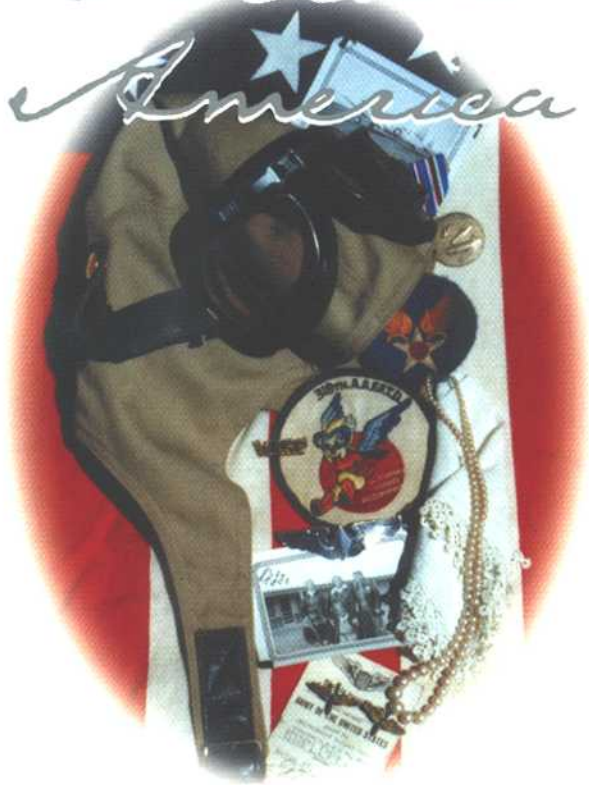


*Wings
Across
America*







Women Airforce Service Pilots

More than 50 years ago, at a time when America was desperate for gasoline, money for war bonds and a few good men, something extraordinary happened. 1,830 young women pilots from all over America quit their jobs, left their families and paid their own way to Texas to learn to fly "the Army way." They did it because they loved their country. They did it because they loved to fly. 1,074 completed their training, earned their silver wings and, together with 28 WAFS (Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Service), became Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), the *first* women in history to fly American military aircraft.

Their pioneering history is virtually unknown. It is a history filled with untold accounts of patriotism, heroism and sacrificial service to their country that is unique, compelling and inspiring. The WASP made a difference, and the eyewitness accounts of their service to this nation should be permanently recorded and preserved. The time has come when their stories must either be sought out and recorded or lost forever.



The WASP

During the early months of World War II, there was a critical shortage of male pilots. America's foremost woman pilot, Jacqueline Cochran, convinced the Chief of the Army Air Forces, General Hap Arnold, that she could bring together a corps of women pilots. If given the same Army Air Force flying training as that given to the AAF male cadets, the women would be equally capable of flying military aircraft and could relieve male pilots needed for combat duty. The first class began training on November 16, 1942.

After graduation, the WASP were stationed at 120 Army air bases across the United States. They flew more than 60 million miles in every type of aircraft and on every type of mission flown by the Army Air Force, except combat.



Missions included ferrying aircraft, towing targets for live air-to-air gunnery practice and live anti-aircraft artillery practice, simulated strafing and night tracking missions, flight testing aircraft, smoke laying, radio control flying, transporting cargo and personnel and serving as instrument and flight instructors for Army Air Force cadets. Thirty-eight WASP lost their lives while serving their country as military pilots, their bodies sent home in cheap pine boxes at the expense of their family or friends. These heroic women pilots were denied any military benefits or honors—no gold star in the window—not even so much as an American flag to drape their coffins.

On December 7, 1944, in a speech to the last class of graduating WASP, General Arnold said, "You and more than 900 of your sisters have shown you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers.... I salute you and all WASP. We of the Army Air Force *will never forget you.*" Thirteen days later the WASP were disbanded. Despite General Arnold's pledge that the Air Force would never forget them, it did—and so did America.



Wings Across America

Most Americans have never heard of the WASP. After deactivation, many of their training records were unintentionally destroyed, while the available military records of their service were sealed, marked “classified” and filed away in government archives for 33 years. By that time, the history of World War II had already been written, the WASP chapter either missing or only included as a brief footnote. In 1977 the WASP were finally given the veteran status they had earned. It was too little, too late for so many.

More than 50 years have passed since World War II and still much of the WASP history lies buried in the hearts of the women who lived it—untold and unknown. However, through WINGS ACROSS AMERICA, there is hope. There are more than 600 surviving WASP. Each of their eyewitness accounts can still be captured and preserved to document their contribution to the Allied victory in World War II and the trail they blazed for others to follow.



Time is crucial. Every survivor is over 70.



The Mission

Document, Digitize, Publish and Preserve the History of the WASP.

The first and most important task is to capture the eyewitness accounts of the more than 600 surviving WASP. Baylor University and WINGS ACROSS AMERICA, with the support of KCTF Public Television, will create an extraordinary WINGS ACROSS AMERICA network of outstanding PBS stations, universities and colleges across America. They will unite for one noble cause: to record a part of America's history that time has almost erased, using a digital medium that time will never erase.

This nationwide effort will directly involve expert field producers, videographers and interviewers from PBS stations and college telecommunications and oral history departments. These specialists will make every effort to travel to each WASP, wherever she is located,



and videotape her eyewitness account. These personal interviews will not only capture the unique history of the WASP, they will create a national public awareness of the WASP service during WWII.

WASP participation is crucial. Their video accounts will form the foundation for the WASP VIDEO ARCHIVE. As the interviews are completed, each WASP will be featured on her own web page, with excerpts from her interview and pictures and records of her service and her life. Each WASP page will be hyperlinked to the database, giving instant access to valuable research material *as it unfolds*.

Video interviews, in their entirety, will be digitized and stored in the WASP VIDEO ARCHIVE, which will be created, housed and maintained at Baylor University. This digital database will be the most comprehensive multimedia archive of WASP history ever assembled. Information from this archive will be used in computerized classrooms as a tool for global education and to inspire future generations to become the pioneers of tomorrow.

The Future

Upon completion of the WASP VIDEO ARCHIVE, WINGS ACROSS AMERICA will have the basic raw material needed to create the most innovative educational portion of the project: the WINGS ACROSS AMERICA DIGITAL LIBRARY AND VIRTUAL MUSEUM.


The **DIGITAL LIBRARY** will link the WASP VIDEO ARCHIVE and other existing WASP collections and archives together—including printed, photographic, film, audio and video resources. This digital library will be the most comprehensive guide to WASP research material in the world.

The **VIRTUAL MUSEUM** will be created, using interactive technology, to access clips from the Video Archives, digitized stock footage, photographs and audio clips. Animation, music, mini movies and slide shows will educate and entertain visitors as they navigate through the WINGS ACROSS AMERICA Image Gallery, Theatre, Radio Room, File Room, Flight Line, Link Trainer and Cockpit Simulators. Visitors will not only learn about the WASP, but they will be able to experience—if just for a moment—what it might have been like to be a WASP.



*The WASP Video Archive
is just the beginning.*

Once these fading histories are documented, the potential for their educational use is unlimited. This one project can provide resources for documentaries, multimedia educational projects, interactive learning kiosks, Ph.D. dissertations and teaching curriculums for all grade levels. From this initial resource—anything is possible.

The history of the WASP service to their country is an important part of the history of World War II, the history of military aviation, the history of women and the history of Texas. During their service and throughout their lifetimes, the WASP have proven time and time again that "you can do anything you want to do, as long as it is the right thing to do and you put your mind to it." Their value as role models is immeasurable. The history of their commitment, courage, service and sacrifice, in the face of formidable challenges during some of America's darkest hours, will be their lasting legacy for this generation and generations to come. WINGS ACROSS AMERICA will carry the memories of these pioneers into the 21st century—and beyond. 



WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

Wings Across America

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