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Women, war, and planes: Women Airforce service pilots' experience working alongside the Army Air Force during World War II

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WOMEN, WAR, AND PLANES: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS'
EXPERIENCE WORKING ALONGSIDE THE ARMY AIR FORCE
DURING WORLD WAR II

A Thesis

by

STEPHANIE MICHELLE CAVIN

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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WOMEN WAR AND PLANES: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS'
EXPERIENCE WORKING ALONGSIDE THE ARMY AIRFORCE
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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

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Women, War, and Planes discusses the Women Airforce Service Pilots' (WASP) experience during World War II as a non-militarized program working alongside the Army Air Forces in the continental United States. The mostly white, twenty to thirty aged pilots recruited from a national pool of women flew many different types of planes from basic, lighter aircraft to heavy, four engine models. The Army Air Forces and WASP leaders promised pilots full militarized status. However, the WASPs never received military status or rank while in the program, and in turn, did not receive the same protections afforded to men of who held the same rank and duties. Women, War, and Planes serves to investigate how the WASP's non-militarized status affected the women's experience in the program and show how society's idea of gender roles in the United States military kept them from gaining military status during World War II.

DEDICATION

My studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family, Mike, Donna, Jaime and my husband, Brian. They constantly encouraged me to persevere through the challenges brought on by such an all-encompassing project. My education and this thesis would not be possible without them.

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I extend my gratitude towards the archivists, transcribers, editors and interviewers who made the digital archive at Texas Woman's University possible. They made the resources easily accessible and offered additional help as needed. I want to recognize the families of the Women Airforce Service Pilots who donated personal letters and diaries to the Woman's Collection and allowed others a closer view into the WASP's lives.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the Women Airforce Service Pilots. They truly went above and beyond for their country during a time of war without wavering. May the memory of your work and your brave and determined spirits live on in our country's history. Thank you for your service.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER I. CREATION OF THE WOMEN’S AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS	1
CHAPTER II. WOMEN’S WORK: THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRUGGLES OF A WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOT DURING WORLD WAR II	22
CHAPTER III. FOR LOVE OF FLIGHT AND COUNTRY: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS’ EXPERIENCES WORKING FOR THE ARMY AIRFORCE AS CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES	47
CHAPTER IV. THE UNSPOKEN RULES: SOCIALIZATION, FRATERNIZATION AND SEXUALIZATION OF THE WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS	72
CHAPTER V. WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS CONTINUED EFFORTS TOWARDS MILITARIZATION AND VETERAN STATUS	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY	102
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	109

CHAPTER I

CREATION OF THE WOMEN'S AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

As Americans increased military power sent to Europe in World War II, a shortage of male pilots began in the continental United States. Traditionally, America's historical memory places women, such as Rosie the Riveter, at the forefront of women's participation during World War II, however a courageous group of women known as the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) worked alongside the Army Air Forces during the war. The all-female piloting organization navigated through uncharted territory, because they served as the first women military pilots in American history.¹ This thesis examines the triumphs and struggles of the women's entry into the Army Air Forces, and specifically focuses on the consequences the women endured due to their civilian status while they flew military planes for the Army Air Forces. Throughout their time in the program, WASPs worked for the Civil Service and were refused military and veteran status, benefits, compensation, and recognition, but performed tasks equal to and beyond those of their militarized male colleagues. During the duration of the WASP program, women pilots acted in performatively male gender roles by adhering to military guidelines, flying military aircraft, exposing themselves to the same dangers and hardships of military pilots, but were refused full military status and benefits by the Army Air Forces.

Other historians' use of WASP's oral histories varied based on date of the author's research and publication. The emergence of digital WASP archives and databases provided a wealth of primary source materials which were previously difficult for authors to access. For

example, Texas Woman's University's WASP virtual collection provided public access to numerous interviews, letters and memoirs and the Library of Congress uploaded several videos of WASP interviews as part of the Veteran's History Project. The additional primary sources offered a different perspective on the WASP pilots and allowed for a deeper analysis and understanding of their experiences as female pilots flying for the Army Air Forces during World War II. A survey of the secondary sources presently available to historians provided a deeper understanding of the WASP program and highlighted the gap in historical knowledge focused solely on the WASPs.

Women Military Pilots of World War II: A History with Biographies of American, British, Russian and German Aviators compared and contrasted the women's auxiliary units from the above countries. The book detailed the women's transition from flying civilian to military planes, the development of women's units, daily duties, and the dangers women faced. In the introduction, Lois K. Merry admitted she had trouble finding source information written in English for German and Russian pilots, but found enough information to piece together a basic history.² However, her lack of sources available for foreign countries meant she focused heavily on American and British pilots. Her book proved to be full of facts and dates, confirmed by primary sources, for the WASPs and provided a basic understanding of the program's inner workings. The lack of primary sources available led to a focus on the facts and not the pilots' voices.

Amy Goodpaster Strebe wrote *Flying for her Country: The American and Soviet Women Military Pilots of World War II* as a comparative analysis between the experiences of American and Soviet pilots. The chapters alternated between American and Soviet pilots and focused on the start of each program, patriotism as motivation, gender issues, and the WASP's disbandment.

The women's voice appears more in Strebe's book when compared to Lois's *Women Military Pilots of World War II*, because the author used the TWU collection. Chapter four, "Gender Issues," focused on the problems female pilots faced and provided a good foundation for the issues gender presented in the WASP program and the American military.³ However, the author focused on both the Soviet and American military and restricted the book to a comparative analysis and inhibited her ability to delve into gender issues regarding only the WASP program.

Sisters in Arms: British and American Women Pilots During World War II served as the most comprehensive comparative analysis between British and American female pilots. Author Helena Page Schrader cited many of the published first-person memoirs cited in this project and used the WASP voice throughout the book. Her book focused on the female pilot's experience and included their journey working towards the same rights as men, such as equal status, rank, privileges, pay, and benefits. While her book is a comparative analysis, she took her argument a step further than previous authors. She used the differences between their experiences to highlight how society's views of gender gave American and British pilots completely different experiences while they fulfilled the same role for their respective militaries. She explored how two governments, militaries and societies treated female pilots with similar cultural background and job functions so differently.⁴

Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II analyzed the WASP program's disbandment. While previous historians believed the WASPs disbandment resulted from men's return to the home front towards the end of the war, Molly Merryman argued cultural constructions regarding masculinity in the United States during WWII caused the WASP's disbandment. Merryman stated WASPs were "disbanded before the war's end, and before the women who had served in the program received the

militarization promised them, simply because the culture in which they existed was not prepared for women to succeed in roles that were associated with and desired by men.”⁵ She believed the WASP pilots remained a civilian group because their presence threatened America’s idea of masculinity. “Women, War, and Planes” builds upon Merryman’s argument and utilized oral histories in order to focus specifically on the women’s performative gender roles throughout the program’s existence. The Army Airforce assigned women performative male gender roles, and the women performed the roles at the same caliber as men. However, WASPs were constantly denied access and protections afforded to male military members. The denial of basic military benefits demonstrated how their equal performative male role in the military did not grant them access to basic and equal military benefits. Female pilots only received militarization and veteran status thirty-two years after the program disbanded.

Sarah Byrn Rickman wrote two non-fiction books about the WASPs. *The Originals: The Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron of World War II*, focused on the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), a group which eventually transitioned into the WASP program. Rickman utilized many primary sources in order to reconstruct the experience of the WAFS pilots. Nancy Crew’s biography, *Nancy Baston Crews: Alabama’s First Lady of Flight* discussed her experience as one of five women chosen to train in the Civilian Pilot Training at the University of Alabama. Crews became one of the original WAFS pilots and one of the first women participate in Officer Training School. Rickman relied heavily on oral history in order to write the biography.

The following three books did not focus on the WASP program, but instead concentrated on the founders of the beginnings of the WASP program, Nancy Love and Jacqueline Cochran. Rickman’s third book, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, followed Love’s

life from childhood, to the creation of the WAFS to her role as the Executive of the WASP program and her eventual passing. Once again, the biography relied heavily on primary sources in order to construct Love's biography. The book also included a glossary of military and airplane terms, a glossary of airplane types and a biographical overview of Love.⁶ Each book of Rickman's books focused on subjects related to the WASPs and constructed experiences based on primary sources, but did not concentrate exclusively on the WASP program.

Two biographies of Jacqueline Cochran and one autobiography pieced together Cochran's life and her part in the WASP program. Her autobiography, *The Stars at Noon*, provided Cochran's view of not only the WASP program, but women's entry into the piloting profession. While the numerous primary sources from WASPs offered an account of Cochran's actions and choices, the autobiography provided the thought processes behind her decisions. *Jackie Cochran: The Autobiography of the Greatest Woman Pilot in Aviation History* was written by Maryann Bucknum Brinley. Brinley depended on the unpublished versions of Cochran's autobiography, interviews, newspaper articles, and correspondence, all of which Cochran saved. The biography included other voices from Cochran's life, including many WASP pilots. The book intersected the line between primary and secondary source, because of the numerous interviews published in the book. The third biography about Cochran, titled *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, was a secondary source. The author used primary and secondary sources collected from numerous archives including the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, the Library of Congress, and Texas Woman's University. The biography spanned Cochran's entire life from birth to death and included a few chapters dedicated to Cochran's work with the WASP program. Each of the three books provided a unique perspective of one of the founders of the WASP program.

Secondary sources agreed that the development of two separate all female piloting programs, which eventually merged and formed Women Air Forces Service Pilots, began with difficulty. Merry described the implementation of Nancy Love's piloting program without the Chief of the Army Air Forces' permission.⁷ Meanwhile, Strebe discussed the power struggle between Love and Cochran when each was given a separate piloting program.⁸ Schrader focused on Cochran's rage directed toward the Chief of the Army Air Forces upon learning of Love's piloting program and stated Cochran "reminded him of some real or imagined promise to make her head of any women pilots' organization within the USAAF."⁹ While each author focused on a different part of the struggle, the main argument remained the same. The establishment of two women's piloting programs to aid the Army Air Forces during World War II marked the beginning of confusion surrounding the military's inclusion of female pilots.

Secondary source materials written about the WASP program remain limited. Books such as *Flying for Her Country*, *Women Military Pilots of World War II* and *Sisters in Arms* focused on female pilots from multiple countries in World War II. While the books provided a useful comparison between experiences, they focused less on unique WASP experiences. Biographies, autobiographies, and books about the WAFS provided important information about different aspects of the WASP program, but not the WASP program itself. Books such as *On Silver Wings*, was published in 1991, before many additional sources and interviews became available and used a limited number of primary sources as a result. Merryman's *Clipped Wings* proved to be the only secondary source centered only on the experiences of the WASP pilots, and the author successfully argued the WASP's disbandment resulted from the program's threat towards masculinity during World War II.¹⁰ Historians agreed the WASP program's creation led

to confusion due to the merger of two different piloting programs. The beginning stages of the WASP created misunderstandings and led to questions of leadership and military status.

“Women, War and Planes” served to fill the gap in historical knowledge regarding WASP service during World War II. The work focused heavily on primary sources made available by Texas Woman’s University and the Library of Congress. The paper relied on the pilots’ personal testimonies through oral histories and written documents such as letters and memoirs. Most secondary sources primarily focused on the WASP program as an organizational structure and this paper instead turned the attention to the women pilots and their personal experiences working with the United States Army Air Forces during World War II.

Creation of an all-women’s flying program began with difficulty during World War II due to the clash of interests between the Army Air Forces, Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Love. The Army Air Forces planned to utilize women pilots individually as they were needed, and Love pushed for a small group of elite women who would only ferry planes for the Army Air Forces. Cochran’s plans differed drastically from the Army Air Force and Love, because she fought for militarization of an all-women’s piloting organization which would remain a permanent part of the military.

Goals for the women pilots also varied between members of the Army Air Forces, further increasing tensions among those involved in the programs enactment. The Air Corps Ferrying Commander, Colonel Robert Olds, wanted to utilize female pilots on an as-needed basis and did not initially want a program created for women. Major General Henry Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces and Deputy Chief of Staff for Air, originally turned down the a female piloting organization, but eventually changed his mind after women’s proven success ferrying planes for the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). Arnold and Olds envisioned dissimilar goals for

female pilots during World War II, and their differing visions led to the creation of two piloting programs, the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD).¹¹

Jacqueline Cochran, eventual creator and director of the Women Airforce Service Piloting (WASP) program, presented her plans for an all-female ferrying program, which included training plans, an organizational layout, and regulations. She submitted an official plan to Olds to enact a program of female pilots, but the two did not agree on organizational structure which would be created to utilize female pilots. Olds "wanted to put women pilots to work on an individual basis, hiring them whenever and wherever needed."¹² Cochran believed "a few good women pilots amidst all the men would simply go down as a flash in the historical pan."¹³ Cochran reported the "idea of taking on a group of individual pilots without a special course of training and without some military organization was the reason [she] originally broke with Colonel Olds."¹⁴ Cochran did not want the women to be used on an as-needed basis and instead pushed Olds for an all-women's military organization of pilots which would not fold once the war was over. However, Olds did not want to start an organization of female pilots and only wanted to hire female pilots when the need arose. Eventually, Olds turned down Cochran's plans because it did not fit the needs of the Ferry Command.¹⁵

Cochran presented her plans to Major General Arnold, but he stated "the time had not arrived to use women pilots at all."¹⁶ He suggested Cochran travel to England and gain experience leading a female piloting program and return to the United States after American women proved their abilities in Britain. A British contact reached out to Cochran and asked her to recruit qualified American pilots, regardless of gender, to aid in the British war effort. Cochran searched records for American female pilots with the experience and training required

to fly military planes. Cochran took on the task because she believed it was her “opportunity to prove a point: an important point about women flyers.”¹⁷ On September 19, 1941, Major General Arnold responded to Cochran’s plan and stated “he didn’t feel there were enough qualified women pilots ready and willing to fly for the Army Air Forces.”¹⁸ Cochran responded to Arnold’s letter on October 4, 1941. She provided him with the number of qualified female pilots able to participate in a piloting program and asked him to reconsider. Arnold and Cochran met soon after and he urged her to travel to Britain and he would “keep Olds away from the women pilots.”¹⁹ Cochran traveled to Britain and took twenty five of America’s best female pilots to prove women’s ability to fly military aircraft.

The idea to utilize female pilots during World War II became known to the women on July 29, 1941, while Cochran was in Britain. Olds sent a survey to all American women with a valid pilot’s license and inquired on their interest and ability to participate in an “auxiliary organization of women pilots for the ferrying of certain categories of airplanes.”²⁰ The letter stated “no conclusions have been reached as to the future of such an organization, and it has not been determined whether it should be formed on a military or civilian basis, temporary or permanent.”²¹ Olds requested the women fill out the attached survey even if they did not wish to participate in the program. The only specific information the women received about the flying program was that “if the services of women pilots are utilized, they will obviously receive compensation.”²² The survey was sent to the women “in the strictest confidence” and included basic questions such as number of piloting hours and receipt of last license to more detailed questions such as “would you be interested in joining an organization which is government sponsored at a salary not less than \$150 per month to start?”²³ Old’s idea regarding utilization of women in the Army Air Forces differed greatly from Cochran’s plan.

While in Britain flying planes for the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), General Arnold sent word that it was time for Cochran to return to America and start a women's piloting program. While on route to the airport, General S. H. Frank asked Cochran to return to the British base and delayed her travel home for three days. The day before Cochran returned, "the Washington papers carried a release from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson's office that a small group of women ferry pilots (WAF) would be formed in the Ferry Command under the direction of Nancy Love whose husband was administrative assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Ferry Command."²⁴ Cochran believed "the order from General Frank to wait over England was but a method to stall my return to Washington until the WAF could be a fait accompli."²⁵

Problems arose with WAFS militarization at the program's creation. The WAFS began as a group of twenty-eight female pilots who ferried military planes for the Army Air Forces. The organization did not have a piloting training program and accepted women, many of which were professional pilots.²⁶ Brigadier General Harold L. George and Colonel William Tunner intended for the process of militarization of the WAFS pilots to be the same process for men. The Ferrying Division would hire women as civilian pilots and after they passed a ninety-day trial, they would become part of the Army Air Forces and fall under the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). However, legislation for the WAAC program did not include militarization of flying female officers or flight pay. As a result, Love made the decision for the WAFSs to remain a civilian piloting program and activate immediately instead of waiting for Congress to pass additional legislation and amendments.²⁷ On September 15, 1942, Colonel Tunner sent a memorandum to the Commanding officer of the 2nd Ferrying Group and stated "In accordance with previous oral understanding, you will retain women civilian pilots under

existing Civil Service Regulations.”²⁸ The WAFS remained a civilian squadron created to fill the needs of the Army Air Forces.

WAFS objectives varied in comparison to Cochran’s idea of women’s participation in World War II. Nancy Love’s program was publically announced on September 10, 1942, and she recruited twenty-eight of the best American female pilots. Love worked with the Ferrying Division’s head of the division’s domestic wing, Colonel William H. Tunner. American factories made planes faster than they could be transported to training schools and the women’s job focused solely on ferrying single-engine trainer planes to make them available for trainees.²⁹ The WAFS utilized pilots who already attained a piloting license on their own and required little additional training. Due to the WAFS’s experimental nature, Brigadier General Harold L. George’s Ferrying Command created a stringent set of requirements of WAFS pilots. In a memorandum to the Commanding officer of the 2nd Ferry Group at Wilmington, Delaware, official requirements included:

- a. American Citizenship
- b. Must be between ages of 21 and 35
- c. Must have a high school education
- d. Must have a CAA Commercial Certificate (validated)
- e. Must have 500 certified hours
- f. Must hold CAA 200 H.P. rating
- g. Must have two letters of recommendation outlining applicant’s experience and qualifications from former employers or prominent people in the community who can be easily contacted ³⁰

At the time of the creation of the WAFS, about one hundred American fulfilled all of the prerequisites, including the twenty-five flying in Britain with Cochran. Twenty-eight out of the remaining seventy-five women decided to serve their country in the WAFS program within three months.³¹ The final proposal also reassured General George that women ferry pilots would fly only small trainer and liaison-type airplanes.³²

In September 1942, Cochran decided against fighting the WAFS creation and Love's appointment. Restrictions on civil air aviation during WWII left women unable to undergo training in order to meet the high standards set forth by WAFS requirements, and Cochran instead focused on creating a separate program with the ability to train less experienced pilots. On September 14, 1942, four days after the announcement of the WAFS program, the War Department announced the creation of another women's ferrying division, the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), aimed at training pilots for the WAFS. The War Department's Bureau of Public Relations sent out a press release and defined the difference between the two programs. They stated "Formation of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, under command of Mrs. Nancy Harkness Love, which was announced September 10, is part of the program for utilization of this additional reservoir of trained pilots, it was explained."³³ The WAFS trained pilots in "cross country flying, using all navigational aids, to qualify as operating personnel for Mrs. Love's and such other units as may require it."³⁴

The Flying Training Command led the WFTD and assigned Cochran to work under Colonel Luke Smith, a General Staff Officer in Washington for pilot training. Colonel Smith reassigned Cochran and told her new command "the Training Command was receiving a bundle of trouble from a very determined and obstinate woman."³⁵ The Flying Training Command reassigned Cochran to the Training Command in Fort Worth, Texas under Lt. General Barton Yount and chose the Houston Airport for the training location. The Houston training facilities were not equipped to handle the nine month training course, and eventually Cochran moved the program to the Sweetwater, Texas at Avenger Field, which had recently become available.³⁶

Cochran received over 25,000 applications once the War Department announced their need for female pilots. With the overwhelming number of qualified applicants, Cochran created her own list of requirements:

I looked for clean-cut, stable young women who could show flying hours properly noted and certified in a log book. We asked for 200 hours flying time at first and later reduced that number to 35. I was to serve with the general staff of the Flying Training Command based out of Fort Worth, Texas.³⁷

Cochran had to be careful about who she selected, because the first training class would lead to the success or failure of the program. Military officials doubted women's ability to handle piloting responsibilities. Cochran knew her program had to appear clean cut and acceptable to the military standards as well as the public if militarization would be in their future. She purposely chose women who represented the best American female pilots in ability and outward appearance.

From their creation, the WAFS and WFTD declared different objectives. Cochran's motivation for the WFTD stemmed from her desire for women to prove themselves as pilots. Cochran's program had three main objectives. First, she strove to prove women could serve as military pilots and upon their success, she needed to create an organizational structure equipped for training and running the program. Second, the training needed to be efficient enough to free male pilots for combative duties. Third, the program needed to fill the demand for pilots created by American industry.³⁸ Cochran's first objective remained her main objective of the program throughout her time as director of the WFTD and the WASP program. Her public statement began: "I am delighted that the more than 3,000 licensed women pilots in American are going to have an opportunity to prove their competence to serve in their chosen field in the war."³⁹ Not until the end of her statement does Cochran mention "women must...take over non-combatant

roles to free men for combat service.”⁴⁰ Her push for women to fly military planes drove her to create the WFTD.

However, Love’s motivations differed from Cochran. Where Cochran wanted women pilots to prove their abilities to WWII America, Love’s “rock-bottom prime motivation was pure and simple: she wanted to fly the Army’s airplanes – all of them, the bigger, the faster, the better!”⁴¹ In 1934, Nancy “vowed to embark on a career in aviation. However... those jobs were few, even for old-timers.”⁴² The WAFS program fulfilled Love’s long-time dream of a career in aviation. The WAFS gave her the opportunity to work alongside the twenty-five most talented female pilots in the United States, aid her country during wartime, and fly planes the Army did not allow women to pilot. Love was “not interested in wielding vast administrative power,” but commanding the WAFS program gave her the ability to reach her goals in a time when the Army Air Forces did not accept female pilots.⁴³

Love and Cochran wanted two different types of female piloting programs. Love also wanted the WAFS to remain an elite group of female pilots. She pushed the Air Forces to allow women to fly bigger and better aircraft and even attempted to gain permission for the WAFS to make transatlantic flights. The more planes the Army Air Forces cleared the WAFS to fly, the more plane types Love herself could fly as well.⁴⁴ Love became the first woman to fly the P-51 Mustang fighter and the B-17 four engine bomber, a feat made attainable with the WAFS in place. However, Cochran wanted the WFTD to train as many female pilots as possible and stated “I was to train 500 women pilots, though that number was later increase to more than 1,000. I was pleased.”⁴⁵

Militarization goals differed between the WFTD and WAFS. Love unsuccessfully tried to militarize the WAFS under the WACs militarization bill, but accepted her role as the

commander of a civilian squadron without hesitation. Even Cochran acknowledged Love “did not go along with the idea of a large group of women pilots especially trained for various kinds of air work who would operate under military discipline.”⁴⁶ When the military opposed women flying military planes, Love “persisted with her proposal that highly qualified women pilots could be recruited to aid the Ferrying Division” as civilian pilots.⁴⁷ Waiting specifically for a WAFS militarization bill to pass through Congress would have wasted valuable time, and the WAFS did not need to be militarized in order to fulfill Love’s goals. Instead, the WAFS retained civilian status and began flying military planes immediately.

Cochran chose not to militarize the WFTD or the WASP program when faced with the decision. Cochran pushed for militarization of the WFTD from the beginning of the program, but wanted a Congressional bill unique to a female piloting program. Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby, commander of the WACs, presented the option to militarize the program as a subsidiary of the Women’s Army Corps, but Cochran stated “there was just about as much sense putting the women pilots under the WAC as putting the Air Force pilots back in the Army Signal Corps; that I was unalterably opposed to it and if the scheme were to mature, she would have to find another leader.”⁴⁸ Although she opposed militarization under the WACs, she pursued other means of militarization. However, she feared “the war would catch up to us, and the need for women would be over before I had a chance to see that they were properly trained.”⁴⁹ Cochran and Major General Arnold hired the pilots as civil service employees and did not wait for a WFTD specific militarization bill to be passed by Congress. Eventually, she believed her plan to get the women flying military planes without protection of militarization backfired and “the troubles in the administrative end were plenty, all stemming from the fact that the girls were not militarized but had to be controlled and dealt with under Civil Service regulations.”⁵⁰

Cochran and Love's goals directed their motivation and efforts to militarize their respective programs. Love became commander of the WAFS program to fly the heaviest models of military planes, but Cochran pushed for a separate program in order to prove women's worth as pilots during World War II. Love made her elite squadron of female pilots civil service employees and enabled them to transition to military planes quickly. She attempted militarization under the WAC program, but only to get the program started. Love agreed to civilian status for her pilots when the opportunity arose. Cochran opposed militarization under the WAC program, because she refused to fall under a leader who openly stated to Cochran that "she did not know one end of the plane from another."⁵¹ Cochran believed militarization under the WACs did not benefit her piloting program and made her pilots civilian service employees in order to waive wait time for a congressional bill to pass. Each leader's motivations drove their efforts for militarization and separated the piloting programs even further.

The Women's Flying Training Detachment and the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron merged to form the Women Air Forces Service Pilots (WASP) in August of 1943. Jaqueline Cochran became the Director of the WASP program and Nancy Love was named Executive. In March 1943, the United States Army Air Forces Base at Avenger Field near Sweetwater, Texas became the training location for the WASP program. The women paid their own travel expenses to Sweetwater and understood their civilian status. However, militarization remained the end goal for Cochran, and she constructed the program to prepare the women for Army Air Forces' standards.⁵²

WASPs lived a military lifestyle with the disadvantage of being classified as civilian pilots. They flew military planes, from light twin engines to heavy, four engine bombers, and passed the same rigorous military standards as their male counterparts. However, they received

no health/life insurance or death benefits in case of an accident and private insurance companies refused to provide a policy for such a high risk job.⁵³ The WASP received official military uniforms designed by Cochran, but purchased the uniforms themselves as a personal expense.⁵⁴ The government also refused to fund WASP travel expenses, including the initial cost of travel to their training base. Cochran required all living quarters, physical requirements, and operating procedures to be held to military standards and the women lived under strict guidelines and inspections as a result.⁵⁵ Cochran upheld the rigorous lifestyle to make the WASPs good candidates for militarization. However, the WASP program maintained civilian status through the end of World War II.

From the start, WASPs did not fit into any of the established categories for militarization. They did not belong in the WAC, for the same reasons the Air Force separated from the Army and became a distinct military service in 1947. The WASPs served completely different roles than the WACS in World War II and required separate leadership, training, equipment, and duties in order to function properly. Falling into another female military service simply because the service was made up of only women would have limited the WASP's ability to perform their duties. The military, government, and society needed proof of women's ability to fly military planes based solely on their gender, and therefore refused to accept WASP militarization into the Army Air Forces.

Judith Butler believed gender to be a performative act, fluid and unrestricted by one's physical and biological body, and explained the WASP's struggle for equal military status in WWII.⁵⁶ Butler refuted the idea that gender is performed, because performed gender only fulfills a role assigned to an individual. Instead, Butler believed gender is performative and the individual presents their gender to the world. She said people are not assigned a gender at birth,

but instead create gender all the time by the choices they make on a daily basis. She further thought society created mechanisms which restricted individuals to their assigned gender, such as bullying.⁵⁷ The same concept can be assigned to Women Airforce Service Pilots in order to analyze their experiences as military pilots during World War II. Women pilots acted outside of their gender during the 1940s, and society bullied the women back into the female gender role. “Women, War and Planes” analyzes the mechanisms used by the Army Air Forces, the government, and society in order to contain female pilots in their rightful gender.

The only way militarization of the WASPs could have been possible in America during World War II would have been if existing gender roles did not exist. WASPs proved social constructions wrong every step of the way, from accruing required hours of flying time to apply for the program to checking out on the heaviest, four engine bombers flown by the Army Air Forces during WWII. Society’s interpretation of gender and assigned woman’s roles did not include piloting planes. Society believed women to be a secondary sex and delegated the profession of a military pilot to men. The women’s assigned gender excluded pilots from militarization, even though they performed the same duties at the same caliber as male pilots.

The following chapters analyze the female piloting experience during World War II and further explain the role gender played in the vastly different experiences between male and female pilots during World War II. Chapter Two discusses WASP responsibilities and the lack of compensation and recognition received when compared to male military personnel performing the same job functions. Chapter Three analyzes the consequences of working for the Civil Service while performing military duties and Army Air Forces’ denial of financial protections, survivor and veteran benefits to the WASPs. The chapter also discusses the unique way WASPs handled the lack of benefits and the added responsibilities WASPs dealt with as a result. Chapter

Four examines the working and personal relationships which developed between WASPs and military men during their time in service and the resulting effect fraternization had on the program and the women's well-being. Overall, the challenges the women faced resulted from their status as Civil Service employees and the Army Air Forces' refusal of full military status to the WASPs who served during World War II.

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- ¹ For information regarding the entry of women into aviation as civilians and military pilots please see: Leslie Haynsworth and David Toomey, *Amelia Earhart's Daughters: The Wild and Glorious Story of American Aviators from World War II to the Dawn of the Space Age*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).
- ² Merry, *Women Military Pilots of World War II*, 3-4.
- ³ Strebe, *Flying for her Country*, 37.
- ⁴ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 1-2.
- ⁵ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 157.
- ⁶ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 276-310.
- ⁷ Merry, *Women Military Pilots of World War II*, 29
- ⁸ Strebe, *Flying for her Country*, 7.
- ⁹ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 13.
- ¹⁰ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 157.
- ¹¹ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 107-120.
- ¹² Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 181.
- ¹³ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 107.
- ¹⁴ Cochran. *The Stars at Noon*, 118.
- ¹⁵ Cochran. *The Stars at Noon*, 118.
- ¹⁶ Cochran. *The Stars at Noon*, 107.
- ¹⁷ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 181.
- ¹⁸ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 182.
- ¹⁹ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 182.
- ²⁰ Olds, Robert. "Letter and Survey," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ²¹ "War Department," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, 29 July 1941.
- ²² "War Department," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, 29 July 1941.
- ²³ "War Department," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, 29 July 1941.
- ²⁴ Cochran. *The Stars at Noon*, 118.
- ²⁵ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 118.
- ²⁶ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 2.
- ²⁷ Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 113-114.
- ²⁸ "Hiring Civilian Women Pilots," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ²⁹ Rickman, *Nancy Baston Crews*, 1.
- ³⁰ "Hiring Civilian Women Pilots," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ³¹ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 27.
- ³² Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 113-114.
- ³³ "Jacqueline Cochran Named Director," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ³⁴ "Jacqueline Cochran Named Director," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ³⁵ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 120.
- ³⁶ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 120-121.
- ³⁷ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 199.
- ³⁸ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 200.

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- ³⁹ “Jacqueline Cochran Named Director,” Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ⁴⁰ “Jacqueline Cochran Named Director,” Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ⁴¹ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 89.
- ⁴² Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 8.
- ⁴³ Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 119.
- ⁴⁴ Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles*, 38.
- ⁴⁵ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 199.
- ⁴⁶ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 119.
- ⁴⁷ Churchill, *On Wings to War*, 37.
- ⁴⁸ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 121.
- ⁴⁹ Cochran, *Jackie Cochran*, 200.
- ⁵⁰ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 122.
- ⁵¹ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 122.
- ⁵² Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 32-39.
- ⁵³ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 95.
- ⁵⁴ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 134.
- ⁵⁵ Merry, *Women Military Pilots of World War II*, 49.
- ⁵⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22-25.
- ⁵⁷ Judith Butler, 2012, “Your Behavior Creates Your Gender,” (speech), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRw4H8YWoDA>.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN'S WORK: THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRUGGLES OF A WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOT DURING WORLD WAR II

Jacqueline Cochran, director and founder of the Women Airforce Service Pilot program, reflected on the accomplishments of the female pilots who never turned down an Army Air Forces plane in her autobiography *The Stars at Noon*. When the B-26 bomber plane came into service, “it was known as the Baltimore Prostitute because it was made in Baltimore and had no means of visible support, that is to say its wing area seemed too small for the weight of the plane.”¹ The B-26 was involved in many accidents and “few planes returned from the first missions of B-26s that went out from England over Europe.”² Many male pilots “feared the plane but, because it was in quantity production, a great problem was presented to the General Staff.”³ Cochran flew the plane herself and reported the plane did not have any serious faults. Cochran gained permission from the Army Air Forces for the WASPs to fly the B-26, and she said “these girls did a fine job. They weren’t afraid of the plane because they hadn’t heard the underground rumors about it.”⁴ When men saw the women fly the B-26, “they made the male pilots’ faces red for a while and then the B-26 suddenly became accepted as a safe plane.”⁵ The Army Air Forces eventually trained two women to fly the B-29, which also had a negative reputation with male pilots. The B-29 WASPs flew the plane into all male transitional bases and demonstrated the plane’s use with ease. The men came to the “obvious conclusion... that if a woman could do it, so could a man.”⁶ Throughout their time in the WASP program, women

proved their abilities as pilots to be equal to men. However, without military status, the women received significantly lower compensation in relation to their male counterparts in training and after graduation.

WASPs relieved male military pilots for combat roles and performed the same duties as men within the continental United States during World War II. Initially, the program's purpose was to ferry military aircraft, but Jacqueline Cochran, director and founder of the WASP program, took on new tasks for WASPs in order to prove women's ability to competently perform duties expected of Army Air Forces pilots. Their main assignments included tow target missions for gunnery practice, ferrying planes between factories and airfields, proving the ability to fly new planes to men, and testing new aircraft models and procedures. Ultimately, the WASP program trained competent female pilots who performed many duties beyond ferrying planes and proved women's ability to perform the work at the same caliber as men. Women received equal training, met the same qualifications required of men, and suffered through similar hazards such as flying planes with unknown amounts of mechanical damages without equal insurance and accidents despite flying only within the continental United States, but they did not receive equal compensation or recognition for their abilities. Despite any hardships WASPs faced, their love for flying drove their high level of motivation and commitment to the WASP program.

Training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas prepared future WASPs to be on par with Army Air Forces pilots. Cochran designed the experimental program and knew failure would convince the military and American society that women should not fly military planes. Over 25,000 women applied to the WASP program, but Cochran only accepted 1,830 trainees. Acceptance into the WASP training program did not guarantee graduation, as 1,074 – just over

half - completed the program and became WASPs.⁷ The women met the same minimum requirements for graduation as the required by the Army Air Forces and “proved not only the interest of women in aviation... but has also proved the capability of women as fliers.”⁸ The program “proved women [could] pass physical examinations and undergo the rigors of a cadet training course as well as their brothers.”⁹ WASP trainees participated in classroom coursework, physical training and flight school, which included ferrying, target towing, instrument flying, night flying, searchlight missions, and formation work.¹⁰ As of October 18, 1943, the twenty-four week training course included “180 hours of flying time in primary, basic, and advanced type training planes and 230 hours of ground school.”¹¹ WASPs underwent the same training as male cadets and faced the same flying dangers as well.

The Army Air Forces tested WASP abilities to tow targets for gunnery practice in 1943. The Army Air Forces chose fifty pilots and sent them to Third Tow Target Squadron located in Camp Davis, North Carolina. The Army Air Forces questioned WASP’s abilities, and deemed the fifty pilots training at Camp Davis a trial group. According to Caro Bayley Bosca, a group of tall women went into additional training on larger planes for tow target practice. She said “It’s still in the experimental stage. They are still quite doubtful of women pilots!”¹² Cochran sent the women to anti-aircraft schools in secrecy, and pilots suspected “Cochran [thought] it would be embarrassing if ATC knew we had failed in flying these advanced ships.”¹³ Cochran considered their additional training experimental “to see just what jobs women can handle, so the men can go to combat duty.”¹⁴ Due to their success at tow target missions, the Army Air Forces expanded WASP duties to include air-to-air and ground-to-air gunnery training.¹⁵ Pilots accomplished the additional tasks set in front of them. In a publicity notice to the Secretary of War written by Major General Henry Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces and Deputy Chief of

Staff for Air, he said “the program will be expanded as needs develop for additional women pilots and the various experiments prove successful.”¹⁶ Eventually, women assigned to Camp Davis, North Carolina began towing targets, performing tracking missions for Anti-Aircraft Gunnery School, and acting as co-pilots in the AT-11 and B-34 in the performance of searchlight missions.”¹⁷

Many WASPs recounted their experiences as tow target pilots for male gunnery practice and expressed concern over the dangers the job entailed.¹⁸ Pilots got little training before gunnery practice and some described the duty as a “dirty job” and “a lousy stinking deal.”¹⁹ According to Anne Chisholm Dessert Oliver, tow target training consisted of a half-hour film.²⁰ Mary Ellen Keil described the process involved in tow target missions and stated “the engineer would release the target from the back of the bomb bay. The target was held on by a means of a heavy steel cable which was towed about 1,500 feet behind the B-26.”²¹ Keil said the first danger included releasing the target because the target forced the plane into a stall position, and “you had to be so careful when you released the target.”²²

The level of danger depended on the type of ammunition used during tow target missions, because WASPs described training exercises where both live ammunition and simulated fire were used during practice. Jean Moore Soard said, while stationed in Victoria, Texas, she flew the AT-6 single engine trainer for tow target missions. The men fired camera guns at WASP planes to simulate a mock attack on the enemy.²³ However, not all airfields used camera guns in their practice, and WASPs reported the use of live ammunition during missions. In Boise, Idaho, B-26 graduates participated in tow target missions and dropped targets at an auxiliary field for men to fire at using live ammunition. While stationed at Boise, Sadie Hawkins confirmed the use of live ammunition in the B-26. Once they dropped the target, Hawkins retrieved the target

and counted the number of holes in it to measure the gunner's accuracy. The WASPs saw the tracers sail past them and usually there was a safe distance between the planes and the bullets.²⁴ Hawkins said, "Unfortunately, there were not usually very many. I always hoped they'd get better."²⁵ The gunners' bad aim caused extra danger for the WASPs, and Hawkins remembered getting some holes in the nose of her plane because "the tail gunner was just getting rid of ammunition."²⁶

Cole described an incident between a WASP pilot's B-26 and a male pilot's B-24 plane. WASPs Fran Smith and Joan Whelan dropped their targets and made passes at a B-24, but they got too close to the B-24 and put a hole in the right wing of their plane. Both planes landed safely after the mid-air collision, and once on the ground Whelan said she got out of the plane and "wanted to catch a ride to the flight line. I put up my arm to stop him and it sung right into the propeller of the B-26."²⁷ Fortunately, an orthopedic surgeon was on base at the time and repaired her arm to full function. She retained some scarring and a droopy finger. Cole believed Whelan was shaken up after the collision because "most midair collisions are fatal, with both planes crashing, so they were all very lucky to have landed safely."²⁸

Along with participating in tow target missions, WASPs checked out on as many planes as possible. The WASP program gave female pilots a once in a lifetime chance to fly Army Air Forces planes, and the women took advantage of the rare opportunity. They learned to fly many different models of planes and understood the way each one flew in the air. Cochran reported the women "flew during operational duties nearly every type of airplane used by the AAF, from the small primary trainer to the Superfortress (B-29), including the Mustang, Thunderbolt, B-17 B-26, and C-54."²⁹ The extra knowledge and experience flying a wide range of plane types allowed the women to perform additional duties within the Army Air Forces. Their expertise

made the women reliable and well-informed test pilots, because they understood what fell within normal and abnormal characteristics for military aircraft.

As test pilots, WASPs were the first to fly planes after mechanics completed repairs or another pilot wrote up the plane for having mechanical issues. Many WASPs discussed the risky duties performed by test pilots on a daily basis. Not every WASP enjoyed the work, as Sara Chapin Winston said test pilots or “utility pilots... hop planes when maintenance gets thru [sic] gluing on a new wing.”³⁰ Some WASPs, such as Ethel Finley, did not want to confuse the task with pilots who tested out newly designed aircraft, and said instead “you were really a maintenance pilot. You do slow-time on engines after overhaul or installation of new engines and check on the write-up of cadets as to some malfunction, etc.”³¹ Winston’s portrayal of a glued-on plane wing presented a realistic picture of the hazards test pilots faced in their daily work. Often times, mechanics did not restore the plane properly, and WASP test pilots flew planes which still had major issues mechanical issues.

For example, Cole documented a discussion she had with former WASP test pilot, Gini Dulaney, who described her experiences working on malfunctioning planes. Elkington and her copilot, Doris Elkington, tested a UC-78, and as they were taking off, their plane caught fire. As she was coming in to land, she “knew the mechanic had not fixed the oil line as he was supposed to do!”³² Once she landed the plane, she “reached across the wing and it was just slick with oil.” Although Dulaney specifically asked the crew chief if he fixed the oil line before she tested the plane, the plane still spring an extremely dangerous oil leak and caused a fire mid-flight. Dulaney said test pilots ended up in dangerous situations because the flight mechanics “were in the military and they couldn’t keep up with it, but they had no right to put it back on the flight line!”³³ Test pilots were the first to fly planes immediately after the crew chief repaired the

plane, but did not know if the repair was completed correctly. If the repair did not fix the problem, the test pilots were the ones who discovered the issue, often mid-air.

Jean Moore Soard remembered her experience as an engineering test pilot in Enid, Oklahoma. She flew planes which had just been repaired and tested them out for the cadets. She said “one cadet wrote one up and said, ‘the tail vibrates violently in third turn of spin.’ And it did, but they all did.”³⁴ The problem described by the cadet was normal for the model and Soard responded to his complaint: “doesn’t vibrate any more than any of the rest of them.”³⁵ In Soard’s opinion, “if it held together, why, it was all right... if it didn’t, you had a parachute.”³⁶

The WASP program anticipated militarization throughout the duration of the program, and Cochran wanted to be as prepared as possible for the women’s transition into their military careers. WASPs attended Officer Training Course (OTC), also referred to as Officer Candidate School (OCS), and studied to become officers within the United States military. The women attended the Army Air Forces School of Advanced Tactics at Orlando, Florida. They attended classes six days a week for four weeks and studied everything from military law and court-martial to jungle survival. Unlike training at Sweetwater, the pilots did not take any flying courses and instead focused on solely “ground school and indoctrination.”³⁷ Instead, they took a courses such as chemical warfare and were given whiffs of mustard gas and cyanide.³⁸ Cole discussed a fellow WASP’s excitement about attending OCS:

We were going for officer’s training and intelligence. It was such a fascinating base. It was the hub of all international training. There was a big meteorology department and a big intelligence department. People came from all over the world. We had English, French, Russians – everybody was down there. I was just carried away with myself. I was so thrilled.³⁹

WASPs prepared to become officers and took the same coursework as men, but did not gain the same recognition. On June 17, 1943, Minton wrote to her parents “The uniform will be same as army air corps officer’s uniform, complete with shoulder insignia and wings. We will be officers in every sense except we will not wear bars.”⁴⁰ Although Minton expected to wear bars on her uniform by the time of graduation, she never received formal recognition of her training during her time in the WASP program. Women pilots wore the WASP insignia instead. Although they took the same coursework and attended Officer Candidate School, they were not given the same official display on their uniform and did not retain official rank within the Army Air Forces.

In addition to OCS school, WASPs learned how to work with ammunition and firearms as well. Minton wrote home to her mother and father “Today I passed tests on the assembling and disassembling of the Springfield and Garand rifles, and a neat little carbine. Sounds more bloody than it is.”⁴¹ Her itinerary for the day also included turret school and she learned how to tune and mount a Browning machine gun on the inside of a B-24.⁴² The women required knowledge of firearms because they flew pursuit planes which carried confidential information and equipment when going overseas. Since WASP pilots ferried pursuit planes across the United States, they were trained to shoot the fuselage and destroy the plane and its contents in case they ever forced a landing under suspicious circumstances.⁴³

Whether intentional or not, the Army Air Forces was not above using gender stereotypes to shame male pilots who refused to fly planes with dangerous flight records. Women often served in an unofficial role for the Army Air Forces and flew plane models male pilots in the Army Air Forces refused. The B-26 was nicknamed the “Widow-maker” and the “Flying Prostitute because it had no visible means of support.”⁴⁴ Irma Story said she was sent to fly the

B-26 “because the boys could refuse to fly it and not lose their wings.”⁴⁵ Immediately after Story and four WASPs soloed in the B-26, a telegram was sent to Washington to alert the Army Air Forces of their accomplishment. As a result, “the answer had come back that the boys could not refuse to fly it.”⁴⁶ Orr discussed a similar situation when she delivered a plan from the European theater of war. Three male pilots turned down the plane because they said the gear was not functioning, but Orr decided to fly the plane anyways. She believed in her talent and said “my creed was I’ll take anything. I’ll show them. I think all of us felt that way.”⁴⁷

Men also refused to fly the B-29 or better known as Boeing’s Superfortress, but Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tibbets found a way to convince them otherwise. Tibbets was in charge of developing training curriculum to instruct male pilots weary of the B-29. He chose two WASPs, Dorothea Johnson Moorman and Dora Dougherty Strother, to be his first students because they did not have any experience flying four-engine planes. According to Tibbets, “if the new B-29 crews could see two gals fly this wonderful new airplane, then it would be proven that it was ‘so easy to fly it...that even a woman could fly it.’”⁴⁸ The women trained for three days and checked out on the B-29. Tibbets assigned the women to take a tour of the Very Heavy Bomber bases. He named the plane “LADYBIRD” and painted a Fifinella (WASP symbol) on the side of the bomber.⁴⁹

After the women completed their short training from Tibbets, Clovis’s base newspaper announced the WASP’s arrival and made the women sound as feminine as possible. Major Harry Shilling, Air Corps Director of Maintenance, described the women as “delicate dishes of femininity... [who were] carrying out some tests on engine heat.” He challenged the men even further and said “perhaps they should take some of our supermen for a ride and show them how to

get off the ground with speed and dispatch at a low head temperature.”⁵⁰ Clovis scheduled the women to fly with the men and the male pilots observed the women’s flying technique.⁵¹

Once the men saw the women successfully pilot difficult planes without any trouble, they changed their mind and decided to fly them despite the plane’s reputation. On August 2, 1995, Harry McKeon, a retired Lieutenant Colonel from the United States Air Force, wrote a letter to former WASP Dr. Dora Dougherty Strother. He was the Director of Maintenance and Supply and Base Test Pilot at Clovis, New Mexico Airforce Base in 1944. He wrote the letter to thank Strothers for her help the day she landed a B-29 at Clovis. He wrote:

You were the pilot that day and demonstrated your excellent flying skills and convinced us the B-29 was the plane that any pilot could be proud to fly. From that day on we never had a pilot who didn’t want to fly the B-29.⁵²

Fifty-one years later, McKeown still felt indebted to Strother and Moorman and reached out to thank them for their service. He admitted he was scared, even though he had experience flying the B-24 in North Africa, but said the women “made a difference in my flying from then on. I wasn’t the only pilot that felt this way, and I am sure that they would thank you too, if they knew where you were.”⁵³ The WASPs truly appreciated his sentiment and the recognition so many years later and called his letter “the frosting on our cake.”⁵⁴ Strothers published the letter in the April 1996 edition of the *WASP Newsletter* in the hopes “this letter brings joy to the hearts of all women pilots who read these words, knowing that any one of us could have been the B-29 pilot.”⁵⁵ WASP pilots were more than ferry pilots throughout the war. Their work changed lives such as McKeown, and the men remembered WASPs long after their service ended.

The Army Air Forces pushed women into traditionally male gender roles and used the women’s femininity to disgrace male pilots into flying difficult bomber planes. They painted the

bombers with the WASP emblem and named the plane Ladybird, giving the bomber feminine characteristics to match the pilots. The WASPs performance of male gender roles forced men to either fly the plane or refuse to fly a feminine plane called the Ladybird. Ultimately, the women's performance of a male gender role shamed the men into flying the plane with a bad reputation because the female pilots proved the bombers flyable.

On June 1, 1945, Cochran wrote the *Final Report* to the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces and detailed the accomplishments of the WASP program. In the report, she showcased the successes of the experimental program. She stated "the record of the women closely paralleled that of the men in rate of elimination, rate of accidents, rate of fatal accidents, hours flown per month, diversity of work, etc."⁵⁶ She reported "uniformly the WASP were reported eager to learn, willing to work, and well behaved."⁵⁷ The women demonstrated their abilities and gradually the women gained additional responsibilities. By the time the WASP program deactivated, their duties included "ferrying, target towing, tracking and searchlight missions, simulated strafing, smoke laying and other chemical missions, radio control flying, basic and instrument instruction, engineering test flying, administrative and utility flying."⁵⁸ They also learned how to fly all types of Army Air Forces' planes from single engines to pursuits and heavy bombers. The women proved they could take on the same tasks as male pilots within the continental United States.

The women faced many hazards during their time in the WASP training program due to the unpredictable nature of their work. Planes are human-made machinery, and they broke down at any time and with little to no warning. Combine that unpredictable nature with the fact that women ferried recently repaired planes from factory to airfield, WASPs frequently mentioned accidents and potential dangers. They did not complain and the dangers did not affect their

motivation within the program. While the pilots did not expect accidents, they understood their line of work came with a certain amount of expected risk. Women experienced the same hazards as men in the same position, but endured the added complication of being civilian pilots in a military role.

Joanne Wallace Orr was assigned to pursuit school in Brownsville, Texas, and she checked out on nine pursuits, or fighter aircraft. During an interview, Jean Hascall Cole, who was also a WASP, discussed the combustible nature of the P-47 Thunderbolt. After being cleared for takeoff in Brownsville, another pilot taxied his plane in front of Orr and caused an accident. Orr “sheared his whole engine off” and missed “killing the pilot by about two inches at the most.”⁵⁹ Her plane caught fire, and she immediately took off her earphones and throat mic, but could not open the hatch. She remembered “I was just getting bright orange, and I was starting to cook. And I just fought and I fought to open that hatch.”⁶⁰ Since she was still on the runway, several men witnessed the accident, but they did not help free her from the burning plane for fear it would explode. She finally opened the latch, and she said “I fell and then those ‘brave’ men came and picked me up and put me in a car and took me to the infirmary.”⁶¹ The Army Air Forces did not complete an investigation of the accident “because he was a man and I was a woman.”⁶² The near fatal accident was not Orr’s fault, but she believed her gender made her responsible for the crash according to the Army Air Forces, and therefore relieved the male pilot of any responsibility.

WASPs were often assigned to transport non-flying officers to other locations. Irma Story described a fatal accident involving her friend and fellow WASP Bonnie Jean Welz during a transport assignment from Harlingen Army Air Field. During flight, Story believed the male officer “pulled rank” and insisted on flying the plane.⁶³ In mid-air, the plane “made a big

shallow turn...it just went in real flat, and hit a tree and then caught on fire.”⁶⁴ Story also stated Welz could have fainted in the cockpit, and the officer attempted to land the plane safely. However, Story thought “he was the cause of the accident.”⁶⁵ The officer suffered injuries and “got his hands burned and stuff,” and Story said, “He said he tried to help her out, but I didn’t believe he did.”⁶⁶ The accident reported stated the underlying cause of the accident as unknown and no further investigation was completed. The officer was not able to give a reason for the crash and stated the “pilot gave no sign of distress.”⁶⁷ He did not realize anything was wrong until right before the crash.⁶⁸ Story explained her uncertainty towards the male officer and said “we’d been warned about him by the boys that he always wanted to pull his rank and fly the airplane, and he was a non-flying officer.” The male pilots warned WASPs of the non-flying male officer’s reputation of pulling rank and forcefully taking control of the plane. Story did not believe Welz’s death to be unknown and instead thought the officer pulled rank. Since WASPs did not officially hold military rank, any non-flying officer outranked WASPs and could force them into life-threatening situations.

The WASPs original ferrying duty came with its own set of daily dangers due to the unpredictability of flying human-made machinery. Madge Rutherford Minton described an incident in a letter to her family from Long Beach in 1943. She began the letter humorously and asked if her family was “troubled with dry skin... Fly a ‘Maytag (a BT) Messerschmidt’ and your troubles are over.”⁶⁹ During a ferrying mission, her plane leaked oil across the hatch of her plane midair. She said, “In 10 minutes I couldn’t see if it was still daylight outside. Smoke began to ooze up from around the firewall.”⁷⁰ She attracted the attention of another pilot who “came up alongside to fly a little formation” who luckily saw the trouble she was in and stayed

away from her plane.⁷¹ She called into Bakersfield for an emergency landing and as she opened the hatch:

oil poured into the open cockpit – all over me, my flying suit, leather jacket, Ray-bans, hair, face, oh my goodness! But I got her down with the firetrucks chasing me down the runways after landing. But nothing happened except I've called 13 beauty shops to get a shampoo. Such is the life of a ferry pilot.⁷²

Fortunately, Minton escaped the crash unharmed and worked for the WASP program until disbandment. The field in Bakersfield was ready for her crash landing and the fellow pilot in midair saw her predicament and did not attempt to fly in formation with her. Minton's humor in the letter home depicted her high morale and desire to reassure her family of her safety after a terrifying accident.

Betty Deudser Budde wrote home to her family in 1943 and told them about the first WASP death. The trainee, Marge Oldenburg, and her instructor, Norris Morgan, were killed when her plane spun in a few miles from the airport. At 6:00 pm, she heard the sirens wail while ambulances and doctors rushed to the scene. Budde remembers the women "were told not to write home about it. They haven't discovered why it happened – altho we all have our own ideas."⁷³ The trainees at Sweetwater were shocked and they realized the true danger of their tasks. On March 10, Budde wrote home in another letter and described the memorial to Oldenburg and Morgan. She said, "They played taps at the retreat tonight, with the flag at half-mast. We all stood at attention, saluting – as usual – facing the setting sun...nothing at all was said, but everyone knew what it was for."⁷⁴

However, subsequent training deaths did not receive the same sentiment. In a letter home on June 21, 1944, Marjorie Osborne Nicol said during training, Gleanna Roberts spun out in the practice area. Unfortunately, "no one saw the accident and there wasn't enough left of the plane

to find the cause of the tragedy.”⁷⁵ However, the trainees pushed forward because they were not allowed to have a memorial service. Nicole said previous WASP classes “tried it once before and it was very demoralizing.”⁷⁶ The women grieved the loss of a fellow trainee individually and did not hold any type of memorial service for Roberts.

While fatal and near death accidents occurred in the WASP program, the accident rate and the fatality rate compared favorably with the rates of male pilots in similar work.”⁷⁷ Throughout the WASP program’s duration, there were 402 accidents, and thirty-five or nine percent of them were fatal. Comparatively, eleven percent of Army Air Forces piloting accidents resulted in fatalities. The WASP program suffered eleven deaths during training and resulted in an accident rate of 0.032 per 1000 hours of flying. Male cadets’ fatalities in training equaled a rate of 0.034 per 1000 hours of flying.⁷⁸ Throughout the duration of the WASP program, the fatality and accident rate was equivalent to males in similar positions.

However, equal training, work and danger did not grant WASPs equal compensation. According to the Official Army Register dated January 1, 1943, cadets in training made \$75 a month, while WASPs made \$150 plus \$26 for overtime.⁷⁹ While the numbers prove WASPs made more monetarily per month, the cadets obtained additional benefits. WASP trainees paid for their own travel expenses to Sweetwater, Texas. WASP pilots borrowed money in order to make the trip and were indebted to family members before training began. For example, Marion Stegeman Hodgson borrowed money from her grandmother to cover travel expenses, but was not able to pay her back until their pay increased after graduation.⁸⁰ However, 756 WASP trainees washed out before graduation and paid for their fare home as well. According to Betty Deuser Budde, a fellow trainee Dorothy Davis washed out and made the trip home to Pasadena. Budde said “it’s sure expensive to be washed out so soon – I mean, the expense of the trip and getting

settled and all. I doubt if she broke even. Well, we all gambled on it so we all expect it to happen.”⁸¹ Approximately 45% of trainees paid for the trip to Sweetwater, Texas, and back home, after they failed out of the program and returned to their home life. On the other hand, men were not held responsible for their travel expenses, even if they failed out of training. The Army Air Forces paid for male cadets’ travel expenses to flight school and assigned men who failed out of training to another military duty.⁸²

After arrival to training in Sweetwater, WASPs paid \$1.65 per day for housing and food, while men did not pay any expense for their room and board. In a letter to her sister, Adaline Blank broke down the deductions from her first paycheck in training:

Federal Tax: 25.60
Civil Serv. Retirement: 7.50
War Bond (voluntary): 18.75
4 days not here in July: 23.40
Room and Board: 44.55
Gym Suit: 3.85
Cleaning and Laundry: 5.00
[Total] 128.50⁸³

After deductions, Blank was left with 47.35 from her paycheck for the rest of the month.

Trainees obtained a pay increase once they graduated and officially became WASPs. WASPs received \$250 per month, while according to Army pay tables in 1943, male 2nd Lieutenant’s base pay with less than ten years’ service was \$150 and a 1st Lieutenant’s was \$166.⁸⁴ The pay for officers increased as their time served increased. By the time a 2nd Lieutenant served for thirty years, he made a base pay of \$250 a month, while WASP’s pay never increased for extra experience and skills gained. In addition to their base pay, the Army Air Forces granted Officers flight pay and the Official Army Register stated:

Officers shall receive an increase of 50 per centum of their pay when by orders of competent authority they are required to participate regularly and frequently in

aerial flights, and when in consequence of such orders they do participate in regular and frequent flights.⁸⁵

After the extra 50% for flight pay, Officers' monthly compensation totaled \$225 per month. In addition to flight pay, Army Air Forces officers received a housing and subsistence allowance which increased for those with dependents. A 2nd Lieutenant received an additional \$45 per month for housing and \$21 for subsistence without dependents. Those with dependents received \$60 for housing and \$42 for subsistence.⁸⁶ The Army Register defined a housing allowance as "suitable quarters in kind or in lieu thereof commutation of quarters at the rate of \$6,500 per annum."⁸⁷ Their housing allowance included the cost of utilities and were defined as "necessary fuel and light for quarters in kind, or in lieu thereof commutation of fuel and light at rate of \$1,500 per annum."⁸⁸

Both WASP and Army Air Forces officers collected a daily allowance when they ferried planes away from the base and stayed off base, but WASPs and officers received different amounts even though they would have incurred the same expenses. Depending on where they landed, they were responsible for finding lodging and paying for their meals. Women were given six dollars per diem, while male pilots were given seven dollars per diem. WASP pilot Marion Stegeman Hodgson realized the amount was "a dollar a day less than the men got, but thought nothing of the inequality."⁸⁹ However, the pay increase Hodgson received after training provided her with enough to pay back money she borrowed from her grandmother to make the trip to Sweetwater for WASP training. She chose not to dwell on the lesser amount because her pay allowed her to pay off her debts, and she instead turned her attention to the task at hand.⁹⁰

WASPs did not receive any additional housing or subsistence allowance, with or without dependents. According to Byrd Howell Granger, WASPs could live in Bachelor's Officer's Quarters (BOQ) for fifteen to twenty dollars a month. If BOQ was not available, WASPs paid

for civilian housing, which Granger said was expensive and in critical demand.⁹¹ After the additional compensation for flight pay, housing and subsistence allowance, a 2nd Lieutenant in 1943 made \$289 per month without dependents or as much as \$327 with dependents.⁹² On the contrary, WASPs did not get additional compensation and were paid \$250 per month regardless of experience and duties performed.⁹³

WASPs completed the same training and took on the same stateside duties as their male counterparts, but did not collect the same compensation or wear the same recognition on their uniforms as male officers in the Army Air Forces. However, WASPs proudly worked as Civil Service employees for the country during a time of need. They filled the role of male pilots and freed them for combat duty and faced the same dangers as men who flew planes within the continental United States. Many pilots knew they took home less pay than male Army Air Forces pilots and all knew they did not wear bars to distinguish rank on their uniforms, but the women did not let unequal compensation and recognition discourage them. Instead they took full advantage of the once in a lifetime opportunity Cochran offered them and checked out on every type of military plane possible. The WASP program gave many women access to expensive training classes and the ability to check out on military planes they did not have access to in a true civilian world. Their undying motivation stemmed firstly from their love of flying and was seconded by patriotism.

WASPs expressed both a love for flying and a love for their country motivated them to join the WASP program, but when asked, many women revealed their love of flight was their first priority. In an interview with fellow WASP Jean Hascall Cole, Jean Moore Soard revealed her true motivation when asked why she joined the WASP program. She said she wanted “to fly... Oh and to help my country in the war naturally.”⁹⁴ Cole responded “some people didn’t

care at all. They just wanted to fly.”⁹⁵ Both former WASPs agreed “most of us were that way... [but] as long as patriotism went along with it, it was okay.”⁹⁶

Orr expressed a similar sentiment. Upon her entry into the program she thought, “It was so exciting. It was such an opportunity to do something that was once-in-a-lifetime. Of course, you didn’t even know it at the time.”⁹⁷ She stated her decision had nothing to do with being a feminist or proving women’s worth to society. Instead she took “the chance to get into the Army Air Corps and learn to fly.”⁹⁸ Orr loved her work and felt hurt by “all the women that didn’t feel grateful for that training [because] it was priceless.”⁹⁹

While the pilots did not claim to be feminists, some delighted in the opportunity to work a man’s job. Men outside of the military became curious about WASPs and expressed interest in WASP’s inspiration to fly for their country. Hodgson explained:

“It was obvious that we loved to fly, loved being allowed to help with the war effort in such a significant way... and the fact that we were girls doing a man’s job seemed to evoke admiration in all but the most insecure types.”¹⁰⁰

Hodgson’s motivation originated from the love to fly, patriotism, and the chance to work a job society normally deemed masculine outside of wartime. However, World War II gave women such as Hodgson, the opportunity to complete a program designed after the Army Air Forces’ training program for male cadets. Most WASPs felt grateful for the flying classes and saw the program as an opportunity they would not have access to in civilian life.

WASPs acknowledged the cost of the training and knew they would not be granted a similar opportunity elsewhere. After breaking down her budget in a letter home to her sister, Adaline Blank acknowledged the pay cut she took when she left her job as an Assistant Buyer and entered the WASP training program. After deductions, she was left with only a little over a quarter of her initial paycheck. She did not focus on the small amount leftover after deductions

and instead wrote “I guess we shouldn’t complain; the government says it costs about \$20,000 to train each of us.”¹⁰¹ Cole began flying at the age of nineteen and spent almost half of her weekly paycheck on one hour of flying lessons a week. The lessons cost her eight dollars, but learning to fly was worth the cost. Cole believed “once you have flown an airplane yourself, your world is never the same again.”¹⁰² The WASP program gave Cole the chance to be paid to learn how to fly planes she would never be able to fly in the civilian world.

The July 1943 edition of *Woman’s Home Companion* featured Cornelia Fort, who proved women could fly planes under all conditions on December 7, 1941 in Honolulu, Hawaii. WASPs did not fly in combative missions, however Fort was in the air during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Fort was a civilian pilot instructor and was in the air with a student when the attack began. She said:

I looked casually around and saw a military plane coming directly me. I jerked the controls away from my student and jammed the throttle wide open to pull above the oncoming plane. He passed so close under us that our celluloid windows rattled violently.¹⁰³

She looked to see what type of plane nearly crashed into her, and saw “the painted red balls on the tops of the wings shone brightly in the sun.”¹⁰⁴ She described her view of the attack:

[I] saw the formations of silver bombers riding in. Something detached itself from an airplane and came glistening down. My eyes followed it down, down and even with knowledge pounding in my mind, my heart turned convulsively when the bomb exploded in the middle of the harbor...A few seconds later a shadow passed over me and simultaneously pullets spattered all around me.¹⁰⁵

She immediately took control of the plane and got them to safety. However, two civilian planes never returned until they were washed ashore weeks later full of bullets. Fort’s view of Japanese’s destruction of Pearl Harbor gave her a different motivation than other pilots. She watched as the Japanese dropped bombs on her country and landed her plane in the midst of

enemy fire. She personally felt the devastation Japan brought to the United States, as she lost colleagues in the attack. Her motivation was derived from “a score to settle with the Japs who had brought murder and destruction to our islands.”¹⁰⁶ Fort immediately reported for duty when Nancy Love invited her to become a member of the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS).¹⁰⁷

Fort’s motivation transformed from anger into patriotism and enthusiasm for flying military planes. She encouraged herself and others to work against disbelievers and, as the first group of female pilots, she proved women’s ability to fly planes was equal to men. She understood they had “no hopes of replacing men pilots,” but realized “delivering a trainer to Texas may be as important as delivering a bomber to Africa if you take the long view.”¹⁰⁸ She took pride in her work and said “I am profoundly grateful that my one talent, my only knowledge, flying, happens to be of use to my country when it is needed. That’s all the luck I ever hope to have.”¹⁰⁹

WASP viewed their time in the program as a once in lifetime opportunity because they were paid to learn to fly every type of military plane available to them. They underwent the same training as men and upheld the same standards required to graduate from Avenger Field. Before and after graduation, WASPs faced similar hazards as their male counterparts who flew military planes within the continental United States, but did not receive equal rank and pay. While many would find it easy to focus on the lack of equal status, the WASP’s love to fly and love of country drove their motivation and pushed them to continue flying during the United States’ time of need.

The WASPs represented a perfect example of Judith Butler’s theory of gender as performative instead of an expected performance of male and female roles. WASPs broke

through society's expected gender roles and instead created new roles for women in aviation and the military. As the Army Air Forces utilized male pilots in combative roles, WASPs took over piloting work within the continental United States and proved women's abilities in military planes. They confidently and fearlessly performed the same duties assigned to male pilots, even though they did not receive the added compensation of military service.

The following chapter discusses one of the major difference between male and female pilots, the WASP's civilian status throughout World War II and the lack of benefits received during and after their service. While WASPs worked alongside men in tow target missions and proved bombers to be easy to fly, the women did not receive equal military benefits or status. The women focused primarily on the absence of distinguishable uniforms and health, life and death insurance, all benefits guaranteed to military men.

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- ¹ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 126-127.
 - ² Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 126-127.
 - ³ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 126-127.
 - ⁴ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 126-127.
 - ⁵ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 126-127.
 - ⁶ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 126-127.
 - ⁷ Cochran, "WASP Final Report," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ⁸ "Press Release," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ⁹ "Press Release," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ¹⁰ "Press Release," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ¹¹ Arnold, "Publicity Notice," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ¹² Bosca to Family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 9 February 1944.
 - ¹³ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive,
 - ¹⁴ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 21 July 1943.
 - ¹⁵ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, xiv.
 - ¹⁶ Arnold, "Publicity Notice," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ¹⁷ Arnold, "Publicity Notice," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ¹⁸ WASPs will be referred to by their full name including maiden and married names to honor their work completed during World War II as single women. In general, WASPs published memoirs and completed interviews using both their married and maiden names. This thesis wishes to respect their decision on how they want to be remembered.
 - ¹⁹ Winston to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, January 1944.
 - ²⁰ Oliver, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
 - ²¹ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 85.
 - ²² Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 85.
 - ²³ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
 - ²⁴ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 21 October 1943.
 - ²⁵ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 86.
 - ²⁶ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 86.
 - ²⁷ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 86.
 - ²⁸ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 83-84.
 - ²⁹ Cochran, "WASP Final Report," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
 - ³⁰ Winston to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 5 November 1943.
 - ³¹ Finely, interview, LOC.
 - ³² Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 110.
 - ³³ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 110.
 - ³⁴ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
 - ³⁵ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
 - ³⁶ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
 - ³⁷ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 108.
 - ³⁸ Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 276-277.
 - ³⁹ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 102.
 - ⁴⁰ Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 17 June 1943.
 - ⁴¹ Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 8 September 1943.

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- ⁴² Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 8 September 1943.
- ⁴³ Keil. *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 252.
- ⁴⁴ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁴⁵ Story, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁴⁶ Story, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁴⁷ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁴⁸ Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁴⁹ Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵⁰ Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵¹ Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵² McKeown to Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵³ McKeown to Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵⁴ Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵⁵ McKeown to Strother, "WASPs and the Superfortress," April 1996.
- ⁵⁶ Cochran, "WASP Final Report," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ⁵⁷ Cochran, "WASP Final Report," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ⁵⁸ Cochran, "WASP Final Report," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ⁵⁹ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶⁰ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶¹ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive. .
- ⁶² Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶³ Story, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶⁴ Story, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶⁵ Story, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶⁶ Story, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁶⁷ "Army Air Force Accident Report, AAF Form No. 14," <http://wwii-women-pilots.org/>.
- ⁶⁸ "Army Air Force Accident Report, AAF Form No. 14," <http://wwii-women-pilots.org/>.
- ⁶⁹ Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 December 1943.
- ⁷⁰ Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 December 1943.
- ⁷¹ Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 December 1943.
- ⁷² Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 December 1943.
- ⁷³ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 1943.
- ⁷⁴ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 10 March 1943.
- ⁷⁵ Nicol to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 June 1944.
- ⁷⁶ Nicol to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 June 1944.
- ⁷⁷ Cochran, "WASP Final Report," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ⁷⁸ Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 383.
- ⁷⁹ *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.
- ⁸⁰ Hodgson, *Winning My Wings*, 141.
- ⁸¹ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 14 February 1943.
- ⁸² Statistics taken from "On Final Approach" by Byrd Howell Granger. Falconer Publishing Company, Scottsdale, AZ, 1991, www.wingsacrossamerica.us.
- ⁸³ Blank to sister, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 14 August 1943.
- ⁸⁴ *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.
- ⁸⁵ *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.

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- ⁸⁶ *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.
- ⁸⁷ *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.
- ⁸⁸ *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.
- ⁸⁹ Hodgson, *Winning My Wings*, 141.
- ⁹⁰ Hodgson, *Winning My Wings*, 141.
- ⁹¹ Statistics taken from "On Final Approach" by Byrd Howell Granger. Falconer Publishing Company, Scottsdale, AZ, 1991, www.wingsacrossamerica.us.
- ⁹² *Official Army Register*, United States Government Printing Office, 1402.
- ⁹³ Statistics taken from "On Final Approach" by Byrd Howell Granger. Falconer Publishing Company, Scottsdale, AZ, 1991, www.wingsacrossamerica.us.
- ⁹⁴ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁹⁵ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁹⁶ Soard, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁹⁷ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁹⁸ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ⁹⁹ Orr, interview, TWU WASP Digital Archive.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 141.
- ¹⁰¹ Blank to Sister, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 14 August 1943.
- ¹⁰² Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 141.
- ¹⁰³ Cornelia Fort, "At the Twilight's Last Gleaming," *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943, http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/records_all/wasp_articles/twilight.pdf.
- ¹⁰⁴ Cornelia Fort, *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943.
- ¹⁰⁵ Cornelia Fort, *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cornelia Fort, *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cornelia Fort, *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cornelia Fort, *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943.
- ¹⁰⁹ Cornelia Fort, *Woman's Home Companion*, July 1943.

CHAPTER III

FOR LOVE OF FLIGHT AND COUNTRY: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS' EXPERIENCES WORKING FOR THE ARMY AIRFORCE AS CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES

After Evelyn Sharp died in a plane crash while on duty with the WASP program, WASP Squadron Commander Betty Gillies asked Nancy Baston, a fellow WASP, to accompany Sharp's body home to her family in Nebraska. Nancy sat on the train headed to Sharp's family who awaited their daughter's arrival in the Sandhills community of Ord. Baston carried an envelope with \$200 all of which was donated to the Sharp family by WASPs stationed in Wilmington, Delaware. The Sharp family chose to keep the metal-lined military issued casket and picked a vault for Sharp. They purchased a grave plot in the Graceland Division of the Ord Cemetery and purchased plots for themselves on either side of their daughter. During the funeral service, a grief-stricken man approached Baston and asked if he could drape an American flag over Sharp's coffin.¹ Baston was taken aback. None of the WASP were military. They flew with no insurance, no benefits, and certainly no military honors if they died."² However, Baston and the man knew in their hearts Sharp sacrificed her life for their country, and "Nancy thought only for a moment" before she "gently whispered, 'of course.' Tears of gratitude brimmed in the man's eyes."³ Although the WASPs did not receive military benefits for their service with the Army Air Forces, the friends and families of the female pilots believed the women's service made them veterans.

Jacqueline Cochran, Director of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), structured the program as a military organization and hoped the transition from a civilian program to a militarized segment of the Army Air Forces would run smoothly. The women came from civilian piloting backgrounds and felt the change of atmosphere from their first day of training. They lived within military rules and regulations, and many believed they would be part of the military within a short amount of time. However, the WASP program stayed employed by the Civil Service and did not receive any additional military benefits or protections. In letters home and interviews, the women focused heavily on two protections not afforded to them by the civil service or the Army Air Forces: insurance and uniforms. The women only received a death benefit as civil service employees which amounted to small a fraction of the total received by their male counterparts. They did not receive any type of health, accident or death benefit from the military and paid for coverage from their pay. The WASP program did not have official uniforms for the first year and a half of the program's existence. Their hand-me-down flight suits put them in physical danger during flight and their unofficial dress uniform left those outside of the WASP program able to identify the pilots flying Army Air Forces' planes. Female pilots lived and worked under the same military regulations as the Army Air Forces, but did not receive the same benefits or uniforms due to the non-militarized status of the WASP program.⁴

On July 6 1941, the *New York Times* read "Miss Cochran, in coordination with other officers of the Army Air Forces, will be responsible for the training, recruiting, standards of performance, conduct and welfare of the women pilots," and the WASP trainees noticed the military atmosphere at the beginning of their training.⁵ Cochran and the Army Air Forces officers structured the training program around Army Air Forces standards to enable an easy

transition from civilian to military pilots and, as a result, women felt as though they were “practically in the Army.”⁶

Although Cochran advised the women they were not Army, many believed the strict military guidelines imposed upon them meant militarization was a possibility. Marjorie Osborne Nicol stated “The army is demanding more from us every day. New rules and regulations are cropping up on the field every few hours – it’s hard to keep up with them.”⁷ Jean Hascall Cole recounted her first interaction with officers when her training class arrived in Sweetwater, Texas:

One of the first things the officers did (which will be familiar to anyone who was ever in the Air Force) was to line us up and tell us to look at the person on either side of us. We were then told that both of those people would wash out. Of course, someone would be looking at you from each side. We were supposed to be impressed what this was a very difficult program.⁸

Adaline Alma Blank described her first impression of life in training and stated “we may not literally be in the army but I surely felt like it that first night. We practically signed our lives away---- and such rules and regulations I have never seen.”⁹ In a letter home to her family, Betty Deuser Budde agreed with Blank and said “we’re not in the Army, really, but it’s run by the Army so it’s just the same.”¹⁰ Mary Anna Martin Wyaall described her first day at Avenger Field in a letter home to her mother and father. She wrote, “Gee, what a long day this has been. We came out in 2 huge semi-trailer trucks with benches arranged in the trailer, and have spent the entire afternoon marching here and there in lengthy lectures from the chief of staff, the primary training (flying) officer, the flight surgeon and the physical training teacher.”¹¹ While the civil service employed the women and the WASPs qualified as civilians, WASP trainees agreed their military lifestyle began at the first day of training. Cochran coordinated with Army Air Forces officials and prepared WASPs for a smooth transition into the military. The women

felt the transition from civilian to military requirements even though the program remained a civilian program at the time of their entry into training.

The women mostly worked as civilians before their entry into the program, and the changeover from civilian to military life was apparent from the start. Ann B. Carl believed “adjusting to the rules and regulations of ‘army’ life was going to be hard for young women who were accustomed to the freedom to run their own lives.”¹² Carl sat down with her roommates after their first day at the training field in Houston, Texas and the women wondered “what have we got ourselves into?”¹³ The women she bunked with left fiercely independent lives to become WASP trainees. Carl’s roommates included Mary Lee Leatherbee, an actress, Margaret Cook, a teacher from Alaska, and Jean Pearson, a writer for the *Detroit Free Press*. “Emma Coulter was an animal lover who once transported a black bear – in her car – across the country to Arizona where, now that he was too big to live around the house, he would be in a bear refuge” and “Dora Dougherty, bright, humorous, had an engineering background and would later be checked off in the B-29 bomber.”¹⁴ The women hailed from diverse backgrounds and left successful careers and their independence and trained for the chance to become a WASP. The instant switch from civilians to military pilots began immediately and, like Air Forces pilots in training, the women sacrificed much of their personal freedoms in order to join the civilian WASP program.

Sweetwater, Texas, became the home of the WASP training program and the women moved into a former cadet training field called Avenger Field. Carl described the living arrangements and said “there were barracks, six to a unit, a regular mess hall, an HQ building, and even a complete infirmary. There were also black widow spiders, tarantulas and scorpions.”¹⁵ V. Scott Gough’s described their living conditions and said “We had six cots, six

desks, and six places to hold our clothes... between the two barracks was a bathroom, and it had six showers, six toilets, and six sinks.”¹⁶ She further explained the changes she underwent and said “you know, our lifestyle changed greatly, because it was quite a job getting everybody ready, and you had to be very fast, dressing and everything else.”¹⁷ Mildred Darlene Axton described the barracks as “a horrible place to live, they didn’t have a place for us, they just put us into some old army barracks that were just terrible...we had cracks in the walls and the wind was so cold.”¹⁸ The WASPs lived in the same condition as the male soldiers and did not receive any special conditions because they were civilian women. They accepted their assigned living quarters and completed their required flying duties without hesitation. However, their assigned living quarters came with non-civilian requirements.

The women’s barracks underwent routine, weekly inspections and the women faced demerits if they did not pass. V. Scott Gough discussed the inspections in an interview and said “Every Saturday they came in to inspect our barracks, and if you couldn't bounce a nickel off the thing, you were in trouble.”¹⁹ The women prepared as much as possible for the inspections and made sure to keep their barracks on par with Army standards of cleanliness and organization. Caro Bayley Bosca worried over the condition of her barracks as she “spent an hour trying to make up [her] bed the Army way. [She] had the ruler out and patted it for half an hour.”²⁰ The WASPs swept and mopped the floors, kept their clothing folded and their shoes shined and hid extra items outside back windows, out of the inspector’s view, but no matter how much they prepared, the inspectors assigned demerits for the smallest infraction.²¹

The inspectors did not lessen the Army standards for the women and found reasons for women to fail an inspection. Adaline Blank’s bay received demerits after drinking water was found in the bathroom during a formal inspection. She said the inspector “seemed dead set on

finding something wrong,” as he “rubbed his fingers over the shelves, desks, blinds, and even over the door sills.”²² The inspector tediously “stooped down to be sure our blankets were laced properly under the beds,” and even went as far as “inspect[ing] each tummy trying to find a shirt seam uneven with the slacks seam.”²³ Eventually, “he made his way toward the ‘john’” and found jugs of water. Blank said the inspector “came out of the bathroom carrying the jug—the emblem of our negligence and disgrace,” and he assigned each woman “five demerits for having drinking water in the latrine.”²⁴ Blank emphasized the inspector’s desire to find a reason to assign demerits to the women and upheld their living quarters to pass the Army’s standard of clean. Frequent inspections ensured the women upheld the cleanliness of their barracks and would be able to pass an Army inspection if militarized. While the women lived in old Army barracks and inspectors held them up to Army standards, their military lifestyle did not extend to matters regarding life, death, health and accident insurance, flight suits, or formal uniforms.

While Cochran ran the WASP program as a military organization, the pilots remained ineligible for many benefits their male counterparts received as active military members. Members of the WASP program flew without any type of life insurance, private or government issued, even though their male counterparts received life insurance as a normal benefit from the government in case of a grave accident. In *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, Lizabeth Cohen argued “the most obvious inequality that the GI Bill created was between veterans and non-veterans,” and she further believed “the largest segment by far of excluded non-veterans was women, more than half the adult population.”²⁵ As a result of their lack of benefits, “women in postwar American found themselves deprived of the GI Bill’s backing and thereby forced into new dependencies that limited their life options.”²⁶ WASP pilots were not considered military veterans during their service and did not receive

access to the GI bill until years after their service ended. WASP endured the consequences of their civilian status when denied access to benefits associated with military service as discussed in the following section.

Cole cited that thirty-eight WASPs died while serving their country in the program. In her book *Women Pilots of World War II*, Cole described her dismay for the their lack of insurance and said “these women, trained and used by the Army Air Force for the war effort, were ignored by the military at the time of their deaths.”²⁷ Women and their families did not receive benefits after their service ended by death or disbandment, as Cole reiterated “No military escort was provided for their remains to be returned home. No flags or military services were authorized for their funerals. No GI insurance benefits were available to them. No Commendations were offered to grieving parents.”²⁸ The WASP pilots banded together in order to protect themselves. They created group accident-sickness insurance policies, donated money for military honors afforded to those killed in action and protected their families from the dangerous reality they faced daily without the protections given to official members of the military.

The lack of insurance concerned many WASPs. Cochran advised the women of their civilian status and warned them of the danger they faced without protections afforded by the military, but the women continued to fly for the WASP program. Inez Woodward Woods detailed a conversation between Jacqueline Cochran and her fellow trainees and according to Woodward: “Cochran explained that we are not in the army. We are therefore, not covered by the \$10,000 death benefit which the cadets have.”²⁹ Woods informed her family “if we have a total dependent – and I listed Mom as such – the government will pay Mom a death benefit in proportion to my salary.”³⁰ She also reassured her family “They are investigating different

policies for us – individually, blanket & mutual – for life, permanent injuries and hospitalization.”³¹ Carl described Cochran’s warning about the lack of death benefits for WASPs as Civil Service employees and said: “Cochran had warned us that in our WASP duties there would be risks and dangers and that no special quarter would be given the women pilots,” and Cochran made the women understand “the fact that being only Civil Service employees meant that there was no Air Force money to pay for funerals or transportation of ‘remains’ – laden coffins.”³² As a result, the women contributed to the expenses of fallen WASPs, and Carl said “We had to pass the hat for contributions for that – and for an American flag to accompany them, too.”³³ The women knew they did not have death benefits in case of any accident. Cochran reminded them about the dangers of flying planes, but the women flew military aircraft despite her cautioning. As Carl stated, the pilots banded together, donated their own money, and provided funding for the cost of funerals of deceased WASPs.

The women’s letters home to their families regarding their insurance displayed their desire to protect their loved ones back home from worrying about their lack of military benefits. In a letter dated March 1943, Woods assured her family extra insurance was unnecessary and wrote “I don’t think I’ll go for any because if I get killed Mom will get enough from Civil Service to pay the bills.”³⁴ She minimized the need for insurance as she said “And if I’m only injured I can get some sort of a job. And I don’t get sick so won’t need hospitalization. However, I’ll see what they offer and let you know later.”³⁵ She offered confident reassurance and concluded the topic and said “At any rate, I wont [sic] get killed, I wont [sic] get injured and I wont [sic] get sick.”³⁶ Woods relied solely on the insurance granted to her as a Civil Service employee, but did not acknowledge the lack of death benefits or funeral expenses militarized

members received. She refocused her family's fear for her safety and reiterated she stayed safe during her time in the WASP program.

Budde described the insurance policy the women purchased in a letter to her parents. She wrote, "I signed up for some accident-sickness expense policy. It's a group insurance and most of the girls are taking it. Amounts to about \$2.00 a month. Guess I should have something like that even though I know I won't get hurt. I'd like to start an endowment policy. What and how much should I pay?"³⁷ On February 3, 1943, Budde wrote another letter home and recounted a meeting the women attended regarding insurance benefits. She said "The Army takes care of all plane accidents (except death, then they don't pay anything), and the contractors cover anything that happens in the bus going and coming to the field."³⁸ Similar to Woods, she told her parents about the Cadet Fund and told them "the only thing left is sickness and hospitalization, and that's to be covered by our group Cadet Fund. We'll each put in \$3.00 and be covered up to \$150.00 in case of emergency appendectomy or something like that."³⁹ Budde stressed the program's safety and reiterated "we'll be covered by insurance all right but won't get anything above expenses. We don't expect to need any insurance though."⁴⁰

Similar to Woodward, Budde explained her available insurance policies to her family and then assured her parents that the women were safe and did not need any additional insurance beyond health benefits. Budde also described the Cadet Fund, an insurance program funded by WASPs which acted as insurance for the women in case of sickness or injury. In comparison, male military men did not need to fund their own accident-sickness insurance, because the military attended to their medical needs.

Caro Bayley Bosca briefly discussed the lack of life insurance in a letter home after an accident which ended in the fatality of a fellow WASP and used humor to reassure her family of

the dangers involved with flying military planes. She jokingly wrote, “Clayton is going to take the body home. If anything ever happens to me, you can have my Chanel #5 cologne, the beautiful compact I bought, and all my sweaters. But until then – you still can’t use them.”⁴¹ Bosca possibly felt the need to alert her family of the WASP death and spare them from hearing the news elsewhere. At the same time, she injected humor as she described the possibility of her own death.

Marjorie Osborne Nicol told her family about the details of her insurance through the Civil Service. She wrote home on August 11, 1944 and in the letter stated “About insurance -- I don’t have any except Civil Service. You probably know as much about that as I do. I just know that we have hospitalization and \$600 for accident or death.”⁴² On November 14, 1944, she discussed the importance of insurance due to the bad condition of the planes WASP pilots flew. Similar to her fellow WASPs, Nicol also assured her family of her safety and advised them of the safety precautions she took before ever flying a military plane. She described the planes as “boxcars or cracker boxes or whatever you want to call them, insurance is more important than it ever was. If you’ve ever seen a UC you know what I mean...There are plenty of pilots who won’t set foot in them.”⁴³ After acknowledging the planes’ dangers, she told her family “Don’t worry, I’m going to give every plane a visual inspection and cockpit check that will cover everything, even if it takes me two hours before I can take off.”⁴⁴ She further explained private insurance companies rarely insured WASPs due to the dangerous nature of their work and the likelihood of a crash. She wrote, “There are very few insurance companies who will cover people who fly. Jean said she couldn’t find one in Milwaukee. I may have to wait until I get home before I can look into the matter thoroughly.”⁴⁵ Nicol was uncertain of their civilian

status, but assured her parents “that since we are civil service employees a certain amount of our pay will be deducted for insurance.”⁴⁶

For those pilots who died in the program without death benefits or life insurance, their remains were not always treated with the same respect due to members of the military. In *On Silver Wings: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944*, Marianne Verges discussed the death of two WASPs, Helen Jo Severson and Peggy Seip. Dedie Deaton, Chief Establishment Officer at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, “discovered the local undertaker had put their remains in rough pine boxes, paupers’ coffins, because the government allowed no funds for burying civilians.”⁴⁷ Deaton immediately took money from the Avenger Field’s administration budget. She also purchased two train tickets and allowed two of the deceased’s classmates to escort the bodies home. The WASP trainees each donated money and bought a casket blanket made out of yellow flowers and spelled out WASP in blue.⁴⁸

In Rob Simbeck’s biography of Cornelia Fort, *Daughter of the Air: The Brief and Soaring Life of Cornelia Fort*, he described the benefits Fort’s family received after her death in a tragic flying accident. Although her coffin was draped with an American flag, presumably procured by her family or WASP pilots, “since Cornelia was a civilian, there was no military escort.”⁴⁹ Cornelia’s mother was asked to “submit an itemized statement of the funeral expenses to the Ferry Command in Long Beach, but there was no reimbursement from the military.”⁵⁰ However, the Civil Service paid her family the \$250 death benefit, which the WASP women received as civil service employees.⁵¹ However, the amount provided little support in comparison to the \$10,000 death benefit for militarized men.⁵²

WASPs continued to find ways to take on their fallen pilots’ responsibilities beyond funding funeral and burial arrangements. In the *WASP Newsletter* from January 25, 1945, the

paper published a section entitled “Opinions and Ideas” and included posts from the pilots directly.⁵³ Margery Taylor “suggests for consideration a fund to act as a retroactive insurance in place of the government policies for which we, of course, are not eligible. In other words, are any of the families of the WASPs killed in need of assistance, and if so, Margery asks, is there any way in which we can provide it?”⁵⁴ WASPs displayed a commitment to one another and banded together in order to fund group accident-health insurance, funerals, escorts, flags, flowers, and even cared for the fallen’s family beyond their normal death arrangements.

WASPs served their country at their own risk. They did not receive any health, accident, life/death benefits from the military, even if a damaged Army Air Forces’ plane caused their death. They received 2.5% of the amount of death protection militarized men received under their civil service employment, and the military decided against life/death insurance coverage for the female pilots. Even when they died serving their country, the women did not receive a military funeral, a flag draped coffin or any military recognition for their sacrifice upon their death. Their families and fellow WASPs provided the fallen with the recognition for their service they deserved.

While inspectors scrutinized the women’s barracks for cleanliness, the same attention to detail was not given to WASP flight suits and uniforms. Along with the lack of financial protections, women received substandard work uniforms as well; official WASP uniforms did not exist until eighteen months into the program. The women described their flying uniforms as “and our surplus Air Force faded flying coveralls two sizes too big.”⁵⁵ The suits were eventually “dubbed zoot suits, the name given to the suits made famous by Harlem men, with voluminous pant legs that tapered at the ankles.”⁵⁶ The ill-fitting suits designed for men added more difficulty to the women’s job. The women eventually received appropriately sized suits, but

initially created extra dangers for the pilots. Oversized flight suits paired with the lack of an official WASP uniform left female pilots vulnerable to dangerous situations during flight and groundside interactions.

Originally, the stockroom keeper who was in charge of handing out flying suites, issued two size 40 suites to Bosca, and said “we wear the issued zoot suit – mine on me looks like a maternity garb.”⁵⁷ In order to make the suite fit better, she began “rolling the legs up a foot and letting the top bag. There are some 34s coming from the laundry Monday, and if I am one of the seven shortest girls I can get two of them and give up the 40’s to some six footer.”⁵⁸ When the suits came from laundry, she “talked the stock room keeper into giving me a size 34 zoot suit. He really couldn’t help himself when he saw that size 40 swamping me. If I can’t swap him that other 40 I Have, I’ll wear the 34 till it gets stiff.”⁵⁹ By the end of June 1943, Bosca received two size 34 zoot suits.⁶⁰

The women were issued old male military suits to wear while flying a plane and referred to themselves as “step-children in hand-me-down clothes.”⁶¹ The suits were not altered or adjusted in any way for a woman. As of August 1943, the women’s minimum height requirement for entry into the WASP program was 5’4” and the weight requirements restricted women from being overweight or extremely frail.⁶² However, the issued zoot suits did not coincide with the height and weight requirement. In *Women War and Planes*, Cole quoted Mary “Minkie” Heckman’s description of the “famous costumes” and stated “When we first went into Sweetwater, we were assigned these old Army fatigues – a heavy twill. We tried them on and I don’t care how big the girls were, the suites were all too big.”⁶³ Heckman said she did not “know anyone who had one that fit” and as a result “We just rolled up the sleeves and the pant legs and tied them up. The seats just swished along as we walked, but we hitched them up the

best we could.⁶⁴ Brown described a similar situation in April 1944 in a letter home to her family. On her second day in training, she said “we were issued our govt suits, leater jackets, helmets and goggles and you should see us. My govt suit (casuals) are about 3 sizes too big and the same goes for my jacket and both are well worn.”⁶⁵ In the same letter, she asked her family to send her a list of items and two of the six items were clothing. Number one on the list was khaki slacks and the third were shoes.⁶⁶ On April 21, she once again asked for khaki pants and said “the clothes situation here is terrible – I’ve only got one pair of ‘generals’ – as our dress slacks are called and we have to wear them all the time. Do you think maybe you could find me a pair of khaki gabardines that would fit me?”⁶⁷ Not only did Brown receive zoot suits which were three sizes too large for her, she asked her family to send her khaki pants for her dress uniform because she received only one pair of khaki slacks, their makeshift formal uniform until Cochran designed their official WASP uniform.

Trainees also had difficulty getting a hold of other types of clothing needed for their WASP training and they paid for the WASP uniforms out of their pay. According to *The Avenger*, a WASP newsletter, the “trousers cost \$12.50 and shirts \$8 to \$12. Most of the girls find it necessary to have about four uniforms.”⁶⁸ In a letter home to her family on January 28, 1943, Budde wrote about the difficulty she had with her clothing. She wrote, “Cookie loaned me a pair of long underwear cuz she thought I’d freeze, but I didn’t wear them – they’re too confining! My blue slacks haven’t much wear left in them, they’re going to go right thru the back pretty soon.”⁶⁹ Budde told her family “I broke the zipper on my jeans, so I just have my C.A.P. slacks to wear, and they’re too tight for calisthenics – so something must be done.” Budde decided she would “find something in town when [she got] paid” because WASPs were not given an allowance for clothing.⁷⁰ She did not have appropriate attire for calisthenics, a

required class to keep the WASPs in top physical shape. Since the program required calisthenics, proper clothing should have been furnished for the pilots. Instead, Budde described how she used her paycheck to pay for proper clothing for physical education class. On February 22, 1943, Budde wrote to her family “everything I Have is either faded, torn, or dirty. Next time you send a package, will you tuck in everything I have that is wearable? If you haven’t sold my ice skates, you could have the blades removed and I could use the shoes here. But if you’ve sold them - O.K. It’s all right.”⁷¹

The women paid for a laundry service to wash their uniforms during their time in training. Once women turned in their uniforms to the laundry service, they did not receive the same suit they turned in, but were issued whatever suit was available. Heckman and her bunkmates found a way around turning in their suits to the laundry service, because zoot suits under a size 40 were a rare find. According to Heckman, once she was issued a good fitting zoot suit, she and her bunkmates washed the suits themselves and avoided handing them into the laundry service they “used to send them to the laundry and never got them back in time.”⁷² Heckman and her bunkmates came up with a solution: “The air was so dry there in Sweetwater, we’d just get into the shower and scrub ourselves with the suit on, and have somebody scrub our back. Then we’d just rinse them out and hang them outside.”⁷³ According to Heckman, “They’d be dry in about two or three hours.”⁷⁴

Women continuously wrote home about the oversized flight suits and asked their family to send clothing for them. The oversized zoot suits were so commonplace, the women even wrote a song about the suits:

Once we wore scanties, now we’re in zoots
They are our issue GI flying suits

They come in all sizes, large, Large, and LARGE

We look like a great big barrage.⁷⁵

Even though the women mocked their oversized flight suits, they posed many serious problems for the female pilots. The zoot suit posed the potential for an accident.

We almost lost a girl because of [the baggy overalls]. She was flying in a PT-17, which is an open cockpit plane, and she was being taught loops by her instructor, and when she was at the top of the loop, her sleeve caught on the safety latch of her -- the latch of her safety belt, and she was ejected. Now, luckily, she had enough sense to pull the cord, and she landed safely.⁷⁶

The oversized flight suites constricted movement and in the cockpit of an airplane, the women did not need to worry about the extra material from their suites. Luckily, the WASP from Gough's interview pulled the cord to her parachute and landed safely, but a properly sized suit would have prevented her from accidentally disengaging her seat belt and ejecting herself from an open cockpit during loops training.

In *Women Pilots of World War II*, Cole told of an issue fellow WASP, Ruth Adams, encountered when flying cross-country in a PT-19. Adams had to urinate during the flight, but the suits were designed for male cadets, not women. She contemplated a forced landing at a nearby airfield, but decided against it because they would be interrogated for their suspicious behavior. She did not want to explain she landed the plane to use the restroom. Finally, she found an alternative to a forced landing and "She unzipped this great big fleece-lined leather jacket...She had a flight suit under it and we wore these zoot suits that were left over from the men. They didn't have any drop seats in them." The drop suit allowed male pilots to relieve themselves while in the air, but the women "had to take the whole uniform off and drop it down around [their] ankles."⁷⁷ Adams also "had on some kind of winter underwear. She managed to get all that off, scoot over to the edge of her seat to where she could pee without getting it onto anything."⁷⁸ Adams managed to get "all this paraphernalia back onto herself and never got off

course”⁷⁹ Cole related to her experience and said “Anyone who ever wore those outfits can realize what she had to go through. Not to mention how cold she must have been in that open cockpit in winter with no clothes on!”⁸⁰ While Cole’s story was very detailed, the problem of using the restroom during flight posed a very huge problem for women who wore male flight suits. Because Adams wore a zoot suit designed for men, she was forced to undress in an open cockpit in the middle of winter in order to use the restroom or complete a forced landing. The danger involved in her choice demonstrated the need for zoot suits designed for the female body, instead of the cheaper, hand-me-down alternatives passed along by the male cadets. Eventually, Cochran designed zoot suits for women and included a drop seat. Gough appreciated the extra thought and said the drop seat made life much easier for the female pilots.⁸¹

The lack of official uniform created an entirely different problem regarding identification. Many who worked at United States airfields did not know the WASP program existed. When planes landed at the airfield, the women were greeted with confusion. The widespread problem forced WASP officials to create an official uniform, so others could recognize the women’s affiliation with the Army Air Forces. *The Avenger* wrote:

WASP are issued Air Force uniforms. But they’re Civil Service employees. When they appear on strange air fields in uniform they are apt to have encounters with baffled MP’s who feel they are impersonating something but don’t know what. The girls were all chosen for ability to stick it out, however, and they hope to be in the Air Force in a few months.⁸²

The women wore uniforms even though they were officially Civil Service employees, and confused the military police who noticed their uniforms did not belong to the military. Military officials failed to recognize the pilots as Civil Service employees and they did not believe the women flew planes for the Army Air Forces. The lack of a consistent uniforms left the women

open to accusations of impersonation and left men in power questioning the pilots' intentions. The women sometimes landed in grim situations due to others' inability to identify WASPs.

In *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines*, Sally Van Wagenen Keil discussed a serious incident when women pilots' unofficial uniforms put them in grave trouble. In the spring of 1944, the weather grounded four WASP pilots in Americus, Georgia. After leaving the airport, the women walked to a bus stop in search of a hotel room, but they never got on the bus. Two policemen arrested the four women because "women were not allowed in the street at night in dress slacks... No Amount of insisting that they were Army pilots in uniform would do. At the police station, the women were locked in a cell."⁸³ The cop believed the women were impersonating Army officers and left them in a jail cell. Finally, at two in the morning, the cop allowed the women to make a phone call and they called Nancy Love. Love demanded to speak to the sheriff and her "expletive-studded threats, ranging from a citation for lack of patriotism to a personal summons before the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, were evidently persuasive."⁸⁴ The policemen released the WASPs from custody and Love gave out twenty-four hour emergency numbers to all of the pilots.⁸⁵

The unofficial uniform worried WASPs when Hazel Ah Ying Lee "got thoroughly lost and landed, out of gas, on a ranch south of San Angelo." Madge Rutherford Minton wrote in a letter to her mother and father "Incidentally our chief worry about Ah Ying was not that she'd crack up and kill herself but that some ignorant Texas farmer or rancher would shoot her for a Japanese spy. We were relieved to learn that she landed among educated people."⁸⁶ However, Marion Stegeman Hodgson told a different version of Ah Ying Lee's forced landing in the book *Winning My Wings: A Woman Airforce Service Pilot in World War II*. According to Hodgson, the farmer greeted Ah Ying Lee wielding a pitchfork and yelled "'are you China-gal or

Japanese.’ She hastily assured him, ‘Me China-gal,’ and pointed to her name tag. ‘Some day,’ she told us, ‘somebody’s going to kill me, thinking I’m Japanese.’⁸⁷ Ah Ying Lee’s Chinese ancestry combined with the farmer’s inability to quickly identify her as a WASP made the job even more dangerous.

WASPs received inferior flight suits and lacked an official uniform for the first eighteen months of service. The denial of an official military uniform kept the women from being recognized as military pilots and left the women locked into traditional gender roles since they could not be identified as military to the public. In the article “Military Uniforms and the Law of War,” Toni Pfanner stated a uniform “distinguishes the members of armed forces from the rest of the population... The absence of a military uniform usually indicates that a person is a civilian, is therefore not allowed to perform military functions.”⁸⁸ Women could not be outwardly identified as military pilots and therefore, they could not escape society’s expectations for women.

Furthermore, uniforms denoted a sense of unity and helped bond a group of individuals together in both personal sentiment and through public perception. According to Pfanner, a uniform “helps to create an identity of appearance and an esprit de corps and is thereby conducive to the bonding process.”⁸⁹ Parts of uniforms included insignias and pins which further signified the group of the military each member belonged. While WASPs found other ways to bond with each other, they did not have a uniform which bound them together in the public sphere. Without a visible symbol of unity, the public’s perception of WASPs during the war remained dependent upon militarized male pilots. Their purpose was to “release men pilots for higher types of duty including combat.”⁹⁰ However, the WASP disbanded “as there [were] sufficient male pilots to handle all AAF missions.”⁹¹ As a result, the WASP’s entire purpose

relied on the militarized male pilots' needs, society viewed women pilots' work as necessary until the men returned home from war. Once men returned "the WASP training program was killed on the argument that there was a surplus of trained male pilots," and the women pilots disbanded December 20, 1944.⁹²

Even the Civil Service publically supported the women's transition into the military. In 1943, the Committee on Civil Service supported WASP militarization and wrote a minority report in case the Chairman decided to write an unfavorable report about the WASP program once militarization was proposed to Congress. They believed "the holding of these WASP on Civil Service status thus denying them the insurance hospitalization and other benefits available to the male pilots doing similar duty is not fair to the individual WASPs involved. It has not been fair to the 19 WASPs who have already given their lives."⁹³ They stated other "such organized service by women with the Armed Forces the organization has been recognized by law and militarized, as witnessed by the WAC and Nurses Corps already working with the Army Air Forces."⁹⁴ Women in other branches of the military received the benefits which came with their military service and veteran status once their service ended. The women served the same purpose as the WASPs and freed men for combat duties, but the WASPs did not get the same recognition and remained members of the Civil Service.

Refusal to grant women the recognition of a military funeral exhibited another way the Army Air Forces excluded women from military service. Even though thirty-eight women lost their lives while performing WASP assignments, they did not receive the honor associated with a military funeral. *The New York Times* quoted Cochran who stated WASPs "perform[ed] the functions of Air Corps officers, but because of their civilian status, they had no right to military funerals, their survivors received no death benefits and their families could not even display the

Gold Star.”⁹⁵ Denial of benefits for survivors and recognition of their military service reinforced the notion to both the WASPs and the public that women pilots were bound to their gender and were therefore deprived of veteran and survivor benefits.

While the women did not fly their planes into combat, their jobs included inherent dangers and many lost their lives. Their families and fellow WASPs were left to care for their funeral expenses and provided the pilots with as many aspects of a military funeral as possible. They flew without official uniforms and, as a result, everyday happenings, such as walking to a bus stop, turned into dangerous situations when they could not easily prove their employment. Militarization granted male pilots official uniforms with a displayed rank and protected their finances and their families in times of illness and death. The same protections did not extend to the women who flew the same Army Air Forces planes and faced the inherit hazards of flight, only compounded by oversized flight suits. Their civilian status and employment with the Civil Service kept them from keeping the same minimum protections granted to members of the Army Air Forces.

The following chapter discusses how civilian status affected the personal and professional relationships of WASPs and male Army personnel including instructors, inspectors, and cadets. The Army Air Forces did not have clearly defined fraternization policies in place during World War II, but informal regulations were put into place by WASP leaders. However, WASP leaders in turn encouraged fraternization in WASP/ Air Forces sponsored environments, such as at dances with local cadets. The military created policies against fraternization, but since WASP were Civil Service employees for the duration of the war, consequences for breaking such policies did not exist. Ultimately, fraternization occurred between men and women and led

to detrimental results and led to a lack of professionalism between male and female pilots, sexual harassment, and abuse of power for those with power over the women's careers.

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- ¹ Diane Ruth Armour Bartels. “Sharpie: The Life Story of Evelyn Sharp Nebraska’s Avaiatrix,” (Lincoln, Nebraska: Great Americans Publishing, 1996), 248-250.
- ² Bartels, “Sharpie,” 250.
- ³ Bartels, “Sharpie,” 250.
- ⁴ Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles*, ix-x.
- ⁵ Furman, “Army Status asked for Women Pilots,” 1944.
- ⁶ Bosca to Family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 9 February 1944.
- ⁷ Nicol to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 1 June 1944.
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- ⁹ Blank to Sister, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 8 July 1943.
- ¹⁰ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 14 January 1943.
- ¹¹ WYall to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 26 May 1944.
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- ¹³ Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles*, 43.
- ¹⁴ Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles*, 43.
- ¹⁵ Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles*, 46.
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CHAPTER IV

THE UNSPOKEN RULES: SOCIALIZATION, FRATERNIZATION AND SEXUALIZATION OF THE WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

The Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) created original marching songs and many reflected some of their everyday experiences during their time in the program. For example, “Zoot Suits and Parachutes” warned women pilots about the consequences of personal interactions with male pilots:

Along came a pilot, ferrying a plane,
He asked me to fly with him down in lover's lane
And I, just like a silly fool, thinking it no harm
Cuddled in the cockpit to keep the pilot warm.

[refrain]

SINGING ZOOT-SUITS AND PARACHUTES
AND WINGS OF SILVER, TOO
HE'LL FERRY PLANES LIKE HIS MAMA USED TO DO.

[refrain]

Early in the morning before the break of day
He handed me a shortsnot bill and this I heard him say,
Take this, my darling, for the damage I have done,
For you may have a daughter, or you may have a son;
If you have a daughter, teach her how to fly,
If you have a son, put the bastard in the sky.

[refrain]

The moral of this story as you can plainly see
Is never trust a pilot an inch above the knee.
He'll kiss you and caress you, and promise to be true
And have a girl at every field as all the pilots do.

[refrain]¹

Relationships between WASPs and military men became complicated, as the song suggests. Fraternalization policies began officially after World War II, but the military established guidelines for interaction between officers and enlisted men. However, the guidelines did not take female military personnel into consideration, and the military did not put guidelines into place restricting interactions between military men and civilian women. Due to the absence of official policies forbidding fraternizations personal relationships between WASPs and military men developed. The WASP's employment by the Civil Service and not the Army Air Forces allowed fraternization to occur between female and male pilots and the imbalance of power put WASPs at a disadvantage within their professional relationships.

The WASP's civilian status created a complicated dynamic in the personal and professional relationships between male and female pilots during World War II. Military policies forbade fraternization between military personnel. However, Congress never passed WASP militarization legislation, and the Army Air Forces did not enforce any clear rules against cadets or instructors pursuing personal relationships with WASPs or trainees. While Jacqueline Cochran, creator and director of the WASP program, prohibited the women from dating men in the military, WASPs' personal letters and interviews proved her efforts remained ineffective. The WASPs' civilian status meant military guidelines against personal relationships with military personnel did not apply to WASPs. Personal relationships formed between WASPs and male cadets, instructors, safety inspectors and fellow male pilots and fraternization remained unsuccessful. Fraternization between male and female pilots caused disastrous consequences for WASPs such as workplace hostility, sexual harassment and a dangerous work environment.

The Army defined fraternization as "a relationship between two soldiers having a detrimental effect on the authority of the senior."² In 1983, the Air Force further stated

“relationships are not limited to officer-enlisted scenarios and points out that any association between Air Force members of different grades that negatively impacts duty performance, discipline and morale is inappropriate.”³ In *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps During World War II*, Leisa D. Meyer stated “these informal fraternization policies, though not official regulations, forbade any social interaction between enlisted personnel and officers.”⁴ The military set guidelines in place “aimed at maintaining a rigid separation between different classes of male personnel, and were intended to discourage potential favoritism on the part of officers holding power over enlisted men.”⁵ The U.S. military discouraged fraternization between different ranking men, especially between officers and enlisted. The rules prevented officers from manipulating enlisted men due to their difference in rank.

Fraternization rules did not apply to women in a straightforward manner and relationships between men and women were often encouraged. *The New York Times* published an article called “Planned Leisure for Troops Scored” and discussed the use of American Women’s Voluntary Services towards the war effort. National Campaign Chairman of the USO, Thomas E. Dewey told the women volunteers “the most important thing for the young service men’s moral... was to make him feel at home in the community to which he had been transplanted.”⁶ Dewey stated “the moral of youths placed ‘involuntarily but not unwillingly’ in distant training camps could best be improved by satisfying their own recreational desires.”⁷ Dewey told the women the men’s wants included “an opportunity to meet nice girls; second. Plenty of bowling alleys and roller-skating rinks.”⁸ Due to opinions such as those held by Dewey, many male military men saw women volunteers as girls to date in order to ward off homesickness and a low

morale. WASPs felt the effect of Dewey's implication, often found themselves in personal situations with military men who had control over their careers and safety in the program.

World War II became a turning point in fraternization law in the United States military due to the introduction of women into the Army and the appointment of officers based on merit versus prominence in society. Prior to World War II high ranking positions were held by men from prominent, upper class families. However, in World War II, the military required a large number of men to serve as officers and awarded positions based on merit rather than family status, thus ending the class system between prominent officer families and middle/low class enlisted men in the military. Also, the militarization of women's programs, such as the Women's Auxiliary Corps, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) and SPARS, forced the military to manage male/female relationships within the military. The large influx of women into the military paired with the end of a natural social class separation within military ranks, led to the need for fraternization policies.⁹

The presence of women in the military gave new significance to fraternization rules, however, unofficial fraternization policies only applied to women with military status, such as the Women's Army Corps or WACs, and did not apply to the WASP. Fraternization laws were "not mentioned in any regulation, it was entrenched as a custom of the service and received quiet support from senior officials" because several senior officers were married to enlisted WACs.¹⁰ Although the military did not clearly define fraternization policies during World War II, the military charged the Military Police (MP) with enforcement that put overarching disciplinary procedures in place. For example, military policy dictated members of the WAC escorted by male military personnel must carry special papers proving their escort was a relative or longtime friend. Military Police arrested women unable to produce proper documentation and their male

escort remained unpunished.¹¹ Such unwritten policies did not apply to the unmilitarized WASP program and unapproved relationships between WASPs and instructors, cadets, and other military personnel developed as a result.

The Army Air Forces gave cadets the ability to become a commissioned officer once the men completed training. The Army Air Forces extended the privilege to attend Officer Candidacy School (OCS) to graduates of the WASP program, and many women held an officer's rank although the WASP remained unmilitarized.¹² The WASP's non-militarized status within the Army Air Forces left the question of the hierarchy of rank unanswered. Although the Army Air Forces granted both male cadets and WASP the ability to attend OCS, the United States government did not recognize the WASPs as members of the military. Without such recognition, the issue of fraternization remained vague. Military rules or guidelines did not determine who held a higher rank, and, therefore, the lack of classification left fraternization undefined. The military's lax attitude about women's place in the army combined with their lack of clear boundaries between men and women's relationships, pilots' experience, training and wellbeing were compromised.

Both WASP and Army Air Forces leaders supported fraternization between male and female pilots and encouraged male and female pilots in training to attend dances at nearby Army Airfields during their off duty hours. They provided transportation to and from the dances, made lodging accommodations for overnight guests and used the dances as an incentive for good behavior during duty hours. In doing so, they presented the women as entertainment for the men and blurred the distinctions between the professional and dating worlds. Cochran appointed Mrs. Debie Deaton as the establishment officer of the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) and her assignment included the administrator of the training school and guardian for the

trainees. In the 1940s, it was common practice for women to remain under their parents' care until marriage, and Deaton served as a stand-in parental figure for the pilots. Deaton took care of many personal issues for the trainees and located living arrangements for the WFTD, created an infirmary with a nurse, doctor, and dentist and collaborated with the YMCA and provided the women with access to the pool every week. Deaton threw parties and dances for the WFTD trainees and invited cadets from nearby air fields to socialize with the female pilots. She unsuccessfully attempted to make arrangements with the AAF cadets at Ellington Field, but their schedules did not coincide.¹³ On Halloween of 1943, Deaton threw a party for the trainees at Sweetwater. Cadets from Big Spring Army Air Force Base and Ballinger Field arrived on buses and acted as dance partners for the women. The men from Ballinger Field stayed overnight and, the following morning, the WASPs got up early to have breakfast with the cadets and say goodbye before their departure.¹⁴ While Deaton only meant to provide recreation for the women, she created an environment in training where male and female pilots could interact in a non-professional way.

The WASP program and the Army Air Forces provided female pilots with transportation to the events and lodging for overnight stays and fraternization between male and female pilots occurred as a result. On March 6, 1943, Kinney attended a dance at Arledge Field. The women used WASP transportation and made the sixty mile trip to Stamford in "our little cattle-wagon... It's a large trailer affair that they converted into a bus for us girls." Fifty WASPs in training attended the dance. They arrived at Arledge Field around 6:00pm and had coffee and ice cream in the mess hall. "Then went to one of those barracks they had cleaned up and fixed for us... Got cleaned up and went dancing... The dance ended at two fifteen and our chaperone safely tucked us in bed." The next morning, Kinney went on a breakfast date with a "cute cadet, Bob"

and then returned to Sweetwater in the cattle-wagon.¹⁵ Brown described a similar experience in a letter to her family on November 16, 1944. She portrayed the dating scene during training at Sweetwater, Texas:

Night life here is still going strong – you never saw so many bachelor officers in your life! Happy hunting grounds – no less! And all the WASPs here have been invited to go to a dance at De Ridder, LA. And the Col. is giving us ships to fly down in – can you beat it?¹⁶

In Brown's case, the Army Air Forces sent military aircraft for the women to fly to the dance in Louisiana. Mickey McLernon Brown discussed a dance she attended with male military personnel from neighboring airfields. In a letter home to her mother on July 6, 1944, she stated "we're having 200 cadets up from Ballinger and Stamford for a dance this Saturday night and it should be lots of fun."¹⁷ Male pilots trained at the Army Air Forces at Arledge Field in Stamford, Texas and Bruce Field in Ballinger, Texas during WWII.¹⁸ Their statements revealed dances were not a rare social gathering between male and female pilots. Dances became a regular occurrence of Sweetwater's nightlife supported by military and WASP employees.

A common place dances were hosted was at Officer's Clubs on base. Officer's Clubs provided a space for men and women to socialize, dance, and go on dates on military property and within a military atmosphere. During the work day, women relaxed and socialized amongst themselves at the Avengerette Club, created by class 44-W-3 and the Sweetwater community for WASPs only.¹⁹ However, during off-duty hours, the women visited the Officer's Club as dates for their male counterparts. Caro Bayley Bosca graduated from training in Sweetwater, Texas in November 1943 and was assigned to the B-25 school at Mather Army Air Base in Sacramento and the California, Biggs Army Air Field in El Paso. In letters home to her family from Biggs Field, she discussed the night life on base. Bosca and her fellow WASPs normally ate dinner at the mess hall and saw an early movie, but sometimes they went to the Officer's Club instead.

If we've seen the movie – a problem we run into every second nite [sic] - we stop by the club and ding the radio on and lots of free paper we write letters, then home to bed, still thinking that tomorrow is another day. The club is very nice – equipped with large ball room, library sitting room and bar with slot machines, but everybody seems to have gotten into quite a rut. There's a nice pool outside that will be filled sometime in April probably. And I have a feeling that things will liven up later on.²⁰

Bosca's description came at a time when she was no longer in training, thus she socialized at the Officer's Club as an officer in her own right. However, WASP pilots still in training at Sweetwater went to the Officer's club as dates for male cadets. Alberta Paskavan Kinney attended a dance as a reward for good behavior. She signed up to go to a dance at the Officer's Club at the Abilene Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas. She said their attendance at the dance depended on “whether or not they give us open post, whether or not we get too many demerits, and whether or not they can think up some other good excuse.”²¹

WASP trainees not only attended the dances with cadets, but with WASP instructors as well. In a letter home on November 28, 1944, Brown discussed another dance she attended: “The dance at the club was swell. I went with Lou Nelsen – one of the instructors I've been going out with and we had a lot of fun.”²² Presumably, the club the dance was hosted at was an Officer's Club. Betty Deuser Budde attended a dance at an Officer's Club July 25, 1943. She danced with a Captain and a Major. According to Budde, “everybody's so thrilled about having girls on the base, we could have dates practically whenever we wanted.”²³

Although military organizations encouraged fraternization between male and female pilots, some attempts were made to discourage such interactions. In *On Silver Wings*, Verges stated Colonel Baker instructed men and women at New Castle Air AAFB to “stay away from each other, at least during the WAFS ninety-day trial period.”²⁴ However, the author stated over

ten thousand men worked on the base and constant interaction between men and women at the officers' mess and Officers' Club made circumstances difficult for men and women to simply avoid socializing with one another. Pilots continued to socialize on and off base despite Baker's warning. In addition, male pilots often offered female pilots joy rides in planes women had not yet been cleared to fly. Eventually, Baker issued another set of orders that forbade WAFS from riding in bomber airplanes. His orders also prohibited women from catching a ride with another pilot back to base after completing a ferrying mission. Instead, Baker required women to take commercial flights back to Wilmington, unless the Ferrying Division sent a female only plane for them.²⁵ As Commanding Officer of the 2nd Ferrying Group, Colonel Baker's orders only applied to WAFS under his command, and his orders remained irrelevant to female pilots training in Texas.

Some WASP pilots, such as Madge Rutherford Minton, voiced concern at the Army Air Forces' advertisement of the new female pilots. Minton recognized the youth and beauty of the female pilots and expressed her concerns for their casual nature with men on base. She believed their friendly nature remained unintentional because the women acted the same way they would on a college campus. However, Minton realized the difference between a college campus and a military base. "They've done as fine of a job of advertising our sex to the cadets as they could have done if they had deliberately tried to. I and a few of my new friends are pretty disgusted and predict real trouble if the powers that be don't realize that we're here to fly, not date the cadets, and we know it."²⁶ Pilots, such as Minton, wanted to gain as much knowledge and experience about flying Army Air Forces aircraft without the distraction of a dating scene during training.

Sweetwater and male Army Air Forces bases hosted parties and invited male cadets to act as the pilots' dates, and in doing so, created a clear division between male and female pilots. They shaped an atmosphere in which men and women pilots were different and separate. While she might have chosen cadets as WASP dance partners under the assumption they were respectable young men who would not destroy the positive public image of the female pilots, she could have invited men from different facets of the community to keep the Army Air Forces gender neutral. For example, she could have invited local church going men who would have had the same respectable reputation within Sweetwater. However, she invited Army Air Forces cadets and created an atmosphere in which dating, dancing and flirting was deemed acceptable between men and women who eventually worked together. Military and WASP personnel encouraged personal interaction between soon-to-be WASP trainees and Air Forces cadets. If the military recognized WASPs as part of the Army Air Forces, the female trainees would have been working under contract with the United States military. While there is no guarantee militarization would have prevented fraternization between male and female pilots, enforcement of fraternization policies would have served as a reminder of the women's equal status to men within the military.

Several WASP trainees recounted dates with their instructors while they were in training. Instructors held a great deal of power over the female pilots, as they were in charge of checking women out on planes. Instructors trained and tested the pilots' flying abilities and ensured women understood how to fly the plane properly in any type of flying situation. Dating an instructor was a clear violation of fraternization policy, as a subordinate WASP trainee's career and life depended on her ability to fly military aircraft in unsafe flying conditions. However,

letters WASPs wrote home proved dating instructors to be a common practice among pilots in training.

Alberta Paskavan Kinney dated an instructor during training. During her thousand-mile PT trip, Kinney traveled to Fredrick, Oklahoma, Waco, and San Antonio with twelve fellow WASPs and “an establishment Officer to chaperone us, an army man and an instructor as flight commander.” While in San Antonio, the women underwent training in the Army high altitude chambers to learn about facts about oxygen at different altitudes. During their training in San Antonio, Kinney and the instructor “had wonderful fun... [they] went dancing, then home to bed and flew back the next day.”²⁷

Inez Woodward Woods discussed her double date with fellow WASP Rosa Lea and flight and link instructors. Rosa knew the flight instructor for years because he was an old family friend who flew with her father. The couples “took a long ride, ate steak dinners & went to a carnival in town.”²⁸ Woods had another date with the link instructor, Wallace, a week and a half later. She described him as “a good friend but a bad enemy so I’m being very careful.” After she declined his persistent offer for a kiss, she stated her concern with dating her link instructor. She stated “He’s helping me a lot in Link and is enough of a weakling that I can keep the upper hand without any trouble.” Although she believed he would not negatively affect her flying career or training, she understood the potential possibility for trouble that existed by her rejection.²⁹

In August 1944, Woods described another date with a Commanding Officer from Stinson Field named Ed. Although Ed was not her Commanding Officer at the time, her job as a WASP could have potentially put her under his command at some point during her career. Woods “went out with him both Friday night and last night to dinner. Last night he arranged for there to

be a party at the Officer's Club at Stinson Field because I was here."³⁰ Ed took a strong liking to Woods and continuously asked her when she was going to marry him. Even after turning him down, he remained jovial and continued to discuss future plans as if they were going to be married. However, Woods had a different opinion on the situation, and said "He asked why I didn't want to fall in love and I told him there was no future in it. He is a lot of fun to go out with though."³¹

Kinney described another date she had with a safety inspector from Washington while she was stationed in Aloe Field, in Victoria, Texas and working with the WASP. Although he was not an instructor, he had great control over their safety and experience while in the WASP program. The 1LT took her to "a roast goose dinner that one of the gunnery boys is giving."³²

Kinney dated her instrument instructor as well. She knew her actions were prohibited because she said she "should read the rules and regulations book again." However, his situation turned out more complicated than a simple date between instructor and student. "He's married and an instructor but I just need a little lovin might bad and he sure did a good job. Sounds nasty doesn't it. Really wasn't just kind of one of those good old parties like the old days."³³

WASPs, pilots' wives, and WASP personnel expressed concern about women dating instructors and took action against the fraternization that occurred. Fellow WASP pilots feared negative repercussions for dating instructors and expressed concern for the detrimental effect fraternization had on the program. On several occasions, Cochran implemented policies aimed to regulate women's behavior on their personal time and clearly forbade women from dating their instructors. Lastly, the instructor's wives disapproved of the WASPs co-piloting planes with their husbands. Their worries led to women being restricted from piloting planes with men.

WASPs recanted stories of unwanted advances instructors made toward them. The advances made WASPs uncomfortable and they often worried if their rejection would harm their flying career in any way. Their fears were understandable because instructors were in charge of deciding whether or not pilots can pass or fail flight checks and ultimately decided their fate in the program.

After Captain Rose spent the afternoon teaching Marjorie Osborne Nicol about AT-6 cockpit procedure, he invited her into his office. While she wished to keep a professional student/instructor relationship with Rose, he showed other interest. She described the events that followed:

I could hardly refuse after he'd been so nice, so I went in and we just talked for another hour. When the conversation got around to dancing and the color of my eyes and what kind of men do I like, I decided it was high time for me to get out, so I made some kind of an excuse and finally went out thanking him profusely for the preview of the AT. I liked him immensely until the conversation got personal, and he made a remark about seeing me after graduation. WASPs are allowed to go out with officers of the field, trainees aren't. He's about 35, has a daughter 12, has been separated from his wife about six years. Handsome, intelligent, why does he have to be a wolf?³⁴

Captain Rose's behavior towards Nicol, a trainee under his supervision, demonstrated the need for clear fraternization policies regarding men and women in a working relationship. Although WASP and Army Air Forces leaders unofficially put guidelines against social relationships in place, the WASP's civilian status meant any guidelines would not fall under military discipline. Instructors, such as Captain Rose, would not suffer any dire consequences for such actions. Militarization would have protected pilots from unwanted advances from men who influenced their safety, knowledge, and careers.

Kinney worried about negative consequences from dating military pilots and worried her refusal would cause instructors to think of her negatively as a student and affect her training.

Although Kinney dated an instructor, on a separate occasion, she turned down an instructor because “in this harem it is an elimination offense to date an instructor... [and she] can’t afford it.”³⁵ She believed it was “bad politics to be rude and not very desirable to say yes,” and indicated she felt obligated to agree to go out with the instructor.³⁶ Ultimately, Kinney turned him down because she did not want a personal relationship to affect her career. Also, she wanted different outcomes than the men she dated; she wanted to casually date, but her dates wanted a serious relationship. She said “people just don’t understand that all I want to do is have fun and not get serious over any one. I just tried to be generally sociable with a different date each night but the fellows live much to close for that. So Shall just plain let them all go to hell for a while and catch up on correspondence and such.”³⁷ Kinney appears to have wanted to date casually and did not want to get into a serious relationship while in the WASP training program.

Cochran and WASP leaders established rules aimed to eliminate unprofessional relationships between instructors and students. On March 5, 1943, Budde wrote home to her family about warnings she received regarding dating and personal relationships. She wrote “It was announced tonite [sic] that we must be more careful in our behavior, not having any men visitors in our rooms, and not going to night clubs unescorted.”³⁸ Madge Rutherford Minton described new rules Cochran enacted in reaction to the women’s private lives. Cochran worried about the WASP’s public image and laid down new rules regarding the women’s free time on weekends. However, Rutherford agreed with Cochran’s point of view and said “Unfortunately it’s true... What’s going on is problematical... One thing has been made pretty clear, no more dates with flight instructors. I haven’t had one for two weeks now and can’t afford to have another one under the present circumstances, even if I wanted to. Fortunately, I don’t.”³⁹

WASPs suffered serious consequences for dating cadets, officers, and instructors due to the complaints from pilots' wives. In September 1943, Madge Rutherford Minton stated the pilots' wives grouped together and approached the WASP's commanding officer. They voiced their objection to female pilots spending a considerable amount of flight time with their husbands. She stated: "We cannot get valuable co-pilot time on heavy ships because the pilot's wives went as a body, and objected to the C.O... You can buck the masculine prejudice in this flying game but it really makes you sore to have your hands tied by a bunch of brainless females."⁴⁰

March 25, 1943, Romulus Air Base instated rules regarding male and female interaction, but the rules singled out a punishment for female pilots only. The 3rd Ferrying Group restricted WAFS to light aircraft only, forbade them to fly as co-pilots with a male pilot, forced women to be assigned deliveries on alternate days with male pilots, and strongly encouraged that women's assignments take them in the opposite direction of male pilots. The directive banned mixed gender flight crews. The rules prevented women from checking out in larger, heavier aircraft and kept them ferrying entry level planes.⁴¹ Nancy Love appealed the directive and the Ferrying Division Headquarters created a new directive on April 26, 1943 that rescinded the previous directive.⁴² In reality, restricting women from flying heavier planes kept men from training in lighter aircraft. The restriction caused a back log of men who could not be trained because women were forced to remain on planes used for training.⁴³

The most serious consequence of the fraternization occurred after WASPs graduated from training and flew professional for the Army Air Forces. Military personnel supported cadet's social interactions with WASPs during training, but the social aspect of their relationships between the men and women did not end when trainees/cadets graduated. Neither

the military nor the WASP program created a clear professional boundary between male and female pilots during training, and the conflict of personal and professional relationships sometimes resulted in grave consequences. Cornelia Fort's death served as an example of the negative outcome of the condoned fraternization between militarized Army Air Forces pilots and female WASP pilots.

Rumors surrounding the cause of Cornelia Fort's death March 21, 1943 revolved around male and female interaction while in the air. Historians debated the reasoning behind her fatal plane crash, but agreed on certain facts. Fort landed in Midland to refuel her plane and met a group of six male pilots from Long Beach whose destination was also Dallas. Superiors forbade Fort and the men from flying formation with any pilots (male or female), but the pilots decided to fly to Dallas in formation despite their orders. Flight officer Frank Stamme Jr.'s landing gear clipped Cornelia's left wing and Fort's plane "rolled several times, went into an inverted dive, rotated slowly to the left and slammed vertically into the ground."⁴⁴ Army investigators assumed Fort died before the plane crashed because she did not attempt to open the emergency latch and her parachute remained unused.⁴⁵

While historians agree on events following the collision, their opinions differed on the cause of the collision. Rob Simbeck refused to fault either pilot and stated no evidence existed to point to foul play on the part of Fort or the male pilot. Instead, he blamed their inexperience in formation flying and close proximity to each other led to Fort's death. However, Simbeck described the ban on formation flying as such:

There was another very practical reason for the ban on tight formation: A percentage of the men flying these missions were young, inexperienced, and sometimes reckless, and the presence of women could bring out the worst in them. All the WAFS experienced or heard of incidents in which male pilots, showing off or attempting to frighten the women, would play fighter pilot, rolling and weaving near them, buzzing them or coming suddenly alongside them, so the

women generally kept a wary eye on them.⁴⁶

While Simbeck did not directly fault either pilot, the above statement showed his acknowledgement of the possibility Stamme may have caused the accident in his attempt to impress Fort. In *On Silver Wings*, Verges stated “one guy in particular thought he was hot stuff, flirting and showing off,” and Fort planned to go to dinner with any available WAFS in order to avoid his advances at the Officer’s Club.⁴⁷ In *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, Rickman’s view of the rumors about male pilot’s behavior in a negative light and referred to their actions as horseplay and harassment. However, she referenced Fort’s squadron commander, Barbara Erickson’s opinion on the crash: “They were in two or three airplanes, out there in the middle of nowhere trying to fly formation. I don’t think there was anything malicious about it. I think it was a plain accident.” Rickman did not offer her own opinion regarding the cause of the accident.⁴⁸

Regardless of the validity of the rumors, the WASPs’ semi-military status meant no provisions existed to regulate male pilots’ behavior. While individual military leaders created rules prohibiting relationships of any kind between men and women, the Army Air Forces failed to create rules to regulate male and female interaction as a whole. The male pilots Fort befriended were not based at New Castle Air AAFB and did not have to abide by Colonel Baker’s instructions for women and men to stay away from each other. Furthermore, his orders required keeping them apart during the WAFS’s ninety day trial specifically, and Fort’s accident occurred outside of the time period. Army Air Forces rules forbidding flirting, horseplay, and relationships between male and female pilots could have changed the outcome of the pilots’ flight together.

Due to the WASPs unmilitarized status, fraternization between male and female pilots occurred throughout the program's existence. Clear military regulation to forbid such activity did not exist and their actions led to serious consequences. Male instructors, cadets in training, and safety inspectors dated the female pilots. These men all had significant influence over the WASP experience in the program. Instructors trained the women to fly military planes no matter what their condition and tested their flying abilities. Many women feared negative repercussions from turning down men who had such power over their careers. Cadets training at nearby airfields saw the women as dates to various social events, but their attitude towards women did not change once they worked side by side, as seen in the case of Cornelia Fort. Safety inspectors checked the planes and made sure they were safe to fly. Their actions ensured the women's safety once they were in the air. Military and WASP leaders forbade women dating instructors and men who controlled their future in the program, but, as seen in the letters, their rules did little to stop the relationships. Overall, the WASP pilot's semi-military status allowed for fraternization to occur between the pilots and men who influenced the outcome of their careers.

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- ¹ “Zoot Suits and Parachutes,” *WASP Songbook*,
http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/songs/zoot_suits_and_parachutes.htm
- ² Department of the Army, “Relationships Between Soldiers of Different Rank,” preface.
- ³ Richard T. Devereaux, “Fraternization in the United States Air Force,” 1.
- ⁴ Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 132-133.
- ⁵ Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 132-133.
- ⁶ “Planned Leisure for Troops Scored,” *The New York Times*, 1941.
- ⁷ “Planned Leisure,” *The New York Times*, 1941.
- ⁸ “Planned Leisure,” *The New York Times*, 1941.
- ⁹ Craven, “Recruitment and Training,” 22 January 2012.
- ¹⁰ Department of the Army, “Relationships Between Soldiers of Different Rank,” 17.
- ¹¹ Department of the Army, “Relationships Between Soldiers of Different Rank,” 17-18.
- ¹² Craven, “Recruitment and Training,” 22 January 2012.
- ¹³ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 76.
- ¹⁴ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 125.
- ¹⁵ Kinney to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, March 1943.
- ¹⁶ Brown to mother, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 16 November 1944.
- ¹⁷ Brown to mother, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 6 July 1944.
- ¹⁸ Murdock, “W.W. II Army Air Force Contract Flying School Airfields,” *USAF Installations Page*.
- ¹⁹ Berry, “Cozy Retreat, 4 February 1944.
- ²⁰ Bosca to Family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 9 February 1944.
- ²¹ Kinney to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 19 Feb. 1943.
- ²² Brown to mother, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 28 Nov. 1944.
- ²³ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 26 July 1943.
- ²⁴ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 50.
- ²⁵ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 50-51.
- ²⁶ Minton to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 4 March 1943.
- ²⁷ Kinney to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 22 Aug. 1943.
- ²⁸ Woods to mother, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 5 April 1943.
- ²⁹ Woods to mother, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 18 April 1943.
- ³⁰ Woods, letter to Mama Dea and Tante, August 1944.
- ³¹ Woods to Mama Dea and Tante, TWU WASP Digital Archive, August 1944.
- ³² Kinney, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 8 Nov. 1944.
- ³³ Kinney, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 1943.
- ³⁴ Nicol to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 19 June 1944.
- ³⁵ Kinney, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 1943.
- ³⁶ Kinney, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 1943.
- ³⁷ Kinney, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 1943.
- ³⁸ Budde to family, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 5 March 1943.
- ³⁹ Rutherford, letter to her parents, 26 May 1943.
- ⁴⁰ Minton to parents, TWU WASP Digital Archive, 8 September 1943.
- ⁴¹ Rickman, *The Originals*, 165.
- ⁴² Rickman, *The Originals*, 171.

⁴³ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 91.

⁴⁴ Simbeck, *Daughter of the Air*, 227-228.

⁴⁵ Simbeck, *Daughter of the Air*, 228.

⁴⁶ Simbeck, *Daughter of the Air*, 225.

⁴⁷ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 88.

⁴⁸ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 117.

CHAPTER V

WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS CONTINUED EFFORTS TOWARDS MILITARIZATION AND VETERAN STATUS

Forty-eight years after the WASP program disbanded, WASP Deanie Parrish wrote a rap song about her experience as one of the first women pilots to serve in the United States Air Force:

They built the barracks six cots to a room
Filled ‘em with cadets, but they found out soon
Those BOYS couldn’t take it, too hot, no air
So they moved ‘em out and put the gals in there
Thought we couldn’t take it, go home to mamma
Dream on, fly boys, dream on

[refrain]

WE GOT THE STUFF—THE RIGHT STUFF, WE GOT THE STUFF

We earned our wings ‘cause we could fly
But good assignments? Well, that’s a flat lie,
They put us in crates that the guys wouldn’t fly,
And sent us on missions even birds wouldn’t try.

We Flew ‘em, every mission, we flew ‘em And you know WHY?

[refrain]

Those Christmas presents were so sincere,
Discharge papers and a kick in the rear.
We took on the fight and we vowed we'd try
To set the record straight, and you know WHY?

[refrain]¹

On October 1, 1944, General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, sent Jacqueline Cochran, Director of the Women Air Forces Service Pilots (WASP), a memo which “directed that WASP be deactivated as soon as consistent with giving adequate

advance notice to the WASPs and to the Commanding Officers.”² Arnold asked her to “submit promptly to me [her] plan for such deactivation to take place not later than 20 December 1944.”³ In her autobiography, *The Stars at Noon*, Cochran said the WASPs “never received the militarization they deserved” during their service because “a political situation arose which caused several civilian male pilot organizations to oppose the Militarization Bill which had been introduced in Congress.”⁴ She said “their opposition was aided and abetted by some of the girls themselves who did not understand the problem,” and the women fought against the bill because they “wished to retain their freedom of action about resigning.”⁵ The Militarization Bill, or Costello Bill, did not pass in Congress, and “WASPs did not get the benefits of the GI Bill nor did the injured get suitable compensation nor did those killed in service get proper recognition.”⁶

The bill met with both avid support and complete dismissal by members of Congress. On May 4, 1944, *The New York Times* reported the Army’s official position in regards to WASP militarization. The Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, released the statement to the paper and stated “the War Department favors continuation of its corps of women fliers and militarization of their organization, known as the WASP, including regular commission in the Army of the United States.”⁷ For those who opposed the bill, Stimson said “neither the existence nor the militarization of the WASP will keep out of the Army Air Forces a single instructor or partially trained civilian pilot who deserves to become a service pilot or cadet and can meet the applicable standards of the Army Air Forces.”⁸ Even though the Secretary of War released the Army’s supportive statement for WASP militarization, representatives in Congress disagreed. On March 24, 1944, *The New York Times*, printed an article stating the bill “Struck a snag... when Representative Charles A. Halleck, Republican of Indiana, raised the question before the House Rules Committee of whether the women pilots really wanted to be militarized.”⁹ Halleck

believed “the number of women pilots objected to joining the Army,” and he saw no reason to pursue the issue any further because none of the WASPs presented their desire to become militarized before the House Military Affairs Committee.¹⁰

The same article quoted John M. Costello’s reaction to Halleck’s claims about the Militarization Bill. Costello believed Halleck to be misinformed and stated “WASPs who oppose the bill and who would fail to go into the military organization is extremely small.”¹¹ Costello “talked to them on many posts, and [he had] yet to see one who oppose[d] it.”¹² Costello further believed male Army Air Forces service members wanted WASP militarization “so that the women are as much subject to the commanding officer as they are. The men don’t like it that the women are freer to come and go.”¹³

Congress turned down the Costello Bill on June 22, 1944 with a vote of 169 to 188.¹⁴ Seventy-three congressmen did not vote either way, leaving 188 responsible for the decision.¹⁵ On August 8, 1944, the War Department released a final report about the WASP program Cochran wrote to Arnold. She believed the WASPs “should, of course, be demobilized when no longer needed.”¹⁶ She pushed for WASP militarization as a separate branch of the Army, but refused to incorporate the WASPs into the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). She believed if WASPs militarized under existing WAC legislation, the WASPs would not receive full benefits due to pilots under existing WAC legislation and said “to round out the experimental features of the WASP and get the full benefits therefrom, they should be treated as pilots.”¹⁷ She concluded:

Under a civilian status, so many elements of the experimental project are lost or weakened, and there is such lack of control over permanency of work by individual WASPs after they are trained, that seriously consideration should be given to inactivation of the WASP program if militarization is not soon authorized. If such action should be taken, an effort should be made to obtain military status, if only for one day, and resulting veterans¹⁸ recognition for all who have served commendably.¹⁹

Cochran pursued WASP militarization from the beginning to the end of the program; she wanted the women to get the recognition they deserved. In a letter to the members of the 43-W-3 class of women, the third graduating class of 1943, Cochran admitted her recommendation for disbandment in a letter she wrote to the women in class 43-W-3, “It is with deep regret that I found it necessary to recommend inactivation of the entire program, for I know all you sorry girls will have to divorce yourself from Army flying.”²⁰ Cochran did not see another alternative for WASPs besides militarization independent from WAC legislation. As evident in the Final Report written to Arnold and the letter to WASP class 43-W-3, Cochran knew her refusal to militarize within another established program would mean disbandment for the women. She truly believed her pilots deserved full honor and recognition as pilots within the United States Army Air Forces and did not want them to settle for anything less. Cochran initially began the program to prove women’s ability to fly military planes to America and her fruitions proved successful. Her approval of the program was evident when she finished the letter to 43-W-3 and stated “how great is our satisfaction to know that over 1,000 women have learned to fly “the Army way.”²¹ Ultimately, the WASP program disbanded as civilians, but the fight for militarization did not end with the program.

In 1976, a press release from the Pentagon stated the first women pilots for the United States military began training for the Air Force, but clearly the WASPs disagreed with the statement. With the help of H.H. Arnold’s son, Bruce Arnold, the women pressured Congress to grant military status to WASPs and grant them veteran’s benefits. Initially, the veterans’ organizations voiced complaints against the amendment, because they believed other civilian auxiliary groups who served during World War II would come forward and ask for veteran benefits as well. As a result, the House Veterans’ Committee turned down the proposal, but the

WASPs did not quit. In October 1976, WASPs held a reunion in Hot Springs, Arkansas and eight-hundred attended, including judges, military officers, and community leaders, and strategized a plan to push WASP militarization legislation through Congress.²²

The WASPs banded together in order to get the recognition they deserved, as made evident in WASP newsletters. The women pressured members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to legally recognize WASP as military veterans. In the *WASP Newsletter: Flash Edition*, Bee Haydu gave WASPs instructions on what they could do to push militarization legislation through Congress. She said they are on "maintain (letters, mail-o-gram, other) pressures until May 25th hearings become history."²³ Haydu listed members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee "under obvious ratings so that [WASPs] and [their] friends may express appreciation or urge open-minded consideration as the case may be."²⁴ She summed up the newsletter with a plea to WASPs to "clearly prove one thing during the hearings – that you were de facto Army Air Force officers and aviators."²⁵ She urged for the women to stand as "on voice with these simple but important facts." She reminded them: "We were sworn in with the same oath. We took the same training. We responded to the same written orders. We flew the same airplanes. We were subject to the same disciplines. We received the same medical care. We service the same beloved country."²⁶ Years after disbandment, WASPs maintained important and reliable means of communication needed in order to become militarized. The bond the women shared through their experiences spanned well beyond their service, and their organized means of communication, along with their perseverance, pushed them forward in their pursuit for military status.

With the help of Bruce Arnold and Senator Barry Goldwater, a former World War II Ferry Division pilot who worked alongside WASP pilots at New Castle Army Air Forces Base,

WASPs presented an amendment to Congress in March 1977. WASPs wore their Santiago Blues, the WASP's formal dress uniform, as they lined the chamber of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Former WASP and Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force Reserves, Dr. Dora Dougherty Strother, recounted WASP's experiences during their service in World War II. She focused on their transition into the military lifestyles, their work with the Army Air Forces, and the unfulfilled promise of militarization. After much deliberation, Congress approved WASP militarization on November 3, 1977.²⁷ On November 23, 1977, after a long battle in Congress, President Jimmy Carter "quietly signed veteran status for Women's Air Forces Service Pilots of World War II into the law of the land."²⁸ Thirty-two years after their disbandment, WASPs became the first women pilots in the United States Air Force.

WASPs kept in touch throughout the years after the programs disbandment. Every year beginning in 1943, they sent out at least one newsletter to surviving WASPs and their families. During the programs' activation, the newsletters discussed graduations, general WASP announcements and major WASP events. After deactivation, the newsletter information ranged from job openings in aviation open to women, their feelings of disbandment and major life events for pilots. A column, "Just Between Us" appeared in the February 1946 newsletter, after the program disbanded. The first column was written by former WASP Mardo Crane, and she described her sadness after disbandment and the difficult time she had readjusting to life outside of the WASP program. She wrote the three steps she made up in order to move her life forward:

First: Keep Busy. Second: Keep Flying – at least once a week, even if I had to pawn the family jewels! Third: Keep being glad I had a wonderful training and experiences I had as a WASP, instead of being sorry I wasn't still flying all those beautiful airplanes.²⁹

WASPs continuously encouraged each other years after the program was inactivated.

They shared personal and professional information in the newsletters and disseminated

information as if they were staying in touch with family. They celebrated triumphs and losses, as well as simple updates of the events in their lives. In the December 1977 edition of the *WASP Newsletter* is forty-five pages long, and twenty-eight of those pages are personal updates from WASPs and their families. Excerpts such as: “Lois Hailey is working to renew her pilot’s license. She visited her son and family in Houston recently,” and “Kati Loft Streble is teaching part time at Miami-Dade Community College (South) in Aerospace Dept. She and her husband took a two-week flying trip to Alaska in their C-183” are common examples of information found in the personal sections of the newsletters.³⁰ The most recent *WASP Newsletter* was published in the winter of 2013. The editor, Sarah Byrn Rickman, urged WASPs to “write or dictate into a recording device, your story. Let someone help you with the technical stuff. Pay someone to transcribe your tapes... find a good editor to work with you and then read the final manuscript.”³¹ She included a list of recently published WASP books and told living WASPs to follow in their footsteps in order to save their memories.³²

Analysis of WASP letters, memoirs, and interviews revealed three major themes regarding their service in the WASP program. First, the pilots expressed concern for the lack of an official uniform and properly fitting flight suit. The lack of uniforms denied WASPs of two important aspects of military service: a clear tool of public identification and an official symbol of unity among pilots themselves. The public did not have a way to identify WASPs as military pilots and made it easier for the public to view the women as civilians helping military men. Also, the government and military denial of official uniforms allowed them to prolong WASP militarization and deny women equal status for equal stateside service. Once women received uniforms, which they paid for personally,

they wore a uniform without rank because Congress continued to deny women militarization for their work.

Second, the women focused on the lack of benefits, specifically death benefits. Thirty-eight pilots were killed in action and their families did not receive death benefits equal to male servicemen's families. Fallen WASPs were honored with a civilian funeral paid for by their families and their fellow women pilots. The refutation of benefits equal to their male counterparts also allowed the military and Congress to deny the women's service. The women died as Civil Service employees and were buried as civilians. They came together in order to supplement the lack of military benefits.

Third, the women often wrote home about their personal lives and time spent with military men and civilian instructors. Women were expected to fill a male gender role as military pilots and then go out with male cadets, pilots, and instructors in a feminine role in their spare time. WASP and military officials set up dances for men and women to socialize, but the women's civilian status did not grant them any additional protection against fraternization. Sometimes, the extra attention from men was unwanted and led to situations in which the women described sexual harassment. Militarization of the female pilots would have created rules against fraternization. However, the women served without rank while socializing with their male colleagues and led to confusion regarding power during work hours.

WASPs gained militarization and veteran status because of their sheer determination and their ability to work together as a unit. Throughout their time in the program, the women bonded because of the inequalities they faced. The United States military denied the women access to insurance, equal compensation, recognition, and veteran benefits, but the women found ways to

protect each other. They funded their own group insurance, donated money to the survivors of WASPs killed in action, and escorted home the bodies of their fallen sisters. The WASPs did not have uniforms for the first eighteen months of service and, even after they paid for their uniforms, the military denied the women the right to wear and hold rank. Their bond became evident over thirty years after their disbandment as they worked together as a cohesive unit and made sure their voices were heard by members of Congress. Despite the efforts the military and government made to restrict the women from becoming soldiers, they women banded together and became sisters in arms.

We stuck it out, day and night,
We didn't give up, made 'em do it right
It took thirty five years to get recognition,
They thought we'd go away, but we held our position!
STUFF, THE RIGHT STUFF, WE GOT THE STUFF.
For fifty years, we've been around
With our hearts in the sky, and our feet on the ground,
With smiles on our faces, we can stand on our own,
And tell the story we've always known,
[refrain]
We did it, it ain't no mystery,
We earned it, our place in history,
We were the **FIRST**, we are the **BEST**,
We set the records for all the rest.³³

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- ¹ Parrish, "We got the Stuff, the Right Stuff," *Marching Songs of the WASP*.
- ² Arnold, "Memo From General Arnold deactivating WASP program," Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- ³ Arnold, "Memo," Eisenhower Library.
- ⁴ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 128.
- ⁵ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 128.
- ⁶ Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 128.
- ⁷ "WASP Militarization Favored by Stimson," *The New York Times*, 1944.
- ⁸ "WASP Militarization Favored by Stimson," *The New York Times*, 1944.
- ⁹ "WASP Bill Strikes a Committee Snag," *The New York Times*, 1944.
- ¹⁰ "WASP Bill Strikes a Committee Snag," *The New York Times*, 1944.
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- ¹² "WASP Bill Strikes a Committee Snag," *The New York Times*, 1944.
- ¹³ "WASP Bill Strikes a Committee Snag," *The New York Times*, 1944.
- ¹⁴ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 145.
- ¹⁵ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 145.
- ¹⁶ Cochran, "Director of Woman Pilots," 8 August 1944.
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- ¹⁸ Cochran, "Director of Woman Pilots," 8 August 1944.
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- ²⁰ Cochran to WASP Class 43-W-3, Jacqueline Cochran Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
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- ²² Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 232-237.
- ²³ Haydu, *WASP Newsletter*, April 1977.
- ²⁴ Haydu, *WASP Newsletter*, April 1977.
- ²⁵ Haydu, *WASP Newsletter*, April 1977.
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- ²⁷ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 232-237.
- ²⁸ Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines*, 348.
- ²⁹ Crane, "Just Between Us," February 1946.
- ³⁰ *WASP Newsletter*, ed. Cross, December 1977.
- ³¹ *WASP Newsletter*, ed. Rickman, winter 2013.
- ³² *WASP Newsletter*, ed. Rickman, winter 2013.
- ³³ Parrish, "We got the Stuff, the Right Stuff," *Marching Songs of the WASP*.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephanie Michelle Cavin began her study in history in the fall of 2008 and in spring 2012 she graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Studies Composite from the University of Texas-Pan American. Her undergraduate senior research thesis focused on the Women Airforce Service Pilots under the direction of Dr. Michael Weaver. She was accepted into the University of Texas-Pan American's Master of Arts in History and began her study in Fall 2012. Her thesis entitled "Women, War and Planes: Women Airforce Service Pilots' Experience Working alongside the Army Airforce during World War II," further extended her study on the Women Airforce Service Pilots. She graduated Summa Cum Laude Spring 2015 with her M.A. in History. In the future, she plans to pursue her doctorate in History with a focus on women's military history.