so the Army Air Force had a surplus of military pilots. Combat pilots who had returned from combat after they completed their assigned missions were concerned about keeping their flight pay. In addition, the civilian air instructors who had avoided the draft were at risk of being drafted

⁹² Paul Tibbets oral history.

⁹³ Paul Tibbets oral history.

⁹⁴ Paul Tibbets oral history.

into the “walking army” i.e. infantry. “They (civilian pilots) formed a powerful lobby and the resulting pressures, both political and emotional, worked against the women.”⁹⁵ Some WASP were resigned to being deactivated. One WASP, Sylvia Dahmes Clayton, remarked, “Maybe it was too late because there were pilots coming back and they were so afraid we were going to take their jobs. They didn’t want to come back from flying and be going into an infantry division or something like that.”⁹⁶ They began to protest against the militarization of women pilots and found many sympathetic people in the media and on Capitol Hill.

Representative John Costello of California introduced the “WASP Bill” on 30 September 1943. Representative Costello assured Cochran that “if we can get a favorable report from the War Department, I feel that I will have little difficulty in getting the Committee’s approval.”⁹⁷ The purpose of the WASP Bill was to ensure the WASPs received the same benefits as male civilian pilots, and was also meant to incorporate them into the AAF. It was **not** designed to create another auxiliary (like the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps, the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service-the Navy Auxiliary, the women Marines or Semper Paratus-Always Ready- the Coast Guard Auxiliary). General Arnold, commander of the Army Air Force, supported the bill. He stressed that the point of the WASP was “that the male pilots were not being replaced by the WASPs, but that most of these men did not meet the pilot requirements established by the AAF.”⁹⁸ He also states, “We cannot lower our standards because a man has had a few hours in the air. They must meet our standards.”⁹⁹ His main point was that some of the unemployed civilian pilots did not meet the AAF

⁹⁵ Jean Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1995), 4.

⁹⁶ Dawn Letson, *Sylvia Dahmes Clayton Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2002).

⁹⁷ Costello, Rep. John, Letter to Jacqueline Cochran, 4 October 1944, 2.

⁹⁸ Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearings*, 22 March 1944, 2.

⁹⁹ Committee on Military Affairs.

requirements, but the WASPs, who were being specially trained, did. In the end, the WASP bill did not pass by nineteen votes.¹⁰⁰

One of the main opponents to WASP militarization was the Committee on the Civil Service, led by Congressman Robert Ramspeck from Georgia. This document is commonly referred to as the “Ramspeck Report.” While he gives statistics, they are not backed up by real evidence. Instead, the committee relied heavily on articles from journalist Drew Pearson. They still had their effect. The Ramspeck Report’s central argument was that “it is a question of the utilization of experience and capabilities before resorting to the use of inexperience and costly training.”¹⁰¹ The report claimed that it was more cost efficient to use men who were civilian instructors to ferry aircraft, and to take over tasks the WASP were currently doing. The Ramspeck Report concluded:

1. The proposal to expand the WASP has not been justified. Therefore, it is recommended that the recruiting of inexperienced personnel and their training for the WASPS be immediately terminated.
2. That the use of the WASPS already trained and in training be continued and provision be made for hospitalization and insurance.
3. There exist several surpluses of experienced pilot personnel available for utilization as service pilots.

Therefore, it is recommended that the service of these several groups of experienced air personnel be immediately utilized.¹⁰²

Another opponent to WASP militarization was Drew Pearson. He was a gossip columnist who attacked the WASP program. He alleged “that WASPs were still in training and still flying missions while ‘more than 5,000 trained male pilots, each with an average of 1250 flying hours remain idle,’ and that General Arnold was attempting to have the WASPs incorporated under the WACs.”¹⁰³ The WACs were the Women Army Corps, which was the women’s auxiliary in the Army. His column was incorrect, and he deliberately left out the fact that “the AAF had concluded

¹⁰⁰ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 101.

¹⁰¹ Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Civil Services, *Concerning Inquiries Made of Certain Proposals for the Expansion and Change in Civil Service Status of the WASP*,; 78th Cong., 2nd Sess., 5 June 1944, 3,

¹⁰² Committee on the Civil Services, *Ramspeck Report*, 13.

¹⁰³ “The Washington Merry-Go-Round: Arnold Faces Uproar over His Continued Use of WASPs,” 5 August 1944.

new training and recruiting.”¹⁰⁴ This is significant because that meant that the WASP program would not be accepting any new trainees. He also makes the claim that the reason people like Arnold wanted the WASP militarized was because the AAF wanted their own women’s auxiliary, which was not the case. General Arnold understood that the WASP were doing an excellent job, and he also understood that it would take more time to train men to replace the WASP. Pearson also makes the claim that “the WASP program and the AAF were engaged in illegal activities by attempting to go against a congressional order.”¹⁰⁵ The congressional order allowed the Army Air Force (AAF) to hire civilian pilots to fill a need. Since the wording was not gender specific, the AAF began hiring the WAFS (Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron) and the WFTD (Women’s Flying Training Detachment).

One positive piece that came out in support of the WASP was written by Gill Robb Wilson. He pointed out that the WASP program had been a success, and also made the point that it was going to cost the American taxpayer money in order to train the male civilian pilots to take over the ferrying jobs previously held by the WASP. He was, moreover, not convinced that “the WASPs were not needed, particularly since they were ‘ferrying more than 80% of all ships produced.’”¹⁰⁶ Wilson claimed that,

Training of men to take their places will require a million dollars, from four to six months time, and even then will not replace the broad experience which the women have built up on pursuit aircraft. But, as previously indicated, the question is not of demobilizing the WASPs, but of firing the experts among them who cannot be replaced in full and whose partial replacement will be expensive and slow.¹⁰⁷

The real debate over the militarization of women pilots had less to do with money and experience and everything to do with cultural perceptions of women’s traditional roles in American

¹⁰⁴ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ Gill Robb Wilson, “WASPs to be Demobilized Dec. 20: Of Nine Hundred of Them, Two Hundred are Experts, Needed in War Work,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 December 1944.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, “WASPs to be Demobilized Dec. 20.”

society. These women proved to the military and the public in general that women could fly military planes, with similar casualty rates as male cadets. They also proved that women had a similar wash out rate, fatality rate, and averaged the same amount of flight time per month as male pilots.¹⁰⁸

According to Molly Merryman

It also reflected a cultural construction in which men and women were perceived as being such separate categories that it was deemed more logical to compare the WASPs with women who served as clerks, nurses and secretaries rather than with male pilots stationed at the same bases as the WASPs. Had the WASPs been compared with these male pilots, instead of being constructed as incompetent, it would have been revealed that the rate of accidents and deaths was lower for WASPs than for male pilots training and performing similar missions.¹⁰⁹

But, at this time, it was not feasible to compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges. Women pilots, in this time period, could not be compared to male pilots. Instead, they were compared with women doing incomparable work. However, the attention secured by the civilian male pilots facing the draft, turned public opinion against the WASP. A statement issued by their director, Jackie Cochran, did not help their cause. She stated “under a civilian status, so many elements of the experimental project are lost or weakened, and there is such a lack of control over permanency of work by individual WASPs after they are trained, that serious consideration should be given to inactivation of the WASP program if militarization is not soon authorized.”¹¹⁰ This statement was a kind of “take it or leave it” threat, that said if the WASP were not militarized, then they might as well be disbanded. With that one statement, Cochran issued congress an ultimatum. And that ultimatum sealed the fate of the WASP. Shortly after that statement was released, the WASP were disbanded, with no military benefits.

Another surprising source of discrimination came from different groups of women. One WASP, Nell Stevenson Bright, recalls that the WAC were unfriendly. “They didn’t like us too well,

¹⁰⁸ Government report, Headquarters, Army Air Forces: “Final Report on Women Pilot Program,” Jacqueline Cochran, 1 August 1944, 1-2

¹⁰⁹ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 109-110.

¹¹⁰ Government report: Women Airforce Service Pilots Jacqueline Cochran, 1 August 1944.

I don't think. Because we did our own thing, but that was- we couldn't be bothered about whether they liked us or not."¹¹¹ It seems that the WACs were jealous of the freedom that the WASP received. Another group of women who did not care much for the WASP were the male pilot's wives. One WASP remembers, "There were some officer's wives who went to the Commanding Officer and asked specifically that their husbands never be assigned a WASP as a co-pilot or their husbands never to be assigned co-pilot to a WASP. That was true at Romulus (Army Air Force base). They (the wives) knew their husbands."¹¹² At a time when the WASPs were pushing the limits of gender roles, it is strange to see other women discriminating against them. The question could be raised that these women were jealous of the independence these women possessed through flight.

Women in the WASP were not able to refute publicly the negative information coming out about their program in the press. The War Department and Cochran did not want any press getting out about the WASP. Their main reason for not allowing interviews or many news articles released was because the program was too experimental. If there were failures, or news about the alleged sabotages, they did not want that getting out and affecting their campaign to get militarized. Women pilots were not even allowed to write their Congressmen or Congresswomen to make their appeals. Cochran stopped those letters, and reprimanded the authors. Since they were not able to come out and refute the negative publicity, only the negative publicity ever reached the American people.

Prior to the WASP Bill being defeated, two very enterprising WASP Betty Gillies and Barbara London went to Washington, D.C. on their own initiative. There, they went through their own channels to talk to Senators to try and get militarization. They went to try and get the meaning of "persons" to include both men and women. London and Gillies were working to get it "so we

¹¹¹ Dr. Maura Mackowski, *Nell Stevenson Bright Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women's University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2003).

¹¹² Dawn Letson, *Sylvia Dahmes Clayton Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women's University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2002).

could individually go into the service.”¹¹³ However, when it reached General Arnold, he said that “persons” meant male only. One surprising fact was that Betty’s husband supported her when she wanted to join the AAF.¹¹⁴ They were at that point unaware of the plans for deactivation. These two women tried their own hand at securing their future as military pilots, but, sadly, they were turned down or sent away.

All of the WASP loved flying and especially loved being paid by the government to do so. “This was a great, blessed opportunity. And forget recognition. If I’d had the money, I would have paid them.”¹¹⁵ However, many did not want to be incorporated into the military. As civilians, they retained the right to resign at any time. This is one of the major criticisms of the program, because after all of the money that the taxpayers had paid, they were not receiving the full benefits of their money. On the other hand, it was one of the major arguments for militarization. If they were militarized, they would not be able to resign without due cause.

The ultimate discrimination levied upon the WASP was the fact that they were denied funerary benefits. There was no compensation for getting the bodies back to the families. Other WASPs had to often “pass the hat” in order to raise funds to get the bodies back to the families or to those who were unable to raise enough money, Jackie Cochran often paid for the bodies to get home. There was no flag at the funeral, and the families were denied the right to call their daughters veterans. This was a slap in the face to the women who gave their lives serving their country.

¹¹³ Dawn Letson, *Betty Huyler Gillies/ Barbara London Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1996).

¹¹⁴ Letson, *Betty Huyler Gilles/ Barbara London Oral History*.

¹¹⁵ Dawn Letson, *Virginia Lee Jowell Hagerstrom Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1994).

VII: After Deactivation

So the day we were to leave, the twentieth of December, some depot called and said, we've got five airplanes to be tested. We said, "Sorry. You have to get your little boys to do them, because we can't do them anymore." They didn't want us to leave¹¹⁶.

Jean Moore Soard- 44-W-2

The day we left to go home on the twentieth of December there were sixty-one P-51's sitting on the airport that did not get delivered that day.

Barbara London, Original WAFS

As 20 December approached, some women were given the opportunity to get a large amount of missions. After the last graduation only two weeks before disbandment, "WASPs at various duty stations tried to get in as much flying as they could, but their abilities to do so depended on the graciousness of their commanding officers."¹¹⁷ Marty WYall noticed that "male pilots from her base sympathized with graduates who didn't get to serve as WASPs, so they let them fly as many missions as possible in a short time, including the flight home."¹¹⁸

WYall, who graduated with the last class on 9 December, was fortunate to be assigned to a base where the WASP were appreciated. She "not only received a flight to a base near her home, but she also got to copilot the plane."¹¹⁹ At one base, they went beyond simply sending them home. At Perrin Field in Sherman, Texas, they had a unique way of saying thank you to the WASP. According to WASP Madge Ragan Leon Moore, "They had a parade (for us)... on the base."¹²⁰ Another WASP who did not have any trouble with getting a ride home was Sara Payne Hayden. "We could get a ride

¹¹⁶ Dawn Letson, *Jean Moore Soard Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women's University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2002).

¹¹⁷ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 126.

¹¹⁸ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 126.

¹¹⁹ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 126.

¹²⁰ Dawn Letson, *Madge Ragan Leon Moore Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women's University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2002).

out on any aircraft, military aircraft that was going our way. Of course, we were pilots, they invited us to sit up in front and fly it.”¹²¹

However, bases where WASPs were not so highly regarded were forced to find other methods of transportations home. Some had to return home on their own dime by other means of transportation than flying. WASP Clarice Bergemann says “We were just told to leave- there was no ‘we’ll take you home’ or anything. We had to get home how you could.”¹²² Betty Stagg Turner, another WASP, had to take a train to get home. “I went home on a train, because there weren’t any planes going near my home.”¹²³

Ironically, it took the deactivation of the WASP for public opinion to change in its favor. Articles came out talking about how “we should have done more for them” or the WASPs were soothed only by the fact that they would be home in time for Christmas. All of the media attention seemingly forgot all accusations of “ineptitude and wrongdoing.”¹²⁴ A newspaper article titled “Wasps Go into Retirement after Valiant War Service,” began by stating, “Although they never actually got into combat but did valiant duty in important war training missions and other war service, the Wasps will be home for Christmas.”¹²⁵ This article recognized that now that the WASP were disbanded, there was no longer a threat from women pilots. But by then, it was too little, too late for the women who had served their country.

¹²¹ Dawn Letson, *Sara Payne Hayden Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1997).

¹²² Jean Hascall Cole, *Clarice Siddall Bergemann Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 1989.)

¹²³ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 126.

¹²⁴ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 127.

¹²⁵ “Wasps Go into Retirement after Valiant War Service,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 December 1944.

I was very sad (about deactivation). I would have loved to stay on and on and on. But I found out we couldn't stay and fly.

*Lela Loudder Harding*¹²⁶

You don't need legislation to prove something...you can be whatever you set your heart and head to be, and don't let anybody tell you can't be, because 1078 women pilots did it in World War II.

*Annelle Henderson Bulechek 44-W-2*¹²⁷

“Well, we heard rumors (about deactivation) and so, this is it, it’s official. And we didn’t like it. Didn’t like it at all. But that’s the way the cookie crumbles, so. You couldn’t do anything about it.”¹²⁸ This sentiment state by Geraldine Bowen Olinger illustrates how many women felt. They were resigned to the fact that their country felt they no longer needed them. By the end of 1944, the American public was ready for a return to normalcy. Women were no longer wanted to do the jobs they had trained so hard to do.

After deactivation, only a small number of women were able to continue flying. Most women could not afford to fly after the war. Those that were able to continue flying did so because they had the capital to fly, took positions instructing, or got jobs at an airport. All of the women realized that the time for them to fly for the military was over. Most women left the WASP and got married and started a family. The return to normalcy had taken its toll on the WASP.

All women reflected upon that they served with the WASP with fond memories. Their sense of patriotism made them accept that people did not need them to continue flying. They did not want to be keeping other men from their jobs. They understood that they had been trained and utilized to release pilots for combat duty. Since they were now considered to be taking jobs from the men they had tried so hard to release, many people were resigned to the fate of the WASP.

¹²⁶ Dawn Letson, *Lela Loudder Harding Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2003).

¹²⁷ Annelle Henderson Bulechek, “WASP on the Web”, <http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/> (accessed 23 March 2009).

¹²⁸ Sarah Rickman, *Geraldine “Gerri” Bowen Olinger Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2005).

VIII: Epilogue: 30 Years Later: Finally Recognized as Veterans

In 1976, women were accepted into the Air Force academy as cadets for the first time. These women claimed that they were the first women to fly military aircraft. Now was the time for the WASP to end their silence, and came out to say, “we were the first.”

It took from 1972 until 1977 for the WASP to be recognized as veterans. The Veterans Administration (VA) blocked their attempts. The bill put forth in 1977 became the “only bill ever to be cosponsored by every woman member of Congress.”¹²⁹ In spite of being opposed by the VA, they had the support “of the military news weekly *Stars and Stripes*, along with that of Antonia Handler Chayes, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Installations.”¹³⁰ One document changed the head of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. When Representative Olin Teague saw “that the copy of Helen Porter’s WASP discharge was identical to the official World War II Army honorable discharge certificate, he changed his mind. Teague acknowledged, for the first time, that the women had been de facto military personnel.”¹³¹ When his support was added to the bill, it passed easily through the House and the Senate. President Jimmy Carter signed the bill into law on 23 November 1977. The Women Airforce Service Pilots finally had their recognition they deserved.

Prior to and during World War II, women pilots were faced with discrimination in multiple forms. They were refused benefits given to all other Army Air Force (AAF) personnel, and went down in history as being the only war bill not passed after endorsement by the War Board.¹³² The WASP were retroactively recognized as the veterans they all knew they were. It took over thirty years for the WASP to receive the benefits befitting those who served during World War II.

¹²⁹ Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation: 1940-1985*, 103.

¹³⁰ Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation: 1940-1985*, 103.

¹³¹ Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation: 1940-1985*, 103.

¹³² “WASPS,” *Washington Post*, 25 June 1944.

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Appendix

*“If I die violently, who can say it was before my time? I want no one to grieve for me. I was the happiest in the sky- at dawn when the quietness of the air was like a caress, when the noon sun beat down, and at dusk when the sky was drenched with the fading light. Think of me there and remember me, I hope, as I shall you.”*¹³³

Cornelia Fort, Original WAFS

*“We weren’t trying to be feminists or prove what women could do. We all just loved to fly. But we just couldn’t believe that we were gonna get paid to fly these wonderful airplanes, and it was just wonderful. We thought it was the greatest thing and just had a great time. And we felt that we had a job to do. We were not necessarily trying to prove a point one-way or the other. I mean, we were proving, in completing our training and being successful, at doing it, we were proving that women could fly as well as men, and that they could do the flying jobs. And I think that is the biggest thing that we, and we were very proud of that.”*¹³⁴

Nell Stevenson Bright, WASP

*We are Yankee Doodle Pilots, Yankee Doodle, do or die! Real, live nieces of our Uncle Sam,
Born with a yearning to fly. Keep in step to all our classes March to flight line with our pals.*

*Yankee Doodle came to Texas Just to fly the PT's! We are those Yankee Doodle Gals.*¹³⁵

Lyrics from Yankee Doodle Pilots

*You’ll go forth from here with your silver wings You’ll go forth from here with your silver wings
Santiago blue and a heart that sings ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no longer.
Leave your h.p. tricks to the babes in ‘6’ Leave your h.p. tricks to the babes in ‘6’ Leave your
big city tricks to the gals in the sticks-- ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no longer.
You can leave all the drillin’ to the W-5 chillun You can leave all the drillin’ to the W-5 chillun
You can leave LaRue’s killin’ to the gals still willin’ ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no longer.
Leave your instrument lore to poor W-4 Leave your instrument lore to poor W-4 You can
leave all the Links with their gadgets galore ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no longer.
You can leave PT to poor W-3 You can leave PT to poor W-3 You can leave all the cricks from
the neck to the knee ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no longer.
Leave your cross-country buzzin’ to your W-2 cousin Leave your cross-country buzzin’ to your
W-2 cousin Leave the hedge-hoppin’ fun that was W-1. ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no
longer.*

*You’ll go forth from here with your silver wings You’ll go forth from here with your silver wings
Santiago blue and a heart that sings ‘Cause you ain’t gonna be here no longer*¹³⁶.

Lyrics from You’ll Go Forth

¹³³ Stallman, *Women in the Wild Blue*, 125.

¹³⁴ Dr. Maura Mackowski, *Nell Stevenson Bright Oral History*, (Denton, TX: Texas Women’s University: Women Airforce Service Pilots Oral History Project, 2003).

¹³⁵ Yankee Doodle Pilots, WASP variation on Yankee Doodle, lyrics from: Wings Across America-
<http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/songs/swinging.htm> (accessed 1 March, 2009).

¹³⁶ You’ll Go Forth, WASP variation on Dig Your Grave With a Silver Spade, lyrics from: Wings Across America-
<http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/songs/swinging.htm> (accessed 1 March, 2009).