STARS AND STRIPES®

*Salutes*

# WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

## WOMEN PILOTS WHO SERVED AMERICA DURING WWII
## 1942 - 1944




An Advertising Supplement to Stars and Stripes

# THANK YOU TO OUR HEROES

by Major Nicole "FiFi" Malachowski

Thank you to our heroes, the WASP, for paving the way for the thousands of military women aviators who have followed in their footsteps. This award of the Congressional Gold Medal represents a long overdue, and heartfelt, thank you from our great nation. It also recognizes the legacy your pioneering spirit has left on the women and men of our Armed Forces. For this you have our everlasting admiration, respect, and gratitude.

The WASP service to our nation during a time of war is the story of legends. Their legacy to all military aviators, women and men alike, is the knowledge that perseverance, commitment, and the desire to serve can overcome tremendous obstacles. Challenging the attitudes and restrictions of their era, the WASP managed to serve their country with distinction and honor. Against all odds, they followed their dream. Their service to our nation at a critical time in the history of the entire free world is not remarkable because they were women, but it is remarkable in its own right.

Countless women military aviators would not be in uniform today, wearing pilot wings, if not for their inspiration. As young children we looked to their example—imagining these women in their oversized jumpsuits, leather flying jackets, parachutes on their backs, stepping into training, transport, fighter and bomber aircraft. It is during those moments we all realized that women could serve their country as pilots, too… and our own dreams were born.

The WASP spirit of Fifinella was with the women pilots who trained in the 1970s and those that flew support missions in Central and South America in the 1980s. It carried many women aviators safely through the first Gulf War. This spirit currently resides in the hearts, minds, and aircrafts of hundreds of women aviators over the skies of Iraq and Afghanistan.

On behalf of the thousands of women military aviators who have followed in your footsteps, and all women and men in uniform, we thank you. We promise to carry your legacy forward for future generations, and we hope we make you as proud of us, as we are of you.



**Maj. Nicole Malachowski is the first woman to pilot a U.S. Air Force Thunderbird.**
(U.S. Air Force photo)

## What is WASP?




WASP stands for Women Airforce Service Pilots, the first women in U.S. history to fly American military aircraft. During World War II, these intrepid "Fly Girls" voluntarily put their lives on the line in an experimental program to prove that women could successfully fly military aircraft. They received no rank or military honors for their service. WASP flew 60 million miles. They flew every type of military aircraft—from the fastest fighters to the heaviest bombers—and they piloted every type of mission flown by their male Army Air Force counterparts, except combat. That was their mission: to relieve male pilots for combat duty from non-combat, yet essential missions.

WASP were stationed at 120 Army air bases across America. They flew B-26s and B-29s—to prove to male pilots that those planes were actually safe to fly. Numbering only about 1,000, this group of extraordinary women will forever continue to serve in a way none can deny them: WASP were the role models for every generation of female pilots and astronauts that takes off after them.



**SILVER WASP WINGS**

**Worn by the 1,074 women who successfully completed the Women Airforce Service Pilots training program.**

They forever changed the role of women in aviation.

## Special Thanks



Deanie Bishop Parrish

**Many thanks to *Wings Across America* for providing content for this special publication in honor of the WASP and their extraordinary contribution to our nation's freedom. A cutting edge, digital, multimedia, non-profit project, *Wings Across America's* mission is to educate, motivate and inspire all of America and beyond with the history of the WASP.**

**A special thank you to WASP Deanie Bishop Parrish, Associate Director of Wings Across America, for sharing her 'WASP Profiles' and her WASP timeline.**

**Visit the "Fly Girls of WWII" exhibit now on display at the Women's Memorial, or visit *"WASP on the WEB"* for more information: www.wasp-wwii.org**

CREDITS: All WASP images and related content were graciously provided by Wings Across America with the permission of Nancy Parrish, Executive Director, and WASP Deanie Parrish, Associate Director.

# Important Dates in WASP History



Cochran

## 1939

**September 28 –** Jacqueline Cochran contacts America's First Lady, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, and suggests women could fly non-combat stateside military missions: *"As, for instance, in flying ambulance planes, courier planes, commercial and transport planes, thereby releasing male pilots for combat duty."*

## 1940

**September –** Cochran addresses the Ninety Nines, a women pilots organization, at the New York World's Fair: "There should be an organized women's air corps auxiliary to the other air forces in the government—controlled, supervised and supported by our government."



## 1941

**July 21 –** Cochran submits her first proposal outlining a detailed plan for utilizing women pilots.

**October 28 –** Cochran meets with General Hap Arnold CG, AAF, face to face and lays out her detailed plan. The General is impressed and, although there is no need at present, asks her to devise a women's training program, including a proposal of what kind of piloting women might do for the Army Air Forces.

**November –** General Arnold asks Cochran to recruit and oversee American women pilots to fly with the British Air Transport Command. She agrees to take the job only with General Arnold's promise to call her back to direct women's work.



Cochran and Arnold

**December 7, 1941**
Pearl Harbor attacked. WWII declared next day.

## 1942

**March –** Cochran takes 25 women pilots to England to fly for RAF. She stays to help the 8th AF.



**May 25 –** General Arnold desperately needs pilots. He requests that Cochran return and begin program to train women to fly military aircraft.

**June 18 –** Colonel Tunner, ATC, receives plan from Nancy Love to hire women ferry pilots.

**September 10 –** Nancy Love and General George make official announcement about hiring women pilots to ferry aircraft without approval of General Arnold.

**September 12 –** Cochran meets with General Arnold regarding her program for training women pilots: *"The use of women pilots must not be limited to the Ferrying Command, but must be recognized as an over-all job."*

Three women pilots, recruited by Love, hired as Civil Service employees on short term contracts to ferry aircraft, report to New Castle AFB (ATC), in new squadron (Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron).



**Mid September –** Female pilots, hired as civilian contractors to ferry planes for the Ferrying Division, ATC, will sign 90 day contract with renewal option if service is satisfactory. They will receive four weeks of orientation/transition training at New Castle AFB. Newly formed squadron unofficially named 'Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron;' women pilots nicknamed 'WAFS.'

**September 15 –** 319th Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) created and officially approved. Women to be given same training as Army Air Forces cadets.

**September 16 –** Cochran is appointed Director of Women's Ferrying Training. Her salary is $1 per year.

**Sept/Oct/November**
A total of 28 civilian women pilots report to New Castle to ferry aircraft for ATC.



**November 16 –** 28 pilots of the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) report to Houston Municipal Airport for AAF flight training.



**December 16 –** 2nd class WFTD reports 60 women pilots.

**December 25 –** Orders from Colonel Tunner, ATC: "Enroll No More WAFS."





## 1943

**January 5 –** 2nd Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron is formed at Love Field, Dallas.

**February 7 –** Women's Flying Training Detachment to be moved to Avenger Field, in Sweetwater, Tex.

**March 1 –** Cochran writes to trainees in the second edition of the 'Fifinella Gazette':

*"The Women's Flying Training program has already approached the proportions of our entire air program to the start of the war... You have my reputation in your hands. Also, you have my faith. I have no fear — I know you can do the job."*



Oldenburg

**March 7 –** First WFTD trainee, **Margaret Oldenburg**, killed near Houston.

**March 21 –** First American woman military pilot, **Cornelia Fort**, killed while ferrying aircraft.

**April 21 –** First class of WFTD trainees graduates at Ellington Field, Houston. Assigned to Ferry Command.

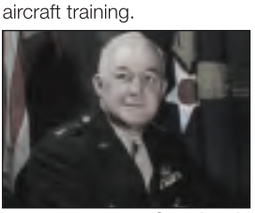
**July 5 –** WFTD and WAFS are consolidated into one branch. Jacqueline Cochran named as the Director of Women Pilots.



Fort



**July 24 –** First women pilots assigned to Training Command (Camp Davis, N.C.) flying A-25, A-24 towing targets for ground to air anti-aircraft training.



Gen. Arnold

**August –** General Arnold designates ALL women pilots flying military aircraft as WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots), names Cochran as Director of Women Pilots and Nancy Love as Executive of Women Ferry Pilots.

**August 15 –** First women check out as first pilots in B-17s at Lockbourne.

**August 20 –** Refusal of some women pilots to accept WASP name prompts General Arnold, CG/AAF, to issue a second order about the naming of women pilots: "ACRONYM FOR ALL AAF WOMEN PILOTS WILL BE 'WASP', WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS, PERIOD."

(AAF Regulation 20-4)

**October 14 –** Some male pilots are hesitant to fly the B-26 Martin Marauder. WASP women pilots report to Dodge City for B-26 training to prove B-26 aircraft is safe to fly.



## 1944

**June 21 –** Congress defeats bill to militarize WASP, nullifying the promise made to them when they entered training.

**June 26 –** General Arnold orders WASP to be discontinued in December, 1944

**December 7 –** Last class of WASP graduates.

**December 20 –** From 120 airbases across America, WASP fly their last military aircraft, hang up their Army parachutes, and pay their own way back home. They receive no benefits, no honors, nor Veteran status. Records are sealed, stamped 'classified' and filed away in the Government Archives for the next 33 years.



## 1977

WASP receive Veteran status. The pilots are not invited to the 'signing' ceremony.



## 1984

The medals the WASP had earned were sent to them in plain brown envelopes in the mail.



Official White House photo/ Pete Souza

## 2010

Congress will finally honor the WASP's service with the awarding of one Congressional Gold Medal to be given to the Smithsonian. Individual WASP pilots will not receive a duplicate bronze medal.





## Jacqueline Cochran

Creator and Director of WASP

***We have proved that women can be trained as pilots easily and used in many ways in the air effectively.***

***Jacqueline Cochran***

The emotions of happiness and sorrow are pretty close together and today, I am experiencing them both at the same time, as well as the third emotion of pride.

I am proud that we have been greatly honored today by the presence of the Commanding General of our Army Air Forces, General Arnold, and by the presence also of General Yount and General Kraus and General Williams. Seldom can one see such a group of stars clustered together—no greater honor can the WASP receive than this. General Arnold made this women pilots program possible and followed it with keen interest, and when General Arnold gave the word "go" General Yount turned in and gave every possible cooperation and support at all times. These men deserve and have our everlasting gratitude and thanks.

I am proud that the WASP have merited praise from General Arnold and General Yount. They think the WASP have done a good job. That makes me happy.

Happiness also swells within me from the knowledge that the WASP have successfully completed their two-fold mission. By two-fold, I mean we have flown scores of millions of miles in relieving the pilot shortage and we have proved that women can be trained as pilots easily and used in many ways in the air effectively. What the WASP have done is without precedent in the history of the world.

As much as the WASP want to help by flying, we can all be happy that our Air Forces are now so built up and the progress of the war is so favorable that our services are no longer needed. We would stay if it would shorten the war by a day. We would go if our flying would take flying time away from male pilots who could use the time to advantage in perfecting themselves while awaiting assignment to combat duties.

But there is also the feeling of sorrow that we are being demobilized, that we are no longer to fly with—and as a part of—our great Army Air Forces.

My memory takes me back to the days in the fall of 1942 when about two dozen women pilots started to fly for the Ferry Command, and another two dozen started the training program. That was down at Houston on a field that had no housing or feeding facilities. The flying equipment was old, to say the least, but it was a start and the results there gave us Avenger Field. Since then, we have turned out over one thousand well qualified WASP who have carried their own weight in duties performed.

Without militarization there were some inherent organizational weaknesses which might have been very serious to the program except for the loyalty and good sense of the individual WASP. For that loyalty and good sense you have my deepest thanks.

My greatest accomplishment in aviation has been the small part I have played in helping make possible the results you have shown. I am sure that if the Air Force needs the WASP back at any time, they can count on us to respond to the call with speed.

Thank you all—keep in touch with me.

***December 7, 1944***

### About Jacqueline

Jacqueline Cochran holds a unique position in history as founder and Director of the Women Airforce Service Pilots.

Like the aircraft she loved to fly, Jackie traveled higher and faster into the frontiers of aviation than any woman before, breaking through the glass ceiling—and the sound barrier. Even today she holds more distance and speed records than any pilot living or dead, male or female.

She never went to college—she never even finished high school.

Instead, she read, she listened, she asked questions—and she seldom if ever took "no" for an answer. She believed in hard work, persistence and God (not necessarily in that order) and she believed airplanes couldn't tell the difference between a man and a woman—only a good pilot from a bad one.

"Rags to riches" doesn't even begin to describe her story. From barefoot girl stealing chickens in small-town Florida to decorated pilot dining with kings, queens, presidents, pashas and premiers, Jackie was truly one-of-a-kind. She went from sweeping up the beauty parlor to founding her own successful cosmetics company. She worked as a shampoo girl and a dancer. She had an audience with the Pope, was best friends with Amelia Earhart and played poker with Jimmy Doolittle (leader of the first air raid by the United States against a Japanese home island during WWII). Jackie was the first woman to enter Japan after World War II, a witness to General Yamashita's surrender in the Philippines and the trials at Nuremberg, and she flew to England and convinced General Eisenhower to run for President (and she was a Democrat!)

Jackie Cochran was one in a million—and she set the standard for women who aspire to ever greater heights.



## Fifinella

"Fifinella" was the official mascot of WASP trainees. This official mascot was designed by Walt Disney for its film "The Gremlins" based on Roald Dahl's book. During WWII, the WASP asked for permission to use "Fifinella" as the official mascot and the Disney Company generously agreed. Official Fifinella 'went to war' and was worn in the form of patches – cloth or leather.

"Fifinella" was the name of the internal newsletter distributed among WASP trainees. When WASP moved to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Tex., Fifinella went with them, as she was still their mascot (just not on the headline of their newsletter). Her image was also on flight jackets and the "class books" that were handed to the students as they graduated.





## Speeches presented December 7, 1944 — last graduation of WASP



U.S. Air Force photo

**General Hap Arnold**

Commanding General of the USAAF

I am glad to be here today and talk with you young women who have been making aviation history. You and all WASPs have been pioneers in a new field of wartime service, and I sincerely appreciate the splendid job you have done for the AAF.

You, and more than nine hundred of your sisters, have shown that you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers. If ever there was in doubt in anyone's mind that women can become skillful pilots, the WASP have dispelled that doubt.

The possibility of using women to pilot military aircraft was first considered in the summer of 1941. We anticipated that that global war would require all our qualified men and many of our women. We did not know how many of our young men could qualify to pilot the thousands of aircraft which American industry could produce. There was also the problem of finding sufficient highly capable young men to satisfy the demands of the Navy, the Ground Forces, the Service Forces, and the Merchant Marine. England and Russia had been forced to use women to fly trainers and combat-type aircraft. Russian women were being used in combat.

In that emergency I called in Jacqueline Cochran, who had herself flown almost everything with wings and several times had won air races from men who now are general officers of the Air Forces. I asked her to draw up a plan for the training and use of American women pilots. She presented such a plan in late 1941 and it formed the basis for the Air Forces use of WASP.

Frankly, I didn't know in 1941 whether a slip of a young girl could fight the controls of a B-17 in the heavy weather they would naturally encounter in operational flying. Those of us who had been flying for twenty or thirty years knew that flying an airplane was something you do not learn overnight.

But, Miss Cochran said that carefully selected young women could be trained to fly our combat-type planes. So, it was only right that we take advantage of every skill which we, as a nation, possessed.

***I want to stress how valuable I believe this whole WASP program has been for the country.***

***General Hap Arnold***

My objectives in forming the WASP were, as you know, three:

1. To see if women could serve as military pilots, and, if so, to form the nucleus of an organization which could be rapidly expanded.

2. To release male pilots for combat.

3. To decrease the Air Forces' total demands for the cream of the manpower pool.

Well, now in 1944, more than two years since WASP first started flying with the Air Forces, we can come to only one conclusion—the entire operation has been a success. It is on the record that women can fly as well as men. In training, in safety, in operations, your showing is comparable to the overall record of the AAF flying within the continental United States. That was what you were called upon to do—continental flying. If the need had developed for women to fly our aircraft overseas, I feel certain that the WASP would have performed that job equally well.

Certainly we haven't been able to build an airplane you can't handle. From the AT-6s to B-29s you have flown them around like veterans. One of the WASP has even test-flown our new jet plane.

You have worked hard at your jobs. Commendations from the generals to whose commands you have been assigned are constantly coming across my desk. These commendations record how you have buckled down to the monotonous, the routine jobs which are not much desired by our hotshot young men headed toward combat or just back from an overseas tour. In some of your jobs I think they like you better than men.



**General Hap Arnold and Barbara Erickson in attendance at a WASP Graduation ceremony.**

I want to stress how valuable I believe this whole WASP program has been for the country. If another national emergency arises—let us hope it does not, but let us this time face the possibility—if it does, we will not again look upon a women's flying organization as experimental. We will know they can handle our fastest fighters, our heaviest bombers; we will know that they are capable of ferrying, target towing, flying training, test flying and the countless other activities which you have proved you can do.

That is valuable knowledge for the air age into which we are now entering.

But please understand that I do not look upon the WASP and the job they have done in this war as a project or an experiment. A pioneering venture? Yes. Solely an experiment? No. The WASP are an accomplishment.

We are winning this war—we still have a long way to go—but we are winning it. Every WASP who has contributed to the training and operation of the Air Forces has filled a vital and necessary place in the jigsaw pattern of victory. Some of you are discouraged sometimes, all of us are, but be assured you have filled a necessary place in the overall picture of the Air Forces.

The WASP have completed their mission. Their job has been successful. But as is usual in war, the cost has been heavy. Thirty-seven* WASP have died while helping their country move toward the moment of final victory. The Air Forces will long remember their service and their final sacrifice.

So, on this last graduation day, I salute you and all WASP. We of the AAF are proud of you; we will never forget our debt to you.

***December 7, 1944***

* There were actually 38 WASP and WASP trainees killed while flying for their country. The government did not fund their burials; their funerals were paid for by their friends and families.

# BECOMING A WASP

The Army Air Forces' experimental flying training program to teach qualified and licensed women pilots to fly military aircraft began at the Houston Municipal Airport in Houston, Tex. After three months, due to inadequate training facilities, the training program was relocated to Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Tex.

Avenger Field is the only air field in the United States used exclusively to train women pilots. It is also the only air field where all three phases of military flight training (primary, basic, and advanced) were taught simultaneously. (During the training period, the original training program of five-plus months was extended to seven months.)

The trainees at Avenger Field were supervised by 40 Army Air Force commissioned officers. Also stationed at the field were 81 enlisted men and hundreds of civilian employees. The trainees spent one half of each day on the flight line and the other half in ground school, where the college level courses included such courses as physics, meteorology, navigation, and math. They were also required to take, among other things, Link training, military PE, aircraft engines, and Morse code.

The trainees lived in wooden barracks, with six Army cots in each small 'bay'. From bugle call at 6 a.m. until 'lights out', they were required to march everywhere they went.

After successfully completing the program, the trainee graduated. During each graduation ceremony, which was attended by Jacqueline Cochran and usually high ranking dignitaries, the trainee received her silver WASP wings and official Army Air Force orders to report for duty.

25,000 women pilots applied for this experimental flying training program. 1830 were accepted, but only 1074 graduated. They, together with 28 women ferry pilots in the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, by order of General Hap Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, were officially named 'WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots)'.

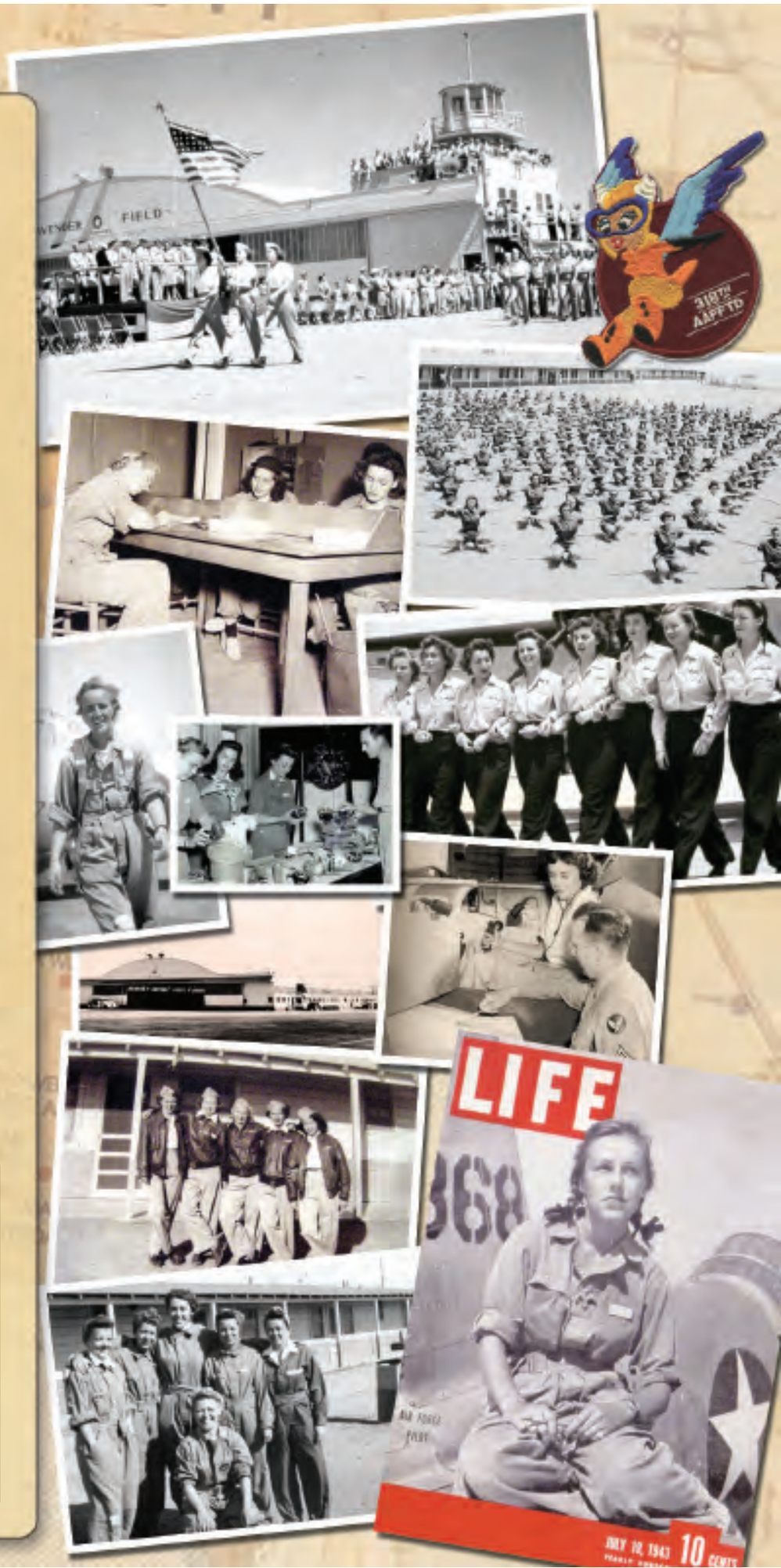
The WASP were stationed at 120 Army air bases and Army air fields all over America. They flew more than 60 million miles in every type aircraft in the AAF arsenal, from the fastest fighters to the heaviest bombers, and on every type mission flown by their male counterparts, except combat.

## The Three Phases of Military Flight Training

**PRIMARY:** 70 flying hours (Flown from auxiliary fields.)
**Aircraft flown:** PT-19 (Fairchild) and PT-17 (Stearman).

**BASIC:** 70 flying hours.
**Aircraft flown:** BT-13 (Vultee Vibrator)
(It involved learning to fly by relying on instruments. Training was done 'under the hood' with an instructor or another trainee as the observer.)

**ADVANCED:** 70 flying hours
**Aircraft flown:** AT-6 (Texan) and AT-17 (Bamboo Bomber)
(Used to teach night flying, cross country and aerobatics.)



# Some of the Aircraft Flown by WASP

## Pursuit

Name: **Lightning** AAF No: **P-38**
Used for: **Pursuit; Photo-recon**
Engine: **Two Allison V-1710s of 1,475 hp. ea.**
Produced by: **Lockheed-Vega**
Wings: **52'** Top Speed: **414 mph**

Name: **Mustang** AAF No: **P-51**
Used for: **Fighter; Bomber; Escort; Photo-recon**
Engine: **Merlin**
Produced by: **North American**
Wings: **37'** Top Speed: **435 mph**

## Bombers

Name: **Flying Fortress** AAF No: **B-17**
Used for: **Heavy Bomber; Gunner Training**
Engine: **Wright** Produced by: **Boeing**
Wings: **103'9"**
Top Speed: **317 mph**

Name: **Superfortress**
AAF No: **B-29**
Used for: **Heavy Bomber; Cargo; Photo-recon**
Engine: **Wright** Produced by: **Boeing**
Wings: **141'3"**
Top Speed: **358 mph**

## Trainers

Name: **Kaydet** AAF No: **PT-13**
Used for: **Primary Training** Engine: **Lycoming**
Produced by: **Stearman (Boeing)**
Wings: **32'2"** Top Speed: **120 mph**

Name: **Valiant: Vibrator**
AAF No: **BT-13**
Used for: **Basic Training**
Engine: **Pratt & Whitney**
Produced by: **Vultee**
Wings: **42'** Top Speed: **185 mph**

## Utility

Name: **Commando; Pregnant Guppy**
AAF No: **C-46**
Used for: **Transport** Engine: **P&W R-2800** Produced by: **Curtiss**
Wings: **108'1"** Top Speed: **260 mph**

Name: **Skymaster**
AAF No: **C-54**
Used for: **Cargo**
Engine: **P&W R-2000** Produced by: **Douglas**
Wings: **117'6"** Top Speed: **285 mph**

Aircraft images courtesy of AF.mil

# Uniforms Worn by WASP

**1942 saw a new species of military pilot for the AAF – women. These were the uniforms they wore while training and on duty.**

**WASP Trainee –** Because the WASP trainees were expected to 'pass in review' for visiting Generals, they were required to buy tan slacks and a white blouse. Forevermore, these pants would be nicknamed, 'General's Pants'.

**Dress Uniform –** In 1943, the WASP's fashion conscious director, Jacqueline Cochran, convinced General Hap Arnold that women pilots should have their own uniforms. His comment: "They should be BLUE." The Quartermaster Corps offered 40,000 yards of olive drab wool material. Cochran's comment, "My girl pilots will never wear that"! Cochran, together with the fashion designers at Bergdorf Goodman in New York, designed a uniform for the approval of Generals Arnold and George C. Marshall. Two sample uniforms were made: one with the olive drab wool material and one with a 'classy' Santiago blue wool gabardine, that coincidentally resembles a color now called "Air Force Blue." A gorgeous French model was selected to model the blue uniform and a Quartermaster Corps clerk was recruited to model the olive drab uniform. The Generals chose the blue uniform, and it became the official WASP uniform. Neiman Marcus fashion coordinators from Dallas personally fitted each girl for her uniform before her class graduated from training.






The Santiago blue dress uniform has a skirt and a fitted, belted jacket, with the AAF emblem on the left sleeve, the insignia of the Command in which the WASP served on the shoulder epaulets, the WASP emblem and the AAF propeller emblem on each lapel, and her distinctive WASP silver wings worn above the left pocket. Underneath the jacket she wore a white shirt and a black tie. The beret, designed by Knox Hat Co. of New York, had a three-quarter size officer's shield pinned on the front. A fashionable black leather purse completed the WASP dress uniform.



**Mechanic's coveralls, helmet, flying goggles –** When the girl pilots reported for military flight training, the only uniform they were issued was a used airplane mechanics' coverall—smallest size: 44 long.

**Official Flying Uniform –** The Santiago blue uniform for flying consisted of an 'Eisenhower' jacket, with the same hardware as that on the dress uniform, slacks, a blue cotton shirt and a black tie. A baseball style cap 'topped off' the uniform for flying.

The 1,102 WASP were not only the first women to fly America's military aircraft, they were also the first pilots to wear the 'Ike' jacket, the first to have their uniforms professionally fitted, and most significantly, they were the first to wear blue uniforms—three years before the Air Force.



The WASP are proud to be a part of the history of the UNITED STATES AIR FORCE!

**Deanie Bishop Parrish, WASP WWII**

## Leather Flying Gear

**Heavy leather suits – in men's sizes only. Worn by trainees and ferry pilots when flying in cold weather or open cockpit aircraft.**



# Betty Tackaberry Blake

WASP Class 43-W-1

*'Just believe in yourself. Study and work hard, and you can get to your goal no matter what it is, if you just believe in yourself and try.'*

Born in Hawaii while it was still a territory, Betty spent her early years surfing, playing sports, being a tomboy, and reading books about aviation. When she was 14, Betty and her father went to hear Amelia Earhart speak. After the speech, Amelia sought out the teenager and invited her to watch her take off the next morning to fly solo from the Islands to Oakland, Calif. Betty and her father were there!

Betty had her first flight at age 15. She then began hitchhiking to the airport and doing its bookkeeping in exchange for flying lessons. She attended private schools and then the University of Hawaii, where she was accepted (as the one girl allowed in a class of ten) into the University's Civilian Pilot Training program. She earned her private pilot's license and flew tourists around the Islands.

On Saturday, December 6, 1941, Betty was scheduled to fly a tourist business executive around the Island at 6:30 the following morning. However, he called on Saturday and rescheduled for Monday.

Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, Betty and her family awakened to the sound of anti-aircraft fire and bombs dropping. They witnessed the bombing of Pearl Harbor from their balcony on a hill overlooking the Harbor. Betty has enduring memories, not only of the bombing, but also of its aftermath: blackouts, driving with blue gel covering the headlights, listening to Tokyo Rose on the radio—she can still recall so many details vividly.

War was declared. Everyone was needed. Betty got a highly secret job at the naval base—keeping track of all the ships in the Pacific. Three months later, she married her fiancé, a Navy ensign, whose ship had sunk in Pearl Harbor on that fateful morning of December 7. He was soon reassigned to the U.S. mainland. Luggage was almost impossible to buy, so they packed their possessions in five new military wooden coffins for shipment to the States. They made the trip in a banana boat in a convoy of ships, experiencing total blackouts at night because of the possibility of German submarines in the area.

While her husband was on an overseas assignment, Betty learned of the Army Air Forces' new experimental flying training program that would teach qualified young women pilots to fly military aircraft. She applied and, with her impressive number of pilot hours, was accepted as a member of the first class in the Women's Flying Training Detachment, located at the Houston, Tex., Municipal Airport.

Betty completed five months of AAF flight training and ground school classes. Then she received her wings and official orders to report to Long Beach, Calif., to ferry aircraft for the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command.

Her first assignments were to ferry new training aircraft to bases all over America. Within a short time, the AAF opened up pursuit training schools and Betty was one of the first WASP selected to attend. There she learned to fly pursuit aircraft. She then ferried aircraft, primarily pursuits, to the East Coast for shipment overseas. To relieve the monotony, she was flying low on one of her ferrying trips. She realized she was overflying some chicken farms in Louisiana when suddenly all the chickens began "taking off."

After the WASP were disbanded, Betty married, had two sons, and worked both as a reporter and a talented craftsperson. Her bean-bag frog design was featured in "The April Fools," a film starring Jack Lemmon and Catherine Deneuve.

A sophisticated and lovely lady, Betty Blake is a 'treasury' of memories.



# Marion Hodgson

WASP Class 43-W-5

*'Put God first, family next, and then do whatever you want to do—whatever is needed. The sky's the limit. When you're needed, be there. You can do anything with God's help.'*

A truly remarkable Georgia 'peach'! Marion's father was athletic director at the University of Georgia, so she and her sister never lacked for boyfriends. Her main interest in high school was playing basketball, in which she excelled.

In 1941, Marion enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training course at the University of Georgia, graduating that year with a private pilot's license and a degree in Journalism.

She then went to Chicago to work as a journalist. But when she heard about the AAF experimental flying training program for women pilots, she applied, was accepted, and headed for the wide open plains of west Texas.

Marion was in the first class of women pilots to arrive at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Tex. However, there were aviation cadets already there who were going through the same training she was about to take. The commanding officer soon decided that these male trainees would have to be transferred to another training base. Having both sexes living on the same air field (without any blinds on the windows) and training to fly military aircraft at the same time was not working! Consequently, the AAF relocated the male cadets. Only the military officers and personnel in charge of the base, and the training, remained.

Upon graduating and receiving her WASP wings, Marion was stationed at Love Field in Dallas, Tex., as a member of the 5th Ferrying Group. She ferried aircraft, primarily new training aircraft, to bases all over America.

After the WASP were disbanded, Marion married her Marine pilot fiancé. For the next three years she spent much of her time writing—mostly about the WASP and her experiences. Then she was blessed with two children, so her writing was put on the "back burner." When her children became independent, she began writing again in a variety of venues—articles for McCall's, Guidepost, etc., and books, several of which have been published with much success. Marion was a writer, who became a pilot, and then became a writer again.

While the Soviet Union was still intact and Mikhail Gorbachev was in power, Marion and several other former WASP were guests of the Russian government, invited to meet their women pilots of WWII. Marion smuggled three Bibles into Russia and selectively gave them to three different Russian women; each was overjoyed to receive it.

Marion is featured in the Eighth Air Force Museum near Savannah, Ga. She is a lovely lady. Her "Winning My Wings" is one of the best WASP books available.





# Deanie Bishop Parrish

WASP Class 44-W-4



**WASP Deanie Bishop Parris taxis a Martin B-26 Marauder (Tyndall Army Airfield, Florida). B-26s were used to tow targets to give gunners flying by in B-24s practice for combat.**

*'Failure is not failure unless you let it be. It's simply a change in direction. Count your many blessings and move on!'*

Deanie grew up in Avon Park, Fla., graduating as the valedictorian of her class. Financially unable to go to college, she got a job in the town's only bank as a teller. It was there that she met many of the flight instructors from the newly created primary school for AAF cadets. One day Deanie asked an instructor, "Why, just because I'm a girl, can't I learn to fly?" He had no answer. And so she became the only female pilot in Avon Park.

Her solo flight experience, taking off in a Piper Cub, proved death defying. As she was climbing to altitude, the control stick came off in her hand. She tore her seat belt off and climbed over into the front seat just in time to keep that airplane from stalling and crashing. Her instructor, watching from the ground, swore if she ever got down alive, Deanie would never fly again! However, when he discovered why she landed from the front seat, he told her never to doubt her ability to fly an airplane, because she had the "right stuff" to be a pilot!

When she learned of the AAF flying training program for women pilots, she applied as soon as she met the minimum age requirement. After seven months of AAF flight training, Deanie received her silver WASP wings and her first AAF assignment. She went to Greenville Army Airfield, Miss., as an engineering test pilot. Two months later, she received orders to report to Tyndall Field near Panama City, Fla., to attend B-26 (Martin Marauder) school. Deanie was retained at Tyndall as a B-26 air-to-air tow target pilot, training gunners (using live ammunition) for combat. She remained stationed there until the WASP were disbanded.

She then married a career B-29 pilot. In 1975, with two daughters in college and having spent 15 years as a volunteer in a local hospital, Deanie decided to do what she couldn't do when she finished high school. Four years later, she graduated summa cum laude from the University of Houston, Tex.

The Silver Wings Detachment of Arnold Air Society at Texas Christian University was named in her honor and the Texas Women's Chamber of Commerce awarded Deanie their "Spirit of Women" award. She has been inducted into the Texas Aviation Hall of Fame and the Ninety-Nines' International Forest of Friendship.

Deanie and her daughter Nancy have spent the past twelve years as volunteers, educating the American public about WASP history. They have interviewed 110 WASP in 19 states, and in 2002 convinced the Sweetwater City Commissioners that the WASP deserved a museum at Avenger Field, where most of the WASP trained. They not only founded the museum, but they also made all the exhibits for it. The WASP "Fly Girls" exhibit, currently at the Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., is also one of their creations.

In 2007, mother and daughter began concentrating their efforts on getting the WASP national recognition for their WWII service, in the hope that the resulting publicity would bring their little-known history to the attention of millions of Americans. The WASP will receive the Congressional Gold Medal on March 10, 2010.

Deanie grew up believing that, 'With God's help, nothing is impossible.' She still does.



# Betty Pfister

WASP Class 43-W-5

*'We all set our own priorities. As you go through life, maybe your priorities need to be as an artist, or maybe a musician, or any field you can think of. It doesn't have to be aviation. If you want to do anything in life badly enough, you can do it!'*

Betty learned to fly while a freshman at Bennington College in Vermont. She graduated with a degree in Marine Biology and immediately went to Texas to enter the AAF flying training program for women in Class 43-4. While in training, her Navy pilot brother was killed due to a catapult failure on takeoff. She went home to be with her family for a month. When she returned, she was moved back to Class 43-5.

She was first stationed at New Castle Army Air Base in New Jersey, where she ferried aircraft, primarily training aircraft, for the Ferry Division of the Air Transport Command. After a few months, she was transferred to Palm Springs, Calif., where she ferried both pursuit aircraft and bombers. Some months later, she was transferred to Williams Field near Phoenix, Ariz., as an engineering test pilot and ferry pilot.

After the WASP were deactivated, Betty worked as a flight instructor and then flew DC-3 type aircraft as co-pilot for several non-scheduled airlines. On one trip, with the airplane loaded with Brahma bulls, they made a refueling stop. She decided the bulls were hot and needed to get out for some fresh air and some water. She led them out, one at a time, gave them buckets of water, and tied them to the airport fence. One of them got away from her and started running down the runway. The commercial airport had to close down and it took some professional cowboys to "rope" that bull and get him back on the plane—more than an hour later. She realized that she should never have given them water—and she never made that mistake again!

At one time Betty owned and professionally raced a P-39 Bell Aircobra.

She married a young man she met on the ski slopes of Aspen, Colo. They had three daughters, but that did not keep her from flying her own airplane and accomplishing great things for her community.

In 1963, Betty received her commercial rotorcraft rating and in 1966 she planned and supervised the construction of the Aspen Valley Hospital Heliport. This was the first hospital heliport in Colorado, and has been instrumental in saving many lives. Betty has many other accomplishments to her credit:

- In 1968, she founded the Pitkin County Air Rescue Group and remained its president until she retired in 1991. This volunteer organization of local pilots initiated searches for downed aircraft and lost skiers in the mountainous regions of Colorado and had saved 32 lives by 2001.
- Betty was also instrumental in getting the FAA to provide and staff a control tower at the Aspen Airport, even though the airport did not meet normal FAA tower criteria.
- After receiving her balloon rating, Betty organized the Snowmass Hot Air Balloon Races from 1976 to 1993.
- In 1973 and 1978 she was a member of the U.S. Helicopter Team, competing in the World Championships.
- Betty was also founder and first member of the Aspen Chapter of The Ninety-Nines (International Organization of Women Pilots), and in 1984 was inducted into the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame.

Betty has received many other awards and has memberships in many organizations. She is proud to say that it was because of her WASP experiences that she received the opportunities to accomplish so much in the world of aviation.



# Mildred Ola Rexroat

WASP Class 44-W-7

*'No matter what it is, you can do it! Do all the extra little things, like studying, writing, practicing, until you can do it, then try to do it better than anybody else!'*

Mildred Ola Rexroat fought her way through extreme poverty and became the only Native American to serve her country as a WASP. Her amazing journey, which ran the gamut from living in a log house with dirt floors to being honored as an inductee into the South Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame, epitomizes the true pioneering spirit of America.

Ola, daughter of Julia Last Horse of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe, was born amidst the wheat fields of Kansas. Her early years were divided between living among the Osage Indians in the "dust bowl" of Oklahoma and staying on the reservation in Pine Ridge, S.D., with her grandmother and other Lakota Indians. Walking down a dirt road to a one-room schoolhouse in South Dakota in the wintertime meant Ola would wear anything to keep warm, including layers of newspaper pages tied around her shoes and ankles to keep her feet from freezing. Life was hard, and Ola had a determined spirit.

She was eventually able to enter college because of a new government appropriation bill titled "Education of the Sioux Nation." Because of financial difficulties, it took her almost six years to get her degree from the University of New Mexico, but Ola never gave up.

After college, she worked as a secretary for the Army as they built military bases and airfields. It was there that Ola learned about an experimental flying training program for qualified women pilots. That was challenging to her, so she spent every spare penny she made on flying lessons, finally earning her pilot's license and getting accepted into the program.





**Trainees from Class 44-W-7 pose at Avenger Field. The Army issue mechanic's coveralls worn by WASP trainees were hand-me-downs and available only in men's sizes. Not only did the trainees have to roll up the sleeves and pant legs of their "Zoot suits," but they also had to launder them, which they did—by wearing them in the shower.**

After seven months of AAF flight training, Ola graduated. Her WASP experiences in training were varied. One of her assignments was as an AT-6 pilot in Eagle Pass, Tex., training male pilots how to successfully shoot down enemy aircraft by towing targets for them to use in practice combat flights.

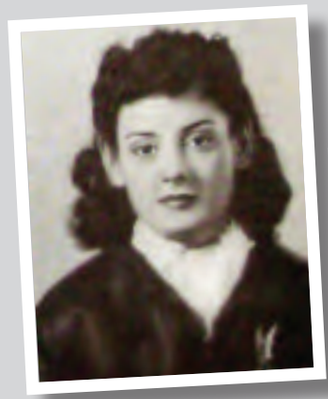
After the WASP were disbanded, Ola continued her service. She joined the Air Force Reserves and held the rank of captain. Later, she still wanted to be involved with aviation, so she became a control tower operator. In 2007, Mildred Ola Rexroat was inducted into the South Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame in honor of her WWII service to her country.

Her message, that she requested be shared with the American people is:

*One of the things that I'm most proud of about my life is that I am Lakota, and that I lived for some time up around Pine Ridge among all my people up there! To me, they're the best people in the world—I mean: THEY'RE MY PEOPLE.*

Ola's pride and love for her people was returned to her three-fold on June 23, 2007, when she was honored at the dedication of the Oglala War Memorial at Oglala Lakota College in Kyle, S.D., and presented the American Indian Medal of Valor and an Honorary Master's Degree in Lakota Leadership.

With all the accolades Ola has received, when asked, *"What are you most proud of?"* her answer comes back, clear and strong: "Being a WASP."



# Helen Wyatt Snapp

WASP Class 43-W-4

Helen Wyatt Snapp was born in Washington, D.C.

When she was eight years old, she recalls sitting on the curb on Pennsylvania Avenue to watch the parade for Charles Lindbergh pass by. This piqued her interest in aviation. Later, she followed the media attention given Amelia Earhart and Jacqueline Cochran and decided that, when she grew up, she wanted to be a pilot like them!

Helen dropped out of college to earn money so she could pay for flying lessons. Then, when the college implemented the Civilian Flying Training program, she had the unique opportunity to work and attend college as the only girl, in a class of ten, allowed to take the Civilian Flying Training program. There, she not only learned to fly, but she also took aviation ground school classes in the evening.

Helen married her childhood sweetheart. When he was shipped overseas, she applied and was accepted into the newly created Army Air Forces Women's Flying Training Detachment. After completing six months of training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Tex., she received her AAF orders to report to Camp Davis, N.C., which was an anti-aircraft base, for training. She was a member of the first group of WASP to be assigned to the Training Command. All previous graduates had been assigned to the Ferry Command as ferry pilots. It was a challenge, but Jackie Cochran knew her WASP would accept that challenge without any hesitation—and they did!

After successfully completing the training at Camp Davis, Helen was transferred to Liberty Field at Fort Camp Stewart, Ga. There she towed targets for anti-aircraft artillery practice and flew radar, searchlight, camouflage, tracking, and strafing missions.

Helen was one of only six WASP assigned to R-Flight, a top secret initiative located on an "off-limits" part of the field. There, she learned to fly radio-controlled PQ-8 drone planes, which in time led to the development of the more sophisticated remote-controlled planes used by the U.S. Air Force today. Helen remembers this as a very scary experience and one that could be very dangerous.

Following the deactivation of the WASP, Helen returned to her home in Virginia. When her husband returned from service with the 3rd Division of the Quartermaster Corps, she continued her service to the nation by accompanying hm and six other officers on an Army "road show" to promote the purchase of U.S. savings bonds.

Helen's patriotism shines brightly as she recalls many wonderful stories relating to her flying experiences as one of the pioneering WASP.



**FINAL TRIBUTE**

*Last WASP Graduation Ceremony. December 7, 1944 - Excerpt*

## General Barton K. Yount

**Commanding General, Army Air Forces Training Command**

Let us acknowledge the measure of their sacrifice by honoring them as brave women, and by honoring them as women who served without thought of glory which we accord to heroes of battle. The service pilot faces the risk of death without the emotional inspiration of combat. Men who battle in the sky have the grim, triumphant knowledge that their bombs and bullets are destroying the enemy, and their courage is sustained by the emotions of conflict.

These women have given their lives in the performance of arduous and exacting duties without being able to see and feel the final results of their work under the quickening influence of aerial action. They have demonstrated a courage which is sustained not by the fevers of combat, but the steady heartbeat of faith—a faith in the rightness of our cause, and a faith in the importance of their work to the men who do go into combat.

Let us pay tribute to these women by honoring their memory…. Let us treasure their memory as women whose sacrifice has brought honor not only to their country, but also to their organization. We shall not forget the accomplishments of our women fliers and their contributions to the fulfillment of our mission. And we shall always keep and remember the brave heritage of the women who gave their lives. It is the heritage of faith in victory and faith in the ultimate freedom of humanity.

## LITTLE KNOWN FACTS:

25,000 women applied but only 1 out of 14 was accepted into training. Of those 1,830, only 1,074 earned their silver wings and, together with 28 WAFS, became WASP.

38 WASP and trainees were killed while flying for the United States. They received no recognition, no honors, no benefits, no gold star in the window, and not allowed to place an American flag on their coffins. Classmates and friends took up collections to help pay for their burial.

WASP never received the military status they were promised, even though many were sent to Officer's Training School.

WASP were unceremoniously deactivated in 1944 without benefits and with little or no thanks.

Once disbanded, WASP records were sealed and marked "classified" or "secret" and filed away in the Government Archives for 33 years.

Historians had no access to the records and accomplishments of the WASP. As a result, WASP were left out of most official histories of World War II.

They were denied veteran's status for 35 years. When that status was finally granted there was no ceremony to mark the occasion; their medals arrived in the mail in plain brown envelopes seven years later.

WASP may be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, but only as enlisted, not with officer's honors.




BETWEEN SERVING WITH HONOR AND DESERVING OF HONOR, THERE IS ONE IMPORTANT WORD: HOW.

The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II were more than flyers. They were pioneers. An inspiration for generations of girls who have looked to the sky and said, "I want to fly." The men and women of Lockheed Martin are proud to honor their service and congratulate them on the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal.

LOCKHEED MARTIN
*We never forget who we're working for®*

lockheedmartin.com/how