

Female Flyers: The Conflict and Compromise of The Women Airforce Service
Pilots in WWII

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During the World War II era, the United States military struggled to find enough able-bodied men to fly the military aircraft. General Henry “Hap” Arnold teamed up with Jacqueline “Jackie” Cochran to create a task force of female pilots to help in the fight against the Axis Powers. The U.S. Air Force had difficulties finding a solution to their conflict: they needed women to fly aircraft on the homeland, but at the time women were prevented from being in the military. The Air Force finally compromised by allowing women to perform only noncombat jobs. Originally, the women were separated into two groups: the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and the Women’s Flying Training Detachment (WFTD). Later these groups would combine into the group known as the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs). The hard work and perseverance of the WASPs led to the 2015 ruling allowing women into all military positions. Though they encountered much opposition, the WASPs proved that females deserve to be seen as equal to men.

At first, it was a bit difficult to find a topic that suited both of our interests and the guidelines, as well as the theme. After much deliberation, we combined our interests in women’s rights and World War II to discover the WASPs. Immediately, their immense courage and bravery to break gender boundaries intrigued us, so we agreed that choosing the WASPs was the right decision for our project.

To commence our research, we utilized local college libraries to discover secondary books about the WASPs, then found sites online to broaden our understanding of the topic. One source that undoubtedly stood out to us was a thesis by Megan Lotzenhiser entitled “Without Glory: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II.” This abstract highlights the opposition of the male pilots and their leaders against the woman pilots. In addition, we were

pleasantly surprised to find many articles from places like *Time Magazine* and the Bullock Museum.

We decided to design an exhibit to display our creative and artistic natures. We wanted viewers to be able to see the time period through our exhibit. For the color scheme, we chose to incorporate the colors of the WASP mascot, a gremlin named Fifinella. Then we discussed the elements that would go into our exhibit: from the pictures and quotes to the impacts and our analysis of the events. Finally, after creating our exhibit, we added historically accurate artifacts to the front for display.

The Women Airforce Service Pilots began at a time when the country was in complete and utter turmoil. At the start of the war, the military was conflicted over how to provide enough pilots without utilizing female pilots. Their compromise to this problem was to allow women to fly non combatant. Though it has been over seventy years since the end of WWII, the WASPs are still remembered for their courageous and heroic actions during the war, aiding women in the fight to enter all areas of the military.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Arnold, H. H. H. H. Arnold to Young People of America. Memo. 1946. Headquarters, Army Air Forces. From Wings Across America. Accessed October 7, 2017.
http://wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/press_archive/arnold11.pdf

This letter from 1946 by Commanding General Hap Arnold addresses America's youth. The letter reaches out to the youth of America, stating that the United States needed both men and women to work together in unison, to repair the country during a time of war. This information helps one to understand America's desperation for new wartime workers.

Arnold, William Bruce. "Women Pilots, Who Put WWII Air Force In The Air, Win Vets Status." The Stars and Stripes: The National Tribune, November 10, 1977. Accessed October 4, 2017. http://wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/press_archive/stars77.pdf

The article "Women Pilots, Who Put WWII Air Force In The Air, Win Vets Status" by Colonel William Bruce Arnold comes from the November 10, 1977 edition of The Stars and Stripes newspaper, an American military newspaper. He wrote about the initiation of the WASP program by his father "Hap" Arnold and how the WASPs were fighting for veteran status. This source contributes extensive descriptions to set the scene for the WASPs fighting for veteran status and what life was like for them.

"BACKGROUND OF THE WOMEN'S FLYING TRAINING PROGRAM of the ARMY AIR FORCES." News release. 1943. On the Record. Accessed October 4, 2017.
http://wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/press_archive/background.pdf

This official press release from 1943 came from On the Record, a collection of primary records about the WASPs from the Wings Across America site. It provides the background of how the training program came about and describes the process of becoming a part of the (then known as WAFS) group. The press release gives readers a better understanding of what the ladies had to go through to become a WASP and how the group was started.

Clark, Marie. "An Opportunity of a Lifetime." Michigan History Magazine, September 1, 2000. From Wings Across America. Accessed October 10, 2017.
http://wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/wasp_articles/inside_clark.pdf

This September edition magazine article was published in 2000 and was written by one of the WASPs, Marie Clark. She described the everyday life of a WASP and the strenuous amount of hours of flying required. She was among the 1,074 women out of 25,000, who were awarded their Silver Wings. This article helps readers understand what it took and difficult it was to be a WASP.

“Congressional Gold Medal, Women Airforce Service Pilots.” Boeing Aviation Center. Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, National Air and Space Museum. Smithsonian Institution, Chantilly, Virginia. Accessed October 28, 2017.
<https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/congressional-gold-medal-women-airforce-service-pilots>

The National Air and Space Museum Collection at the Steven F. Udvar - Hazy Center includes the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to the Women Airforce Service Pilots. This website includes images of the medal awarded on March 10, 2010 for their amazing acts of service to the United States. Some of these images are visual features in the exhibit.

Darr, Ann. "The Long Flight Home." U.S. News and World Report, November 17, 1997. Accessed October 7, 2017.
http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/wasp_articles/darr.pdf

Wonderfully written by Ann Darr, a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, this article was featured in the U.S. News and World Report in November 1997 and was published electronically by Wings Across America. She describes the long process of becoming a WASP and what it took to be a member. The challenges she went through adds to knowledge of what the WASPs did and how they were treated.

Fort, Cornelia. "At the twilight's last gleaming." Woman's Home Companion, July 1943, 19. Accessed October 7, 2017.
http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/wasp_articles/twilight.pdf

Cornelia Fort, a WASP, wrote an eyewitness account of the attack on Pearl Harbor for Woman's Home Companion, which published the article in 1943 and was republished online by Wings Across America. Not only does she describe the ambush on Pearl Harbor, she depicts the life of a WASP through the words of a female pilot. Her knowledge from being a WASP adds to the information about the group.

Hodgson, Marion Stegeman. "Army Check Rides." ARTICLE ARCHIVE. 1996. From Wings Across America. Accessed October 10, 2017.
http://wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/wasp_articles/army_check_rides.htm

This excerpt from “Winning My Wings” by Marion Hodgson, was published in 1996 but describes a WASP trainee’s life in the 1940s. “Army Check Rides” explains the terrifying experience of WASP and Army Air Corps pilot trainees routine check rides with their strict lieutenant. This excerpt helps readers know how scary it was for trainees to be continually tested throughout each phase of training.

"Letter From the War Department To All Women Holders of Licenses." Letter from Air Corps Ferrying Command. July 29, 1949. In Liberty Letters. Accessed May 25, 2018.
www.libertyletters.com/resources/pearl-harbor/letter-from-war-dept.php

This original letter addressing all women holders of pilot licenses urges women pilots to join the Air Corps Ferrying Command during 1941. It does not promise that a division of women will be allowed into the military, but is quite hopeful.

McKeown, Harry. "B-29 Letter." Harry McKeown to Dr. Struthers. August 2, 1995. Letter. From Wings Across America. Accessed October 31, 2017.
http://wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/b29_letter.htm

In this letter from 1995, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Mckeown thanks Dr. Struthers, a WASP in 1944, for teaching him to not be afraid of B-29 planes. He explained that Dr. Struthers was very brave and helped him to become a now retired B-29 pilot. This source shows readers the bravery of the WASPs.

Rees, Marjorie. "Guilt Stings WASP." Women in Aviation, Jan. & Feb. 1993. From Wings Across America. Accessed October 10, 2017.
http://wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/wasp_articles/rees1.pdf

This article from 1993 is Marjorie Rees' testimony of how she cheated not once, but twice on her test to be accepted as a WASP. She described how she did not fit the proper weight and height requirements to be a WASP. Her testimony adds to the information about the unfair and unusual requirements to be accepted.

Secondary Sources

American Experience. "The Women Airforce Service Pilots." Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed October 9, 2017.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/flygirls-women-airforce-service-pilots/>

An American Experience article simply titled "The Women Airforce Service Pilots" contains an extensive timeline with details about what happened throughout World War II with the WASPs. It starts with female pilots such as Amelia Earhart disappearing in 1937 and ends with the WASPs (known then as WAFS) starting their first mission. The timeline provides many images and crucial details in the activity leading up to the creation of the WASPs.

Baucom, Eric. "Training Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) at UNC." Training Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) at UNC. February 25, 2016. Accessed September 27, 2017.
<http://blogs.lib.unc.edu/uarms/index.php/2016/02/training-women-airforce-service-pilots-wasps-at-unc/>

From 1942-1944, women had to go through lots of different trainings and tests before they were even considered to be a part of WASP. This article describes who was trained and what they went through at the University of Northern Carolina at Chapel Hill along with other colleges.

Bullock Texas State History Museum. "Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)." Bullock Texas State History Museum. Accessed October 23, 2017.
<https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/campfire-stories/wasp>

A detailed history of the WASPs during the 1940s can be found from "The WASP Story", an article from the Bullock Museum in Texas. The long hours the WASPs put in for their country are all described here with a long article, a timeline, quotes, and images to back it up. Though information from this site is secondary, primary quotes and photographs were also incorporated.

"Cochran, Jacqueline." National Aviation Hall of Fame. Accessed September 26, 2017.
<http://www.nationalaviation.org/our-enshrinees/cochran-jacqueline/>

One of the most accomplished women on the WASPs was Jacqueline Cochran, who was enshrined in 1971. This detailed article explains to the full extent Jackie Cochran's history and accomplishments. This biography helps readers learn more about Jackie Cochran and her impact on the WASPs.

Collins, Shannon. "WASP Pursued Love of Flying, Fought for Women Vets' Recognition." U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. March 09, 2016. Accessed March 20, 2018.
<https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/689318/wasp-pursued-love-of-flying-fought-for-women-vets-recognition/>.

The article "WASP Pursued Love of Flying, Fought for Women Vets' Recognition" was written by Shannon Collins, a Defense Media Activity author for the United States Department of Defense. It includes quotes from a former WASP, Bernice "Bee" Haydu, and gives an overview of the lives of the WASPs and the rights that they fought for. Along with shrewd information and quotes, the article also provides an insightful video.

Contributor, VAntage Point. "Female World War II pilot proud to be a WASP." VAntage Point. March 03, 2016. Accessed October 26, 2017.
<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/26210/female-world-war-ii-pilot-proud-to-be-a-wasp/>

This article from the US Department of Veteran Affairs discusses the history of the WASPs from their start in 1942, to their end in 1945. It also touches on their vast impact on today's society. This online article can be used to gain a greater understanding of the WASPs.

"Jackie Cochran & the Sound Barrier." Aerospaceweb.org | Ask Us - Jackie Cochran & the Sound Barrier. February 27, 2005. Accessed September 26, 2017.
<http://www.aerospaceweb.org/question/history/q0217b.shtml>

Jacqueline Cochran was a very distinguished woman with numerous accomplishments and achievements. This Q & A style website describes her many achievements. Jackie Cochran is accredited with being the first to reach Mach 1, or break the sound barrier, along with being the first woman to win the Bendix Race in 1938.

Lamothe, Dan. "As Pentagon opens combat jobs to women, 'deep-seated' opposition and a checkered past." *The Washington Post*. December 11, 2015. Accessed March 05, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/12/11/as-pentagon-opens-combat-jobs-to-women-deep-seated-opposition-and-a-checkered-past/?utm_term=.6bdd5ed b0c3b

This newspaper article written by Dan Lamothe outlines how women were reintroduced into the navy in 2015. This was an experimental process despite General Arnold stating that women shall never be used as an experiment. This online article was utilized to show how women were rejected in the military and are still opposed today.

Langley, Wanda. *Flying higher: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II*. North Haven, CT. Linnet Books, 2002.

In the mid 1940s, many jobs were left by the men drafted into leaving, which needed to be fulfilled by the remaining women. This book uses a collection of interviews and stories from Marie Mitchell, a young WASP pilot who crashed and died on the job, to describe what the life of a WASP was like.

LeSourd, Nancy. "Behind the Story: Attack at Pearl Harbor." *Liberty Letters*. Accessed March 18, 2018. <http://www.libertyletters.com/resources/pearl-harbor/index.php>

Liberty Letters includes collection of several pragmatic primary sources. This website showcases both Nancy Harkness Love's and Jacqueline Cochran's original proposed plans, multiple eyewitness, and a memo from General Hap Arnold.

Library of Congress. "First in Flight." *Library of Congress, The Wise Guide*. October 2010. Accessed September 21, 2017. <https://www.loc.gov/wiseguide/oct10/flight.html>

The Wise Guide was a monthly web magazine run from 2002 to 2011 by the Library of Congress that had a section called "First in Flight" in the October 2010 edition. It recounts a few little-known facts about the dangerous work done by the WASPs and features the backstories of a few of the veterans. "First in Flight" presents a multitude of the struggles undergone by the daring ladies and primary photographs.

Lotzenhiser, Megan, M.A. "Without Glory: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II." Master's thesis, Baylor University, 2007. Accessed March 5, 2018. https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/baylor-ir/bitstream/handle/2104/5126/Megan_Lotzenhiser_masters.pdf;sequence=1

This master's thesis is an excellent synopsis of the work it took to allow women to ferry and test planes for the US. Megan Lotzenhiser was able to include multiple interviews and

primary sources that we were able to utilize. This thesis much more in depth than most other secondary sources and helps readers understand the true impact of the WASPs.

Mercury 13. Directed by David Sington and Heather Walsh. April 8, 2018. Accessed April 14, 2018.

Mercury 13, a recently released documentary, featured multiple former WASPs as well as original footage of leader Jacqueline Cochran. Viewers gained knowledge about the connections between the WASPs and the first women astronauts.

Merryman, Molly. *Clipped wings: the Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

This engaging biography of the Women Airforce Service Pilots was written by Molly Merryman and enlightens one's awareness of the conflicts the WASPs went through. During the 1940s, women were not treated as equals to men, and this book shows the unfairness all of the female pilots endured. Excellent quotes and background information provide better comprehension on the topic.

National Archives. "Women Who Served: The Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS/WASP)." National Archives: A People at War. Accessed September 23, 2017. https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/a_people_at_war/women_who_served/wafs_wasp.htm

"A People at War" is an exhibit featuring documents from the National Archives that highlights the contribution of Americans to the war effort during World War II. The "Women Who Served" section displays a short biography on women pilots during the war, specifically the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). The exhibit offers excellent background information on the creation of WAFS/WASP and original images of some pilots.

Rosenberg, Matthew, and Dave Philipps. "All Combat Roles Now Open to Women, Defense Secretary Says." *The New York Times*. December 03, 2015. Accessed February 23, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/04/us/politics/combat-military-women-ash-carter.html>

The New York Times perfectly states the "historic transformation" of America's military restrictions against female combat positions. The article offers informative insights on the personal opinions of military workers and summarizes the "groundbreaking decision" to open combat roles to women. The site provided information as well as an image depicting the very first female graduates of the Army's Ranger School.

Rothman, Lily, and Liz Ronk. "Women of the World War II WASP Program: See Pilots Training." *Time Magazine*. May 23, 2016. Accessed March 05, 2018. <http://time.com/4337773/wwii-wasp-pilots-training/>

This TIME magazine article gives in-depth information on the Women Airforce Service Pilot Arlington Inurnment Restoration Act and the lawmakers behind the act. It also provides reflection on the LIFE cover story from 1943 about the training of the WASPs. The July 19, 1943 cover of LIFE magazine was also featured in the article and on the exhibit.

"Smithsonian P-40 Warhawk Model Kit." Smithsonian InAir E-Z Build P-40 Warhawk Model Kit 1:48. The National WWII Museum. Accessed March 20, 2018.
<https://store.nationalww2museum.org/smithsonian-p-40-warhawk-model-kit.html>

The Smithsonian P-40 Warhawk Model Kit from The National WWII Museum was utilized in the display.

Stamberg, Susan. "Female WWII Pilots: The Original Fly Girls." NPR. March 09, 2010. Accessed September 25, 2017.
<http://www.npr.org/2010/03/09/123773525/female-wwii-pilots-the-original-fly-girls>

In 1942, there was a huge shortage of pilots, a group of women was recruited to let the male pilots deploy overseas. This article describes the history of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) and the hardships they went through, along with their great accomplishments. This article provides many photos and information about the WASPs.

Texas Woman's University. "Gateway to Women's History. Women Airforce Service Pilots Digital Archive." Women Airforce Service Pilots. Accessed October 23, 2017.
<http://twudigital.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p214coll2>

The Texas Woman's University's page titled "Gateway to Women's History" includes a digital archive for the WASPs. In 1939, Jacqueline Cochran decided she wanted to women pilots to be used in the U.S. military. This website chronicles the major events throughout the time of the WASPs. It provides history on them as well as photographs that were utilized and a quote.

"Veterans Day Special: Women Pilots of WWII." KRTS 93.5 FM Marfa Public Radio. Accessed November 28, 2017.
<http://marfapublicradio.org/blog/west-texas-talk/veterans-day-special-women-pilots-of-wwii>

While this radio broadcasting only provides a brief explanation of the WASPs, it does provide information on their start in the early 1940's. It discusses their backstory and helps readers understand how the WASPs started. It also includes an image to add to the visual impact.

Verges, Marianne. *On silver wings: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.

Marianne Verges wrote this enticing biography of the history of the WASPs from 1942 to 1944. Well-written with details from the ladies themselves, the story accurately depicts the hard

lifestyle of a female pilot during World War II. The book was full of fantastic quotes and specifics to broaden one's understanding of the WASP group.

Wackerfuss, Dr. Andrew T. "Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)." Air Force Historical Support Division. December 8, 2011. Accessed October 31, 2017.
<http://www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/458964/womens-airforce-service-pilots-wasp/>

This article, written in 2011 by Dr. Wackerfuss, an AFHSO historian, gives an explanation of the WASP's backstory and how they with the text, it also includes photographs of the women at work for visual effect on the exhibit.

"WASP Statistics." Wings Across America. Accessed October 25, 2017.
<http://wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/stats.htm>

These WASP and WAFS (Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron) statistics taken from Byrd Howell Granger's "On Final Approach," written in 1991, compare the statistics of female pilots opposed to male pilots. These statistics showed that the women had to pay extra expenses and insurance, while their accident rates were much lower than the men's rate. These statistics can help one understand how unfair and biased pay rates were for women compared to men.

"WASPs Were Pioneers for Female Pilots of Today, Tomorrow." U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. March 02, 2016. Accessed March 05, 2018.
<https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/684700/wasps-were-pioneers-for-female-pilots-of-today-tomorrow/>

The US Department of Defense summarizes the training and missions of the WASPs as well as other topics. In addition, this website includes images that can be found nowhere else. These images help one to see joy of former WASPs finally receiving recognition.

The Women's Armed Services Integration Act. The Women's Memorial, Washington, D.C. In The Women's Memorial. Accessed November 25, 2017.
<https://www.womensmemorial.org/americas-military-women>

The Women's Memorial website published an article about military women including an image from 1948 of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. This act relates to the WASPs because after they had proved that women could serve in the war, it was signed into law allowing women to have permanent status in the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Army. The image was used as a visual reference in the exhibit.

"Women In War- We Can't Win Without Them ." United We Will Win | Poster Information. Accessed February 23, 2018.
<http://www.fortmissoulamuseum.org/WWII/detail.php?id=14>

The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula provides a popular wartime poster advertising the WASPs, perfectly capturing the theme.

"World War II Female Pilots Claim Sabotage in New Documentary." Time Magazine. September 7, 2017. Accessed March 05, 2018. <http://time.com/4923054/world-war-ii-sugar-engines/>

The WASPs faced much opposition during their time as pilots, mainly sabotage, the main focus of "The Hidden Risk Faced by Female Pilots During World War II" from TIME. Former Women Airforce Service Pilots contributed their stories of being seen as less of a pilot and even being sabotaged. The article ends with a passage describing how the women were still not fully recognized until decades later despite their fight for military status.