



The Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP):  
Marvelous Women With Their Eyes on the Stars

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*“With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts”*

- Eleanor Roosevelt

I’ve had the incredible privilege of growing up with a phenomenal, strong female role model: my mom, Lieutenant Colonel Laura Theodorson. When I was born, she was stationed on active duty at McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey, eight years into what would become twenty-eight years of service in the U.S. Air Force. Twenty years ago, my mom transitioned to the Air Force Reserve at McChord Air Force Base, now Joint Base Lewis-McChord, south of Seattle, Washington, where she continued flying for the military while beginning an airline pilot career. The idea of women serving in military aviation was normalized for me from a young age, as I frequently saw both my mom and her close female friends in uniform and in the cockpit. I was introduced to the topic of the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) in 2010, when my mom had the distinction of escorting WASP Ruth Glaser Wright Guhse during their Congressional Gold Medal ceremony. In April of 2010, I had the honor of meeting WASP Dorothy Kacher Olson when my Girl Scout Troop served as color guard for a City Council meeting in University Place, Washington, during which Olson was recognized.

It wasn't until seven and a half years later, when taking Professor Premilla Nadasen's History course on Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the 20th Century United States in the Fall 2017 that I began engaging with the topic of Women in the U.S. Military, and more specifically the WASP program, academically. For the past two and a half years I have engaged with issues of Women in the Armed Services and Women in Aviation for courses including Professor Robert Neer's Global History of the U.S. Military course and Professor Claire Ullman's Political Science Course on the Comparative Politics of Gender Inequality, attempting to answer questions that I had about the WASP and their timeline within the U.S. Military. Since September 2018, Professor Carl Wennerlind, my wonderful thesis advisor, has helped me shape my research on the WASP into a question of their militarization and recognition as Veterans. I honestly do not think I could have shaped my thesis into what it has become without your words of encouragement and advice.

Over the past eight months, I have been fortunate to visit two archives, a museum, and a personal collection, full of documents which have helped me answer my own personal questions and shape the narrative around WASP militarization as accurately and compellingly as possible. The living WASP and the women who have taken on the responsibility of telling their stories have welcomed me with open arms. I owe much thanks to Kimberly Johnson, the Director of the Special Collections at the Texas Woman's University for welcoming my mom and I into your archive; to Carol Cain, the Vice President of the National WASP WWII Museum for driving out right after an ice storm, to give my mom and I a wonderful private tour of the museum; to Ann Haub, the Lead Archivist of the National WASP WWII Museum for all of the help that your

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Of course, I could not even write on this topic without the contributions of all of the leaders who made the WASP what it is, both during wartime and beyond, for dreaming and believing in the power of women. I am so grateful to my mom, for putting me in an Air Force flightsuit before I could even walk, then telling me not to become a pilot after 2001, then begging me to consider a career in aviation after I set my heart on a career in policy. For countless hours of flying, driving, and FaceTiming between Seattle, Austin, Dallas, Sweetwater, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and (of course) New York. To my dad for cultivating the historian and geographer in me and proving just how resilient the Wensleys can be time and time again. To my trailblazing role models, most notably Washington State Representative Christine Kilduff, U.S. Congressman Denny Heck, U.S. Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, and Washington State Governor Jay Inslee. There is no doubt in my mind that policymaking is an art, and an often thankless one at that. I am forever thankful for your continued graceful leadership and guidance. To my service dog Samantha for always being so excited to go on our adventures to Austin, Dallas, Sweetwater, Atlanta, Philadelphia, or wherever this journey took us, for all of your late night cuddles as I continued to perfect these chapters, and for winning over librarians and archivists with your puppy eyes and unwavering respect as I promised that you wouldn't make a noise or shed a single black hair in their archives. Lastly, to Taylor, Ella, Kacey, Annie, Phoebe, Lucy, and Julien, for being my early morning, late night, powerhouse women who always had exactly the words I needed to get my creativity flowing and keep me going. I appreciate all of you more than I can put into words.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“War holds many ironies and among them is the liberating effect upon women”*

- Doris Weatherford

The history of women serving in the military is a complex narrative, framed by public law, military doctrine, social norms, and cultural expectations. Some of the greatest complexities of the narrative of women’s service in wartime center around World War II (WWII) and the mobilization of women both on the home front and in the Armed Services. One such story that illuminates these complexities is that of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, also known as the WASP. The WASP “experiment” originated with the purpose to free up American male pilots for combat roles.<sup>2</sup> From the onset of WWII, Army Air Forces (AAF) leaders were intrigued by the idea of incorporating women in assignments that were not limited to ground roles. General

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<sup>1</sup> WASP with Cochran at Wishing Well, photograph, 1943; University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Historical records assert that the WASP training program was top secret because it could have resulted in the deaths of many women. Therefore, WASP historians frequently refer to it as “The Experiment.” See Henry H. Arnold, “Address by General Henry Arnold, December 1944,” Speech, The Portal to Texas History, December 7, 1944.

Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, Chief of The Army Air Forces, was initially skeptical about using women aviators as pilots, but because of the high casualty rate during the air war over Europe in 1942 he was persuaded to create this paramilitary program: “By adopting the idea of hiring women as civil servants, Arnold neatly sidestepped the limitations of women’s reserve legislation as articulated by Congress.”<sup>3</sup> Even without an established recruitment campaign, the Department of Defense (DoD) received over 25,000 candidates volunteered.<sup>4</sup> Nearly 2000 of these candidates were accepted and began training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas in 1942. By December 1944, the WASP program graduated 1074 women who received Army Air Forces (AAF) orders to report to 122 air bases across America.<sup>5</sup>

WASP were initially trained alongside male recruits, but their program was soon moved to a dedicated base of operations at Avenger Field, which would eventually become their home. Upon entering training, each woman signed a letter of consent to later be commissioned during the war, also referred to as being militarized or mobilized.<sup>6</sup> The trainees knew that they were setting a precedent for women in the military, being told to “look at the person to their right and to their left,” that it was “highly probable that those two women would not be standing there at graduation,” and informed that they had “joined the army and were expected to perform up to

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Stiehm, *Bring Me Men and Women: Mandated Change at the U.S. Air Force Academy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). pp. 41

<sup>4</sup> Molly Merryman, *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (Wasps) of World War II* (NYU Press, 2001). pp. 14

<sup>5</sup> Byrd Howell Granger, “Evidence Supporting Military Service by Women Airforce Service Pilots World War II,” n.d., Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, November 1975, The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University.

<sup>6</sup> Merriam-Webster defines “militarize” as to give a military character to, or to adapt for military use. “Mobilize”: to assemble and make ready for war duty. WASP expected to be militarized and mobilized during World War II, as asserted and proved within the thesis. In government, civil servants have the same legal protection as private sector employees. To be mobilized (or demobilized), WASP *women* would have first required militarization. The WASP *program* comprised an entire Army Air Base of military officers and personnel. Therefore, it is appropriate to state that the WASP program was demobilized.

army standards.”<sup>7</sup> This training consisted of between 21 and 27 weeks of rigorous, demanding, and regimented work, accumulating a minimum of 560 hours of ground school and 210 hours of flight training in which they worked and flew according to AAF rules and regulations.<sup>8</sup> The military structure of the WASP training regimen paralleled that of the AAF’s male pilot candidates, living in austere barracks, rising to the bugle call of reveille for PT at sunrise, marching everywhere, and finishing the day with lights out at taps. Some key components included maintaining dress uniforms for formal inspections, advanced military customs and courtesy, the articles of war, indoctrination to the duties and responsibilities of an officer, and more. At all stages of their training, the WASP were instructed about, and had access to, ‘top secret’ information and equipment, and were trained in and issued firearms to protect classified equipment. Despite being segregated from male trainees, WASP students’ instruction was the same as enlisted male aviation cadets, although many went on to specialized advanced flight and officer training, including at the AAF School of Applied Tactics. At the Strategic Air Command base in Orlando, Florida, they completed military courses side-by-side with men including classes in poisonous gases, specialized certifications including flying on instruments, in fighter aircraft, and towing troop gliders. The WASP flew everything from light trainers through multi-engine bombers and sophisticated fighter planes, including new jets. Because their mission roles would specialize in ferrying and instruction, these women were also given more training for cross-country navigation and formation flying than men, regularly exceeding the aviation

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<sup>7</sup> Sally Van Wagenen Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines: The Unknown Heroines of World War II*, Rev. and expanded ed (New York: Four Directions Press, 1990). pp 157-158.

<sup>8</sup> The AAF Ground School curriculum in math, meteorology, mechanics, and sciences was equivalent to a degree in Aeronautics. See Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines*, pp 158-180.

expectations of their counterparts. In the time leading up to December 1944, there was no limitation as to what the WASP would be asked to do.

The positions and missions that the WASP served in after graduating from the program were unprecedented for women in aviation and women in the Armed Forces. These women served in top-secret positions desired and admired by men, following the oath of office that all officers took and adhering to military orders. While the men who completed AAF training were commissioned as second lieutenants, the women who graduated received certification as military pilots and orders to report to a duty station. The WASP went on to fly more than 60 million miles for their country, in every aircraft type and assignment flown by men, except combat.<sup>9</sup> As they progressed in experience, they flew as instructors and test pilots, towing targets for air-to-air and ground gunnery practice, ferried newly manufactured fighters and bombers, transported personnel and cargo, and actively participated in the development A-bomb program, and even serving as G-2 Intelligence Staff members.<sup>10</sup> The WASP roles were instrumental in the B-29 “Superfortress” bomber’s employment throughout the Pacific theater and the defeat of Japan. The positions that the women of the WASP served in placed them in significant danger, and they were on-call 24 hours a day, same as the men who served in the Army Air Force and unlike civilians such as Rosie-the-Riveters and other nonmilitary defense workers. During their service, these women lived in barracks, Bachelors Officers Quarters (BOQ) on base, or in quarters shared with Army Nurses or the Women’s Army Corps. Some WASP received promotions, becoming commanding officer and squadron leaders, and were accorded membership to officers clubs in addition to admission to military mess halls. While civilians did not have these privileges, WASP

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<sup>9</sup> Granger “Evidence Supporting Military Service”

<sup>10</sup> Granger “Evidence Supporting Military Service”

had full access on their assigned bases. During their service, the WASP were subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), and were disciplined as any other male trainee or officer in cases of infractions of military rules and regulations, including proceedings of court martial. The examples drawn from this experimental organization demonstrate that the only nontraditional element of the WASP training program was the fact that they were women.

However, the disbandment and unceremonious demobilization of the WASP program demonstrated the real difference between these women and the men of the AAF.<sup>11</sup> In December 1944, nine months before the end of the war, the WASP were dismissed from their posts, for the most part without discharge papers or any financial assistance to return to their families. The former WASP status as pilots qualified to fly military planes permitted them to ride in aircraft jumpseats to get to the nearest base to their homes, but not a single woman was given funds or extra assistance to cover transportation to their home of record. Even before the WASP found and financed their own transportation from their wartime posts, they took on the responsibility of remembering those who the program lost to WWII. Although 38 WASP perished during their wartime service, with 27 of those women being killed on active duty missions, many women and their families had to take up a collection to pay for their deceased classmates' remains to be returned to their families and for the burial. In military aviation accidents with male AAF pilots, the men's bodies were sent home to be buried with honors, but for these women both the civil service and the Army said they were not responsible.<sup>12</sup> As a result of their civilian status, they

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<sup>11</sup> The Oxford Dictionary defines the term disbandment as "the breaking up of an organized group". The term disbandment was popularized through the USAAF announcement that the WASP would be disbanded in October 1944. Other traditionally-used terms such as demobilization or inactivation are appropriate when used to describe the program as a whole because of the service members' who were assigned to Sweetwater Army Air Base.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Collins Hughes, "Were WASPs First Combat Women?," *The Stars and Stripes - The National Tribune*, October 20, 1977.

were inured without military honors or even a flag draped on their poorly crafted pine coffins. The deceased did not receive any of the comparable awards, honors, recognition, or discharge of their service that their male counterparts were given for their most ultimate sacrifice. These entitlements would have been provided by the Army if the WASP had been formally militarized. When Congress deliberated militarizing the WASP in 1944, these women were “ordered to act like ‘ladies’ and keep silent... antagonism against women pilots was rampant.”<sup>13</sup> It was not until three decades later that the women of the WASP retold the story of their heroism, and sought the Veteran’s status they deserved.

**This thesis argues that the Women Airforce Service Pilots were warriors in two senses, showcasing what women can do in military aviation, and correcting the truths of history: claiming recognition for their wartime contributions and pushing the boundaries of women’s legislative policy.<sup>14</sup>**

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<sup>13</sup> Ann Darr, “The Long Flight Home,” *U.S. News & World Report*, November 17, 1977, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Merriam-Webster defines the literary term “narrative” as a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values. The term “reclaiming the narrative” or “reclaim the narrative” has been popularized in scholarly work for over two decades. These terms refer to individuals or groups of individuals asserting or reasserting how a story about them is told, remembered, or dictated.



## HISTORIOGRAPHY

*“We live with the wind and the sand, but our eyes are on the stars”*

- WASP Motto

American women played pivotal roles during World War II, both in uniform and at home. It is popularly accepted that 6 million women joined the workforce on the home front, filling a void created by the urgency with which the U.S. entered the war. While women had been officially serving as Army and Navy Nurses since the beginning of the twentieth century, women’s involvement in the U.S. Armed Forces was formalized by Congress in May 1942 with the creation of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). This organization was converted to full status as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in July 1943, becoming the first official women’s branch of the U.S. Army. During WWII 400,000 American military women served at

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<sup>15</sup> Girl Pilots, photograph, July 19, 1943; New York City, New York. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

home and overseas in nearly all non-combat jobs, including in the Women's Reserve of the Coast Guard (SPARS), the Marine Corps Women's Reserve (WR) and the Naval Reserve, also known as the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). In 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which granted all women's components of the U.S. military permanent status in the Regular Reserve forces of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Prior to the act, women only served in times of war, and had never served in peacetime. However, WASP service was not considered the same level of participation as the other four women's branches, as male pilots were part of the full status Army Air Force, but the WASP had not become full status along with the WAC in 1943.<sup>16</sup> In fact, when the experimental program was revealed, the WASP defied cultural norms and traditional gender roles in both the military and the field of aviation.

Women have been unsung heroines in aviation since Katherine Wright sacrificed her own ambitions to support the Wright brothers' first 12-second powered flight in 1903. American Suffragettes saw great promise in the future of aviation for women, predicting that the skies would belong to everyone. Public sentiment is reflected by L. Frank Baum, author of bestselling *Wizard of Oz*, who published a novel called *The Flying Girl*, expressing that he believed women were destined to make a place for themselves in the sky.<sup>17</sup> Civilian flying was banned when the U.S. entered World War I in 1917 and, when it resumed, aircraft had significantly advanced beyond the fragile box kites that they had been before the war. The first two decades after WWI

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<sup>16</sup> It is commonly accepted that the WAC, SPARS, WAVES, Women Marine Reserves were successfully militarized because their functions were in traditionally female role, e.g. nursing, caregiving, or clerical duties, in U.S. military hospitals, personnel offices, and command staff administrative support.

<sup>17</sup> Leslie Haynsworth and David M. Toomey, *Amelia Earhart's Daughters: The Wild and Glorious Story of American Women Aviators from World War II to the Dawn of the Space Age*, 1st ed (New York: William Morrow, 1998).

became known as Aviation's Golden Age and were marked by many firsts that expanded across gender lines, including the "independent woman's... rejection of traditional femininity."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the most famous name in early aviation for most people is Amelia Earhart, who gained fame as the first woman to cross the Atlantic and mysteriously disappeared while attempting to circumnavigate the Pacific. Earhart believed that competing in air sports was a way for women to demonstrate their abilities and promoted the establishment of separate record-keeping for women by the French Fédération Aéronautique Internationale.

In 1929, Earhart founded the Ninety-Nines, an informal organization dedicated to "fostering a sense of fellowship among the licensed women pilots in the U.S." and "increasing membership by promoting women in aviation."<sup>19</sup> By 1930, there were 200 women pilots, and by 1935 there were between 700 and 800 licensed women pilots.<sup>20</sup> These women believed that they were all connected as sisters who built on one another's successes, shared one another's failures, and united together against their skeptics. The Ninety-Nines original purpose was to coordinate the interests and efforts of the women in the aviation field. In an ever-broadening sense, the organization proposed:

to assist them in any movement which will be of help to them in an aeronautical research, air racing events, acquisition of aerial experience, maintenance of an economic status in the aviation industry, administering through their air in times of emergency arising from

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<sup>18</sup> Haynsworth and Toomey, *Amelia Earhart's Daughters*

<sup>19</sup> The Ninety-Nines, Inc, "The Ninety-Nines from 1929 to 1959," Our History 99s in Aviation History Thirty Years at a Glance.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph J. Corn, "Making Flying 'Thinkable': Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-1940," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1979): 556.

fire, famine, flood and war, or any other interest that will be for their benefit and/or that of aviation in general.<sup>21</sup>

One of Earhart's closest friends, Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran, was President of the Ninety-Nines in 1941 when America's entrance into WWII was imminent. Cochran, who would become the first woman to break the sound barrier in a supersonic jet, was America's leading pilot of the time.<sup>22</sup> She introduced the idea of the WASP program in a letter to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in September 1939:

We have about 650 licensed women pilots in this country. Most of them would be of little use today, but most of them could be of great use a few months hence if properly trained and organized. And if they had some official standing or patriotic objective (rather than just fly around an airport occasionally for fun) there would be thousands more women pilots than there are now.<sup>23</sup>

Cochran had the ambition to lead these qualified women pilots who answered the nation's call to serve to free up male pilots for combat roles.<sup>24</sup>

In Spring 1941, Cochran ambitiously sought out General Arnold and volunteered "anything she could do to help" integrate women pilots in the AAF.<sup>25</sup> At the time, one of Arnold's biggest headaches was delivering American planes across the Atlantic to the British forces, which was still considered a heroic feat of aviation:

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<sup>21</sup> The Ninety-Nines, Inc, "The Ninety-Nines from 1929 to 1959"

<sup>22</sup> Cochran won the Bendix Trophy Race 1938, defeating male competitors. In 1939, she held the women's international speed record. To this day, she has broken more records in speed, distance, and altitude than any man or woman in the history of flight.

<sup>23</sup> Jacqueline Cochran, "Proposal to Eleanor Roosevelt for Women Pilots in National Emergency" (Liberty Letters, September 28, 1939).

<sup>24</sup> Charles E. Planck, *Women with Wings* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1942). pp 318.

<sup>25</sup> Jacqueline Cochran, *The Stars At Noon* (Boston: Little Brown, 1954).

Few American pilots seemed willing to make the crossing. Hap told her that if she ferried a plane to England, other pilots might be persuaded to follow.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, Cochran projected that if her crossing the Atlantic would give male pilots the courage to follow suit, it might also give the AAF the courage to recruit women.<sup>27</sup> In June 1941, Jackie commanded a crew of three, flying the Lockheed Hudson bomber to Scotland, and collaborating with British commander Pauline Gower in the ensuing weeks. Gower had formed a small women's division of Britain's Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), and her program became successful because of the British Royal Air Force's critical need for manpower that enabled it to put aside societal norms about employing womanpower from the start of the war. Cochran initially recruited 76 of the most qualified female pilots to train in military aircraft transport and ferrying, and when she came to the ATA with twenty-four female ferry pilots, Britain showed its gratitude by treating her like a celebrity.<sup>28</sup> Because of this success, in Summer 1942, General Arnold told her to start thinking about returning stateside. Six months after America's entry into the war, Arnold was beginning to feel that Cochran's non-traditional proposal for women in the AAF was no longer premature.<sup>29</sup> By Fall 1942, Cochran's WASP proposal prevailed, thus beginning her command of the AAF Women's Flying Training Detachment. By Summer 1943, Cochran's role expanded with her appointment as director of the WASP, superseding an organization of civilian women who had been flying for the Air Transport Command (ATC) under the leadership of Nancy Harkness Love.

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<sup>26</sup> Deobrah G. Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation, 1940-1985* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990). pp 29.

<sup>27</sup> Cochran, *The Stars At Noon*.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation*, pp 41.

<sup>29</sup> Granger "Evidence Supporting Military Service"

By Spring 1944, the national press discovered the WASP program. The question of WASP militarization was introduced in congressional legislation and reported on the front pages of all major newspapers. Public opinion, including editorial pieces in *The Washington Post* D.C. *Post* and *TIME* magazine, urged these women to step down and give their jobs back to men. At the time of its proposal, General Arnold, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and the War Department supported the legislation, arguing that there was room for both women and men to work as pilots in the Army Air Forces. However, these male leaders were still required to focus their attention on the conclusion of the war, and lobbying from civilian male pilots who feared women pilots would take their jobs led to the defeat of the bill on the floor.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, the leaders of the WASP program, including General Arnold, resolved themselves to the idea that these women were meant to return focus to the home, not replace men.

In December 1944, nearly twenty months after the first class of WASP graduated in May 1943, the final class graduated in December 1944 and the WASP program was terminated. General Arnold gave a speech at this ceremony, expressing his gratitude for the WASP's service:

You and more than 900 of your sisters have shown you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers. I salute you... We of the Army Air Force are proud of you. We will never forget our debt to you.

Even with these promises, the program ended on the heels of the failure of H.R. 4219, a bill which would have militarized the WASP. When the newly independent U.S. Air Force offered reserve commissions to former WASP a few years later, those who were accepted were assigned to administrative and support duties and did not fly military aircraft again.<sup>31</sup> All WASP

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<sup>30</sup> Granger "Evidence Supporting Military Service"

<sup>31</sup> "Jacqueline Cochran and the Women's Airforce Service Pilots," National Archives and Records Administration: The Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home.

documents were in turn sealed and classified, their contributions to the war effort nearly unknown, and inaccessible to historians, for three decades.



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## CHAPTER ONE

*“This is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with all our ability and every weapon possible. Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used.”<sup>34</sup>*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

### ***Part One: Promises Unfulfilled - The Missing Chapter in Air Force History***

The WASP’s gender was the reason for the program’s military designation as experimental, and defined the women’s service, from its inception. With the country in a state of emergency, Jackie Cochran began drawing a plan for the training and use of American women pilots. Arnold placed his trust in Cochran because of her proven track record, having “flown almost everything with wings” and winning “air races from men who now are general officers of

<sup>32</sup> Photograph From the Graduation of WASP Class 44-W-10, photograph, December 7, 1944; University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

<sup>33</sup> Leaders Saluting, photograph, Date Unknown; University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

<sup>34</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day September 1, 1942,” The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, September 1, 1942.

the Air Force.”<sup>35</sup> Arnold, who would come to be known as the Father of the Air Force, became one of the first military pilots worldwide when he was taught to fly by the Wright Brothers in 1911.<sup>36</sup> He was unsure if women could fly military aircraft as men could:

Frankly, I didn't know... whether a slip of a young girl could fight the controls of a B-17 in the heavy weather they would naturally encounter in operational flying. Those of us who had been flying for twenty or thirty years knew that flying an airplane was something you do not learn overnight.<sup>37</sup>

Arnold's concerns manifested in his belief that women were “too high strung” for military aviation and would discredit the Army Air Forces he had worked to establish.<sup>38</sup> When Cochran presented the plan that formed the basis for the use of the WASP in the AAF, she was convinced that women pilots would be crucial to the war effort, and wanted to prove that women could do the same training as men. The program was formed, however, within the framework of civil service rather than military service for the purposes of expediency, to counter the delivery crisis the AAF faced with a new warplane coming off the assembly line every six seconds.<sup>39</sup> General Arnold believed “it would take Congress too long to grant military status,” giving the program civilian status “so they could be trained and begin flying as soon as possible to help the war effort.”<sup>40</sup> This framework would prove to be a significant obstacle for the WASP in the coming

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<sup>35</sup> Henry H. Arnold, “Address By General H.H. Arnold, Commanding General, December 7, 1944” Press Release, (War Department, Bureau of Public Relation, Press Branch, December 7, 1944), *Wings Across America*.

<sup>36</sup> “Here's Why Hap Arnold, a Practical Visionary, Became the ‘Father of the Air Force,’” *Air Force Times*, November 19, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Arnold, “Address By General H.H. Arnold”

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Parrish, “Wingtip to Wingtip: Women in Aviation and the Pioneering WASP,” in *One Hundred Years of Powered Flight, 1903-2003*, by Royal Aeronautical Society and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, ed. Wayne Fessey (Hadleigh, Essex: Brigade 2000, 2003). pp 69-71.

<sup>39</sup> Dana T Parker, *Building Victory: Aircraft Manufacturing in the Los Angeles Area in World War II* (Cypress, CA: D.T. Parker, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Marie O’Dean Bishop Parrish, n.d., *Wings Across America*, Baylor University.

years. Jackie Cochran convinced the first class of trainees of their necessity in saying that this was “the greatest opportunity ever offered to women pilots anywhere in the world.”<sup>41</sup> From August 1943 to December 1944, the WASP were intensely proud to be part of a unique, groundbreaking program which allowed them to serve their country in unprecedented ways.<sup>42</sup>

While serving in the WASP, these women always believed they would be militarized and that some of them would have the opportunity to become officers.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Cochran asserted to each class of WASP that they were not to report to training if they were not prepared for militarization.<sup>44</sup> Cochran similarly documented in her 1954 memoir, *The Stars at Noon*, that she and General Arnold “agreed that militarization would be desirable and necessary if the program were to be more than a short-lived experimental test.”<sup>45</sup> Throughout the program’s duration, the intent and expectation of militarization caused the Army to treat the program “as effectively military as legal constraints permitted.”<sup>46</sup> By Spring 1944, General Arnold observed that the WASP had proven themselves throughout their service and, in a particularly notable speech anticipating militarization, Arnold acknowledged pride in the women’s performance:

I’m looking forward to the day when Women Airforce Service Pilots take the place of practically all the male pilots of the AAF in this country for the duration. Indeed, this organization has come to serve a variety of useful purposes in the Army Air Forces

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<sup>41</sup> Barbara Selby, “The Fifinellas,” *Flying 33 Magazine*, July 1943.

<sup>42</sup> David Roberts, “Men Didn’t Have to Prove They Could Fly, But Women Did” Clipping, The Portal to Texas History, Unknown.

<sup>43</sup> Mildred McLelland Christansen, interview by Deanie Parrish, 22 May 2000, Wings Across America.

<sup>44</sup> Charles W. Duncan, “Letter to Mr. James T. McIntyre, Jr. Enclosed: Summary of Historical Review, Telegram to Potential WASP,” October 21, 1977, Wings Across America.

<sup>45</sup> Cochran, *The Stars At Noon*

<sup>46</sup> Duncan, “Letter to Mr. James T. McIntyre, Jr.”

organization. We're proud of you and we welcome you as a part of the Army Air Forces.

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The War Department crafted legislation for militarization of the WASP in early 1944 using precedents from when the WAAC was converted to the WAC in 1943. Since the women who served in this Army auxiliary force credited all their service as active duty military time, the WASP had no reason to doubt they would be militarized.<sup>48</sup> H.R. 4219, dated February 1944, was sanctioned by the Armed Services, which submitted a favorable report, and by the Armed Services Congressional Committee.<sup>49</sup> Even with expectations for militarization created and fostered in the actions of the program's leadership and the military environment that these women were subject to, the bill met unexpected opposition, which forced the WASP program's closure in December 1944.

The WASP were disbanded after H.R. 4219 failed by a margin of 19 votes.<sup>50</sup> This long-awaited legislation would have granted these women full military status for the duration of the war and six months thereafter, including insurance coverage, hospitalization, burial benefits, and Veteran status. There was no logical reason for Congress to reject this bill because the training program success had been meticulously reported. Operationally, WASP had lower accident rates and surpassed male AAF performance in every measurable way.<sup>51</sup> In its rejection of the legislation, Congress defied wartime precedents and bureaucratic expectation of passage:

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<sup>47</sup> Henry H. Arnold, "Address by General Henry Arnold, March 13," Speech, Wings Across America, March 13, 1944.

<sup>48</sup> Allison Heltz, "House Bill 4219," The Women Air Force Service Pilots: Breaking The Gender Barrier In The Skies.

<sup>49</sup> WASP Congressional Hearings Committee, "ACTION NOW," July 1977, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, The Women's Collection at Texas Women's University.

<sup>50</sup> Heltz, "House Bill 4219"

<sup>51</sup> Jacqueline Cochran, "Report from Jacqueline Cochran to Commanding General of the Army Air Forces," Report, The Portal to Texas History, 1944.

Congress had never rejected a bill supported by the War Department or commanding generals during wartime... Not since the beginning of the war in 1941 had any legislation supported by the Army Air Forces been turned down... and the bill had been endorsed by the Committee on Military Affairs.<sup>52</sup>

The failure of this legislation was acknowledged in Cochran's final report to General Arnold, which highlighted her number one recommendation: for any future women's Air Force pilots program, to be "militarized from the beginning."<sup>53</sup> She in turn suggested that the report be "removed from the confidential list" and released for general publication, in part to correct the factual mistakes publicized by the WASP's adversaries.<sup>54</sup> However, the press release published by the War Department in conjunction with this final report told a different story. In Fall 1944, this press release selectively quoted Cochran's statement expressing that the pilot shortage that existed when the U.S. entered the war had been effectively corrected. If militarized, the WASP "would be using flying time... that could be spread to better advantage among the available male pilots."<sup>55</sup> Cochran and the War Department's press release was informed by evolving public opinion that found the WASP's service in traditionally male roles threatening to pervading cultural norms.

### ***Part Two: The Fog of War - A Sign of the Times***

Meanwhile, General Arnold was defamed in press articles that insinuated he was manipulated by Cochran and the WASP's "feminine wiles" in the midst of a "political situation

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<sup>52</sup> Merryman, *Clipped Wings*. "Chapter 5: No Allies for the WASP"

<sup>53</sup> Cochran, "Report from Jacqueline Cochran"

<sup>54</sup> Jacqueline Cochran, "WASP Report: Letter to Commanding General, Army Air Force," June 1, 1945, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), The Women's Collection at Texas Women's University.

<sup>55</sup> "WASP Report, statement from Miss Jacqueline Cochran, Director of Women Pilots for the AAF" Press Release, (War Department, Bureau of Public Relation, Press Branch, December 19, 1944), *Wings Across America*.

which arose, caus[ing] several civilian male pilot organizations to oppose the Militarization Bill.”<sup>56</sup> The propaganda campaign by these men fanned the fear that women would take the jobs that they deserved post-war both in the AAF and in civilian positions. Many Members of Congress learned about the WASP for the first time through public outcry, and while “no one knows exactly how many of those civilian pilots, flight instructors, and trainees were protesting the bill,” those who did “made sure they were heard” and “did not characterize the WASP kindly.”<sup>57</sup> The opposition to the bill prevailed, supported by the mid-1940’s masculine normality both in civilian and military aviation roles.<sup>58</sup> Despite supporting WASP militarization leading up to H.R. 4219, pervading public opinion and personal attacks on his character seemingly influenced General Arnold. This reversal is particularly apparent in a letter sent to the WASP from General Arnold upon their release from service:

The war situation has changed and the time has come when your volunteered services are no longer needed. The situation is that if you continue in service, you will be replacing instead of releasing our young men. I know that the WASP wouldn’t want that.<sup>59</sup>

By the time that the WASP were notified of their disbandment, the decision of Congress and the War Department was impossible to reverse or resist. Although the bill’s failure cast uncertainty on the program’s future, General Arnold’s letter conclusively gave them only a few more months to complete their service. The WASP continued flying operational missions and training right up until the final class of 71 women graduated right before V-E Day.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cochran, *The Stars At Noon*.

<sup>57</sup> Merryman, *Clipped Wings*. Pp 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> Henry H. Arnold, “Deactivation of WASP. H. H. Arnold to Director of Women Pilots,” October 1, 1944, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University.

<sup>59</sup> Henry H. Arnold, “Letter from General Henry Arnold, Commanding General U.S. Army Air Forces,” October 1, 1944. Personal collection of Elaine D. Harmon.

<sup>60</sup> Merryman, *Clipped Wings*. Pp 120-125.

Despite the general praise of General Arnold and Jackie Cochran in the historical telling of the WASP story, it appears their leadership was focused elsewhere as the program concluded. By a combination of action and inaction, Cochran created significant obstacles for the WASP establishing their wartime legacy, both in public law and in history books. Cochran's actions during the time leading to the disbandment of the WASP program do not necessarily prove malice, but raise the question of whether Cochran politically sacrificed the WASP in advancing her own career in aviation. In her memoir, Cochran admitted that she was "not as optimistic as most of the girls in the WASP program as to the future that they would carve out for themselves in flying."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, her demeanor alienated two other powerful women military leaders, WAFS Director Nancy Love and WAC Director Oveta Culp Hobby. Love contributed to a Congressional Civil Service Committee investigation, chaired by Georgia Congressman Robert Ramspeck, that reported many inaccurate details about the program and characterized WASP pilots as incompetent.<sup>62</sup> Cochran failed to support the WASP during this critical time in their careers, choosing not to refute the fallacies made by this report and the vocal groups of male pilots. Cochran knew that her reputation of being a "difficult woman" would color her testimony, and drawing attention to herself in this manner could jeopardize her ability to carve out a future career in aviation.<sup>63</sup> She even ordered the WASP not to testify in congressional proceedings, or write to Members of Congress or the press.<sup>64</sup> This instruction posed a significant obstacle for the WASP in telling the story of their wartime contributions. Cochran herself was not discharged

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<sup>61</sup> Cochran, *The Stars At Noon*.

<sup>62</sup> House of Representatives, 78th Congress, 2d Sess, "Committee on Appropriations. Report No. 1606," Military Establishment Appropriation Bill, 1945. (June 7, 1944), The Jacqueline Cochran Collection, The Eisenhower Center Archives. Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>63</sup> Cochran, *The Stars At Noon*.

<sup>64</sup> Merryman, *Clipped Wings*. pp 66.

from the AAF, but abruptly abandoned her role as WASP director, wanting to “do a little real fighting myself” during the war in the Pacific. She accepted a commission in the Air Force Reserve and, after the war, went on to set many notable flying records. This caused the WASP to question the possible implications of political influence on Cochran’s actions.

Some of the WASP’s lingering distrust also stemmed from Cochran’s personal and working relationship with General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe.<sup>65</sup> Eisenhower’s documented discrimination against women, especially lesbians, within the military was well-known and has been historically critiqued.<sup>66</sup> A further complication, Cochran and her husband Floyd Odlum, who was reputed to be one of the ten richest men in the world, went on to support Eisenhower politically, playing a large role in his presidential campaign. Given that a military leader’s top responsibilities are mission accomplishment and troop welfare, Cochran’s actions demonstrate that she failed the WASP in the latter when they needed her most. Although Cochran received the Distinguished Service Medal for her wartime service and earned a commission in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, the rest of the WASP separated from the Armed Forces the same way they entered, at their own expense. Cochran subsequently took credit for the commissioning of a limited number of WASP in the Air Force Reserve, and their acceptance as enlisted officers without flying status. In the chapter of her memoir about the WASP, which she claimed to be the first publication of their wartime contributions, Cochran asserted that she would not consider her work as Director of the WASP truly finished until the barring of women pilots in the Air Force was lifted.<sup>67</sup> Because the WASP

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<sup>65</sup> “Jacqueline Cochran and the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots”

<sup>66</sup> Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). pp 33-51.

<sup>67</sup> This assertion was not true, but it is important to reveal as a demonstration of Cochran’s self-promotion

continued to admire her as an icon of women aviators, a significant period of time would elapse before they recognized the necessity of the WASP reclaiming the narratives of their own history.



## CHAPTER TWO

*"The myth that the designation of these ladies as veterans would set a precedent for other civilian groups to claim veterans' rights has been exposed time and again. The girl pilots were denied commissions as military officers for one reason alone—their sex."*

-Senator Barry Goldwater

### ***Part One: Challenging the Narrative - For the First Time***

Regardless of whether Cochran and General Arnold were derelict in their leadership duties as the program was disbanded, the WASP recognized a lingering sense of hurt and confusion. On the whole, the WASP felt lucky to have been able to participate in the program, and felt great pride for the role they played in the victory in Europe<sup>69</sup>. However, most of the

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<sup>68</sup> Swinging down along the ramp at the AAF's Training Command, photograph, Date Unknown; National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland.

<sup>69</sup> This conclusion has been drawn from oral histories conducted and collected amongst numerous archives including the National WASP WWII Museum, Texas Woman's University, Wings Across America, and Women in Military Service for America Memorial, amongst others. Some scholars have suggested that oral histories are based on memories and that memory as a resource is unreliable. Memories of WASP are filtered through their experiences after the war and accounts given by others. They recorded these resources 55-75 years after being disbanded. Some issues are remembered and selected as more important and others evaded. All people are subject to shared and popular memories that affect their accounts, and memory of the past is influenced by the events of the present. The oral histories of the WASP represent the women's accounts and raise the possibility of challenging the tradition and dominant male expectations.

WASP were largely unaware that their program was experimental at the time, especially after being led to believe throughout their training and service that they would become militarized and converted to active duty status as the Women's Army Corps had been. Some women have since expressed that they would have rather accepted positions in the WAC if they knew the WASP was to be disbanded.<sup>70</sup> However, if the WASP publicly voiced their disappointment with the closure of the program or their desire to stay in their roles, they were accused of being unpatriotic. While we may speculate if the militarization outcome would have been different had the WASP been notified earlier of their disbandment or able to voice their opinions in the congressional proceedings, this was not the reality of the WASP situation. After disbandment, these women were further unable to express or document their frustration as a result of their service records being completely sealed and classified. In fact, as a result of the WASP records being sealed and classified for over 35 years, many of the WASP and their families were denied the closure that they needed and rightfully deserved.

Having since blamed this injustice on complacency, WASP have in turn blamed themselves for not speaking up or pushing harder at the time<sup>71</sup>. The WASP have long since expressed regret about how their demobilization was handled, recounting their surprise and disappointment. The complications of cultural and gender bias towards WASP service during wartime can inform the complicated emotions felt by these women. Understanding the societal climate of the 1940's can further aid in demonstrating their understandable frustration with this gender biased disbandment. Consequently, the WASP story has been a missing chapter in the

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<sup>70</sup> Granger "Evidence Supporting Military Service"

<sup>71</sup> Patricia Collins Hughes, "WASPs Warned Against Complacency," Clipping, The Stars and Stripes-The National Tribune, Washington, D.C., August 25, 1977. pp 3.

history of the Air Force, the history of aviation, and the history of the United States of America<sup>72</sup>. The burden has thus been placed upon the WASP themselves to correct the truths of their story and seek their own recognition for their contributions.

Upon receiving notification of deactivation, these women created the Order of Fifinella, also referred to as Fifinella or the O.O.F. This group was named after their wartime symbol, a female flying gremlin created and licensed for the WASP by Walt Disney<sup>73</sup>. A dainty winged sprite, Fifinella has become a unique emblem and symbol of pride for women pilots of all generations. The creation of this organization was motivated by the lingering hurt felt by many WASP, and the desire to reunite during peacetime. The O.O.F mission was to maintain contact between the WASP post-war, and especially to honor those who passed away or were injured. Fifinella's leaders were elected officers, who oversaw the body and operations of the organization in military fashion and in tandem with an advisory council, organized as a political body with representatives from each of the 18 WASP training classes. The leaders' roles included disseminating information about reemployment opportunities, maintaining communication among the WASP, and forming a unified organization to influence legislation and potential employers in aviation. In the years following, the organization evolved into producing bi-annual newsletters, coordinating reunions across the country, and maintaining a roster for all its members. However, by the end of 1949, the officers had largely decided to limit communication as members gradually and organically lost contact:

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<sup>72</sup> "Public Law 111-40: To Award a Congressional Gold Medal to the Women Airforce Service Pilots" (July 1, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Gunther B. Lessing, "Permission to Use Fifinella," Text, The Portal to Texas History, January 25, 1945.

They spent the next thirty years spread out across the United States and for the most part lost touch with one another as they moved on with their lives - changing last names when they got married and not establishing a widespread formal network to stay connected.<sup>74</sup>

Few of the WASP continued careers in aviation, civil service, or the military, as they followed through with traditional gender-biased expectations to return home to domestic roles post-war.

It wasn't until early in the 1970's that the members of the Order of Fifinella formally reunited as WASP sisters, rather than just long lost friends. In the early 1970s, it was announced in a press release that the U.S. Navy, responding to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, was accepting women for pilot training, and that "for the first time in history" women would fly American military aircraft, having "never before opened aviation roles to women in military branches"<sup>75</sup>. After over 20 years, the Order of Fifinella reunited with a new sense of purpose and dedicated leaders who stepped forward again, this time determined to tell the complete story of their courageous and patriotic wartime service. At this point, the WASP records had been sealed and stored as classified material for nearly three decades. Reuniting where it all started at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, on June 23rd, 1972, over 300 former-WASP spent the weekend joyfully recounting their memories with tearful embraces and laughter, reminiscing over scrapbooks and photo albums.<sup>76</sup> Over the course of the weekend, one question persisted through the excitement of the ceremonies, speeches, and notes passed between attendees: would they finally be recognized as Veterans, receiving their rightful benefits and place in history?<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Erin Miller, *Final Flight Final Fight: My Grandmother, the WASP, and Arlington National Cemetery*, 2019. pp 87.

<sup>75</sup> Eric Pace, "Navy Puts 1st Woman in Pilot Training," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1973, sec. Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Women Airforce Service Pilots (U.S.), "1972 WASP Reunion Souvenir Album," Book, The Portal to Texas History, 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Micki Van Deventer, "WASPS Reunion Includes More Than Tea And Old Times," Clipping, "WASPS Reunion Includes More Than Tea And Old Times," Stillwater News-Press, Stillwater, Oklahoma. p. 17., July 2, 1972.

Motivated by the camaraderie rekindled by their “homecoming” and driven by the national media attention on the re-opening of military aviation roles to women, the Order of Fifinella renewed the process to seek militarization and tell their story to the country. These women were determined to claim recognition for their wartime contributions and hold the Department of Defense to their Commander’s promise, “we will never forget our debt to you,” no matter the amount of time, energy, or work necessary to cement their rightful place in history.

***Part Two: Opening Salvo - Men Take the Lead***

Between June 1972 and September 1978, the Order of Fifinella mainly organized the WASP around the issue of militarization in what became known to them as the Battle of Congress. However, the historical importance of their wartime contributions was once again overshadowed by the male leaders. Joining the WASP at the 1972 reunion was Colonel William “Bruce” Arnold, son of General Hap Arnold. Colonel Arnold followed his father's footsteps as a West Point graduate, seeing action in the Pacific at the end of WWII and during the Korean Conflict. Like his father, he transferred to the Air Force, and specialized in research and development. After leaving the Air Force, he became a legislative liaison and skilled lobbyist based in Washington, DC. Also like his father, he maintained personal contact with members of the WASP and lamented the failure of the WASP Militarization Bill in 1944.<sup>78</sup> Arnold sought to act on his father's regrets after he passed away, and was similarly frustrated when he saw the U.S. Navy press release boasting to bring women to military aviation for the first time in history<sup>79</sup>. Arnold’s connections in Washington and knowledge about advocacy campaigns inarguably helped guide and open doors to the WASP. He has long been credited as one of the main driving

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<sup>78</sup> Women Airforce Service Pilots, “1972 WASP Reunion Souvenir Album”

<sup>79</sup> Kathy Sawyer, “WWII Women Fliers Seek Equality,” Clipping, “WWII Women Fliers Seek Equality,” The Washington Post, Washington, D.C., March 6, 1977. pp. A1 & A10, March 6, 1977.

forces behind the Battle of Congress, as one of the original non-WASP supporters who believed in their mission and was dedicated to “correct the injustice” they faced after the war<sup>80</sup>. However, his inexperience in working on women’s issues contributed to an underestimation of the framework within which he was working, and the time and effort it would take to achieve this mission. Without the same personal experience that the WASP had, Arnold could not understand that even though these “Fly Girls” from the Golden Age of Aviation sometimes attracted more attention and headlines than their male counterparts, they were a minority that comprised only three percent of licensed American pilots.<sup>81</sup> Failing to persuade lawmakers to pass a bill, or even an amendment, in his initial legislative push during Fall and Winter 1972, Arnold realized that he would need to spend more time learning about the unique situation of the WASP to help this cause. Only after strategizing with the leadership of the Order of the Fifinella, understanding their goals and the unique nature of their framework and legacy, could Arnold aid the WASP in their newest mission.

One of the policymakers who the WASP were able to enlist with the help of Bruce Arnold’s legislative connections was Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater was one of only eight senators who voted against the Equal Rights Amendment. Although he strongly opposed women in combat, he became the WASP’s greatest political advocate. He had flown alongside many women in the WASP program during his time in the AAF Ferry Command during WWII. Following his failed presidential run, he heard of the appeal to provide recognition to the service

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<sup>80</sup> Lucile Wise, “Report of WASP Militarization Campaign,” June 1999, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University.

<sup>81</sup> William Bruce Arnold, “Final Report on the Militarization Committee,” September 20, 1978, Women Airforce Service Pilots, Gateway to Women’s History.

of the WASP in the war<sup>82</sup>. As part of Goldwater's quest to transform the socially conservative image of the Republican Party by championing a feminist cause, he joined Bruce Arnold and the leaders of the Order of Fifinella in seeking Veteran status for the women he flew with during wartime<sup>83</sup>. One of the few legislators who supported the WASP from the mid 1970's on, Senator Goldwater regularly testified in favor of WASP militarization in hopes to put the issue on a piece of legislation, appealing to members of congress across the aisle:

Now, here are women pilots who served in war time at very dangerous work and who are not entitled to veterans benefits because of a technicality they could not prevent, the fact that they are women.<sup>84</sup>

While working to build bridges in the Senate, Goldwater earned a large amount of credit for the outreach and coalition building that ultimately aided the WASP cause. Historians often cite Goldwater's Senate bills as a main factor behind the success of the Battle of Congress, and the stereotypical image of a front-facing male leader paired with Goldwater's record of service certainly aided their mission<sup>85</sup>. However, the prevailing historical perception that Barry Goldwater single-handedly led the WASP through their legislative battle is inaccurate. Although a crucial contributor to the Battle of Congress, Senator Goldwater's public assertion of his championship of the WASP's successes as part of his own narrative became another roadblock to

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<sup>82</sup> Senator Barry Goldwater, "Hearing before a Select Subcommittee," Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 95th Congress (1977).

<sup>83</sup> The Republican Party in the 1970's was undoubtedly defined by racist, sexist, and homophobic policies. Goldwater attempted to change both his image and the perception of the party through supporting a women-centered cause, although the WASP movement was not considered feminist at the time. For further information, see: Matthew Dallek, "The Conservative 1960s: From the perspective of the 1990s, it's the big political story of the era" in *The Atlantic*, December 1995; Larry J Sabato, "How Goldwater Changed Campaigns Forever" in *Politico*, 2014; Lee Edwards, "Barry M. Goldwater: The Most Consequential Loser in American Politics" in *Heritage*, July 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Goldwater, "Hearing before a Select Subcommittee"

<sup>85</sup> "Goldwater Speaks for WASPs," Clipping, Sweetwater Reporter, Sweetwater Texas, October 23, 1977. p. 1-2, October 23, 1977.

the WASP's reclamation of the narratives of both their wartime service and their grassroots policy work.

One hero of the WASP whose impact has been forgotten in the history of the Battle of Congress Congresswoman Lindy Boggs, the first woman elected to Congress from Louisiana. Regularly testifying to her democratic colleagues, appearing in numerous committee meetings and every session relevant to the WASP, Boggs insisted that the Women Airforce Service Pilots had a voice in the House<sup>86</sup>. Alongside Boggs, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs' (HVAC) only female member was Margaret Heckler of Massachusetts, a Republican with a distinguished history as a spokesperson for women's rights. Boggs and Heckler managed to gain backing across party lines in Congress. With bipartisan support, these Congresswomen championed legislation by the Order of Fifinella through committee and onto the floor of the House<sup>87</sup>. By the time the final vote came, Congresswomen Boggs and Heckler were responsible for the G.I. Improvement Act becoming the first piece of legislation in history to be co-sponsored by every woman member in Congress. But the stories of these women have been overshadowed by those of Senator Goldwater, just as the memory of the Order of Fifinella has been overshadowed by Colonel Arnold's legacy, and the legacy of the Women Airforce Service Pilots has been largely lost to history altogether. When considering the implications of the time period during which the WASP first fought, we can understand why it was necessary to rely on the platforms of respected male leaders. The WASP movement gained successful momentum during the time that the public perceived it to be led largely by men. But as many of these

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<sup>86</sup> "WASPS' Stung By Government," Article, The Portal to Texas History, Unknown.

<sup>87</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

extraordinary female heroes are taking their final flights, we need to consider the dynamic that forced this narrative, and how we can uncover the true narrative of the Battle of Congress.



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### CHAPTER THREE

*“Stop feeling sorry for yourself and do something about it.”*

-Bernice Falk Haydu, WASP

#### ***Part One: To Right a 33 Year Wrong***

In the story of the WASP Militarization campaign, the women who served in these heroic roles in World War II took on the role of protagonists, telling their own stories while leading the charge. During the 1972 reunion, it was WASP Dorothy Young who began the conversation on re-seeking militarization, becoming the catalyst of this new campaign<sup>89</sup>. “Dottie” was the first WASP to receive her wing and served as wing commander of the 319th AAF Flying Training Detachment in 1943. Her feisty demeanor earned her the loving nickname “the little general.” As the acting President of the Order of Fifinella, Young was excited to begin gauging interest in

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<sup>88</sup> WASP reunion at Avenger Field... A Flyby of Memories, Photograph, September 10, 1972; University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

<sup>89</sup> Betty Pettitt Nicholas, “Letter: Betty Pettitt Nicholas,” n.d., Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University.

re-mobilizing a movement for militarization among the leaders and allies of the WASP in attendance. By the end of the weekend, Young had persuaded Bruce Arnold to take action on his father's dreams and stand with the WASP in their new political battle<sup>90</sup>. Young believed that to finally achieve militarization, Fifinella needed bold, unwavering leaders who could dedicate themselves to this challenge. Some of the new leaders who Dottie nodded to were Nancy Crews, Mary Jones, Lola Ricci, and Mary "Marty" Wyall. Upon the conclusion of the reunion, the new Order of Fifinella Executive Board was elected, with Crews as President, Jones as Secretary and Treasurer, Ricci as the Newsletter Editor, Wyall as Historian, and Leoti "DiDi" Deaton as a permanent board member<sup>91</sup>.

In a change of leadership after the reunion, the newly elected President of the Order of Fifinella, Nancy Crews formed the Militarization Committee, led by Jones and chaired by Colonel Arnold. Volunteer Committee members travelled at their own expense to Washington, D.C. in March 1973 for their first meeting, where they discussed offensive strategy. Some of the topics initially debated included who would be covered by the legislation, the steps necessary to achieve their goals, and the direction to take to successfully get congressional backing and approval<sup>92</sup>. Some of Crews's first actions as President included sending letters to every member of the Order of Fifinella and all reunion attendees with the goal of maintaining personnel records. Crews similarly reached out to key WASP allies, Veterans' organizations, and past leaders in the AAF who lauded the WASP program in hopes many would take the nod from Arnold to step up and aid the WASP. At this point, Crews and the Board operated out of their own personal

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<sup>90</sup> Dora Dougherty Strother, "Letter from Dora Dougherty Strother to Rigdon Edwards," Letter, The Portal to Texas History, July 27, 1972.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Jones, "Annual Meeting of Officers Order of Fifinella," Text, The Portal to Texas History, April 14, 1973.

<sup>92</sup> Jones, "Annual Meeting of Officers Order of Fifinella"

households and Arnold's office in Washington, D.C. With Arnold chairing the committee, he assured the Board that he was making sufficient progress towards congressional action for the WASP. The committee was hopeful that they would achieve this goal with the proposition of H.R. 15035, which would have considered all WASP time as military service and therefore entitled each WASP who entered training to an honorable discharge. Successful passage of the bill would have immediately made all WASP Veterans of World War II and entitled them to all benefits afforded to former servicemembers<sup>93</sup>. Arnold and the Militarization Committee established many best practices, however they underestimated the work that would be required to ensure the passage a bill of this kind through Congress, and H.R. 15035 did not advance during the 1973 legislative session.

### ***Part Two: New Girls in Charge - The Impact and Legacy of Bee Haydu***

Arnold, Crews, and the other members of O.O.F. Board and Militarization Committee knew that they would need to take a different approach to achieving their legislative goals. Recognizing the personal involvement necessary for the militarization effort, women stepped up and took charge in a new way. In 1975, Bernice Falk "Bee" Haydu took on the role of the President of the Order of Fifinella, elected alongside a new Executive Board, united by a singular goal: achieving WASP militarization. Bee was a trailblazer both during and after the war — ferrying aircraft, flight instructing, flying a comedy airshow act, and becoming one of the first women aviation executives in New Jersey.<sup>94</sup> Serving alongside Bee, new board members included Vice President Sara Hayden, Chief of Staff/Executive Officer DiDi Deaton, Secretary/Treasurer Elizabeth "Betty" Nicholas, Newsletter Editor Betty Cross, and Historian

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<sup>93</sup> Arnold, "Final Report on the Militarization Committee"

<sup>94</sup> "Bernice 'Bee' Falk Haydu Biography," Women in Aviation International, 2012.

Marty Wyall. The members of the Board began their term by asserting an open and public communication policy and desire to achieve the WASP militarization mission:

When asked if my name could be placed on the ballot for President, I confessed that I might have expected to be offered the Presidency of the U.S., but never that of the O.O.F. And now that elected, I want you to know how very honored I am. Our "administration" will be running an "open door" policy, so here is how I can be reached.<sup>95</sup>

Bee's collaborative style of leadership differed from the top-down tactics of the organization during wartime and the expedient style of the previous board. This policy of open communications stimulated a greater collaboration within the Order of Fifinella itself, which would eventually prove itself to be crucial to the WASP militarization effort and the proceedings of the Battle of Congress. Because the Board had set this precedent, the expectation of openness allowed them to in turn ask for openness and support from its members in supporting the goals set by the Board and the Militarization Committee.

After rallying the "troops," Bee and the rest of the Board began a hotwash that started with examining the failures of past efforts to seek militarization and recognition, creating a new plan that incorporated many elements of military strategy for achieving their goals. Bee's leadership as a beloved bridge-builder who united the WASP against the misogynistic perceptions of their opponents is considered by many to be the turning point in the Battle of Congress. One of the fundamental failures that she identified was the lack of a permanent WASP lobbying presence in D.C., where the Militarization Committee had convened irregularly and Bruce Arnold's energies were divided between many other projects.<sup>96</sup> To solve this problem, Bee

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<sup>95</sup> "WASP Newsletter, November 1975," Newsletter, The Women's Collection at Texas Women's University, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, November 1975.

<sup>96</sup> "WASP Newsletter, November 1975"

began commuting between New Jersey, Florida, and Washington, D.C. on a regular basis alongside other members of the executive board. Pursuant to this commitment, the board made the significant decision to allocate dues from the Order of Fifinella to rent an office in the Army-Navy Club in D.C. to serve as an operational WASP Headquarters, archival space for historian Marty Wyall, and the base of operations for their resurgent campaign.

Alongside new Board elections came an expanded Militarization Committee: Byrd Howell Granger, Doris Tanner, Dora Dougherty Strother, Betty Nicholas, Ziggy Hunter, Sara Hayden, Betty Cross, Wyall, and Deaton. Under the tenacious leadership of Bee, the committee reorganized, focusing on outreach and communication<sup>97</sup>. Although fairly certain of opinions and priorities after the reunions of the early 1970's and the initial disappointment from the WASP on the failure of H.R. 15035, the renamed WASP Congressional Hearings Committee began their mission by sending a new survey to the WASP, asking for feedback on their desire to be militarized. In this survey, the committee primarily sought to gauge how eager the WASP were to achieve recognition, and if the WASP had any service-connected health problems, including injuries and disabilities caused or aggravated by their service.<sup>98</sup> The centering of this question was mostly related to the age of the WASPs — the youngest WASPs were in their early 50's at this point — and the free healthcare that the WASP would have received had they been recognized as being mobilized during the war, which was considered a tremendous benefit. The committee also prioritized this question because Veterans Hospitals give preference to service-connected health problems.<sup>99</sup> This survey set a new precedent for communications with

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<sup>97</sup> Nicholas, "Letter: Betty Pettitt Nicholas"

<sup>98</sup> "Survey by WASP Congressional Hearings Comm. c / o Army-Navy Club in D.C.," n.d., Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, The Women's Collection at Texas Women's University.

<sup>99</sup> Jones, "Annual Meeting of Officers Order of Fifinella"

the membership of the Order of Fifinella, and empowered its leaders to continue asking for additional support and input from the WASP while maintaining openness and responsiveness.

### ***Part Three: Permission to Speak Freely?***

While chairing the WASP militarization committee, Bruce Arnold had previously instructed the WASP to “not obtain publicity regarding militarization for the WASPs until he feels the time is proper”<sup>100</sup>. However, the new board and committee members began advocating for a change in tactics, realizing that if they wanted militarization to be a success, they would need to extend their policy of open communication beyond the Order of Fifinella and into the communities they were asking to champion their cause. They incorporated existing information, gathered from reunions, the newsletters, and the survey, to develop a new communications system that they compared to a chain letter. Dividing the country into five regions, they set regional liaisons, also known as Communication Captains, who coordinated toll-free WATTS and 800 lines. The Communications Captains enabled, mobilized, and motivated WASPs across the country as stakeholders in the mobilization proceedings in DC.<sup>101</sup> This new system was revolutionary in the 1970s, and similarly allowed the Congressional Hearings Committee to communicate their progress quickly and efficiently to their supporters, to stay on top of their opposition, to collect petitions across the country, and to communicate their needs with their partners and supporters. The collection of petitions proved to be particularly powerful as the congressional hearings proceeded and the Order of Fifinella needed to harness the power of the

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<sup>100</sup> “WASP Newsletter, November 1975”

<sup>101</sup> Bernice Falk Haydu, “Letter from Bernice Haydu to Communications Captains, June 1, 1977,” Letter, The Portal to Texas History, 1977.

media.<sup>102</sup> The committee also created a new hearings bulletin which reported to the WASP and their families the progress of the congressional hearings themselves. This bulletin allowed the committee to ask for additional financial support to aid their lobbying efforts and empower their coalition-building work in Washington.

Enabling the collection of surveys and developing an archive of WASP service in World War II proved itself to be essential to the militarization campaign. Through the communications system, WASP Historian Wyall was able to systematically compile documents from the war in the D.C. office. In reviewing these documents and the responses to their first survey, Haydu had the idea to send out a more extensive survey to help collect evidence for militarization. Granger was then tasked with researching how to prove the WASP had been treated as military. She sent a new, carefully crafted 20-question survey through their communication channel, expressing its importance to the hearings and imploring the WASP for help:

Congressional hearings will be looking for evidence that WASP militarization was envisioned during our time of service and should be granted NOW. You can help supply the evidence. Listed are general questions, numbered. When you make your statement on separate sheets, put your name, address, and telephone number at the top. Then note your duty assignment (including trainees who did not enter active service).

With the survey, the committee continued to collect updated married names, addresses, and phone numbers for their databases. This research helped the committee organize some of the information that was inaccessible through the classification of WASP records, including flight operation statistics of AAF women pilots, flight activities assigned to WASPs and not known to

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<sup>102</sup> “Red Alert from WASP Headquarters August 15 1977,” August 15, 1977, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University.

be assigned to other civil pilots, military activities required of and accorded WASP personnel, and more. Working alongside historian Wyall, Granger also collected copies of military orders and pictures which showed the WASP in uniform with military pilots and on duty. Through this extensive survey, the committee collected compelling documentation from women who went on to serve in the U.S. Air Force or other military branches as well as the impact of WASP demobilization on their careers and retirement.



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## CHAPTER FOUR

*“Your response is overwhelming; we are deluged with mail. Our soaring gratitude to the vets of WWI, WWII, Korea and Viet Nam who have welcomed us to their ranks and sent their sentiments to their Congressmen. We hope to swamp them. With your continued assistance, we will!”*

-Patricia Collins Hughes, WASP

### ***Part One: Convincing Congress***

The communications system designed by the WASP Congressional Hearings Committee was revolutionary in its ability to harness the voices of these women in a time when personal mass communication was largely nonexistent. Its true power consisted in the creation of compelling evidence from seemingly ordinary women to convince Congress of the necessity of militarizing the WASP. During this pivotal moment in their history, the WASP focused on building a coalition through grassroots organization, and local and national media appeals. Members reached out to a wide variety of news sources to report on and gain popular support for their efforts. Bee and the committee knew that, with the evidence they had collected, gaining a national audience would help their campaign substantially<sup>104</sup>. Most notable was the reach of

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<sup>103</sup> Militarization Committee, photograph, 1977; The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).

<sup>104</sup> Haydu, “Letter from Bernice Haydu to Communications Captains”

opinion editorials both in print media and broadcast news, and the televised news coverage of the bill hearings. Having proved the necessity of their campaign to the media, the committee made a significant alliance with a major national broadcasting company: NBC. The national reach of NBC's coverage of the Senate hearings in particular allowed the general public to see the first civilian women testifying on military legislation<sup>105</sup>. This critical turn enabled the committee to achieve the objective of gaining support from numerous important Veterans' organizations, convincing them to enlist their membership and leadership in support of the WASP campaign.

Another key platform that enabled the Order of Fifinella to win hearts and minds was the Stars and Stripes, the only independent national military newspaper. Affectionately nicknamed the "Stars and Bars" by its readers for over a century, the Stars and Stripes operates within the Department of Defense, but has journalistic freedom protected by the First Amendment and safeguarded by Congress. As the WASP bill entered congressional hearings, the militarization committee secured a weekly column in the magazine, written by former WASP Patricia Collins Hughes. The column provided detailed updates about events on Capitol Hill, reporting on committee hearings and key details on the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs (SVAC), including the Chairman Senator Alan Cranston's blatant strategy of delaying the WASP bill. These columns also provided key evidence in quoting a representative from the Veterans Administration (VA) who stated that President Carter had specifically ordered him to testify against the bill<sup>106</sup>. Other reporting included lists of committee congressmen in opposition, uncommitted congressmen to target their communications towards, and congressional committee members to thank for co-sponsorship or commitment to cause<sup>107</sup>. The WASP used this added

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<sup>105</sup> Haydu, "Letter from Bernice Haydu to Communications Captains"

<sup>106</sup> Wings Across America, "WASP Patricia Collins Hughes, 44-6," *WASP Final Flight* (blog), September 30, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

channel of communication in numerous ways. First, clippings of pertinent information from the Stars and Stripes were sent by WASP to their members of congress, especially to members of the congressional committee, ensuring that this information was recorded in congressional communication records<sup>108</sup>. WASP Lucile Wise's strategies in disseminating the Stars and Stripes ensured that the WASP message was spread far and wide:

Copies of this paper go to the White House, Cabinet, OMB, Civil Service employees in all departments of Labor, Defense, Commerce, HEW, State, all State governments, over 3000 college campuses, every active duty military base, station, ship, Guard unite and all Reserve, ROTC, and Retired units. Plus, 10 copies go to teach senator, Representative, Congressional Committee and their staff, to name a few<sup>109</sup>.

As a key offensive resource in the militarization campaign, the Stars and Stripes columns played an essential role in getting WASP voices into congressional offices and convincing congress.

### ***Part Two: On Final Approach - The Key Contributions of Byrd Granger***

Order of Fifinella Board Member and WASP archivist Byrd Granger's work began with her comprehensive 20-question survey sent through their communication channel. Alongside Historian Marty Wyall, Granger also collected copies of military orders and pictures which showed the WASP in uniform with military pilots and on duty. Not only did this information lend compelling visual documentation on the impact of WASP demobilization on their careers and retirement, but it allowed Granger to compile a 114-page report of supporting evidence to be

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<sup>108</sup> WASP Congressional Hearings Committee, "Letter from the WASP Congressional Hearings Committee, July 1977," Letter, The Portal to Texas History, July 1977.

<sup>109</sup> Haydu, "Letter from Bernice Haydu to Communications Captains"

part of official WASP record in congress. The defined purpose of Granger’s testimony centered around providing proof WASP claims:

To demonstrate that Women Airforce Service Pilots served their country as part of the Army Air Corps and did so in the expectation of becoming commissioned officers, having taken officers’ training, lived as officers under military regulation, and earned the right to such commissions<sup>110</sup>.

The report not only described arduous training program, but also illustrated how the WASP continuously risked their lives throughout their service. When the Army wanted to test an accelerated training program for all pilot candidates, the WASP were their “guinea pigs”:

They went straight from primary training to advanced training. The military wanted to try the new training method with the male cadets but decided to find out if the women were successfully able to do it first. They did not want to lose any of the men, and if they were going to have to lose an entire class, they preferred it to be the women.<sup>111</sup>

In the report, the WASP presented mission records to document their operational service, “facing hazards and risks of death without the emotional inspiration of combat.”<sup>112</sup> The report included official Army orders that substantiated many hazards: the potential of being shot down while towing targets, which were fired on with live ammunition by male trainees; the prospect of crashing while validating the airworthiness of newly built airplanes, right off the assembly line; the unwavering bravery they exhibited flying damaged airplanes to and from repair sites.

Byrd Granger’s talents as an academic, author and researcher enabled her to compile an extensive document of evidence that convincingly answered many questions that legislators had

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<sup>110</sup> Granger “Evidence Supporting Military Service”

<sup>111</sup> Doris Brinker Tanner, interview by Deanie Parrish, 12 Aug 2000, Wings Across America.

<sup>112</sup> Duncan, “Letter to Mr. James T. McIntyre, Jr.”

about WASP service during the war. Many opponents believed that, as civil service members, the WASP were essentially volunteers who could come and go as they please. However, this comprehensive testimony and the accumulation of official orders substantiated that these women literally and figuratively never took off their uniforms. The evidence further proved that WASP were treated the same way across the board, and that these standards were not unique to a few members of the WASP<sup>113</sup>. Granger's evidence also illustrated the strategic power of the WASP to organize and collect proof in spite of their documents being classified "secret" by the military and sealed from the public. In fact, Granger's findings on WASP Helen Porter's discharge is credited with saving the bill in the House, becoming a critical piece of evidence. This discharge paper, which was identical to the WWII Army honorable discharge certificate, convinced Texas Representative Olin Teague, who had served as as HVAC Chairman from 1955 to 1972, to join the bill as a cosponsor. "Tiger" Teague was a notable WWII Veteran who previously opposed the WASP bill, but the finding of this certificate which was identical to his own catalyzed his acknowledgment that the WASP had been de facto military personnel<sup>114</sup>. It is suggested that, without this discovery, the bill would have died in committee, but Representative Teague's cosponsorship opened doors for the WASP to make strides with other House Representatives, eventually achieving unanimous passage in late 1977.

### ***Part Three: Dr. Dora Dougherty Strother and the "Ladybird"***

Throughout 1977, the militarization committee continued their offensive strategy — maintaining lines of communication by developing reports, locating and reconnecting with lost WASP, provisioning their campaign by raising funds through appeals and a store for

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<sup>113</sup> Granger "Evidence Supporting Military Service"

<sup>114</sup> Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines*. pp 311, 315, 316.

memorabilia, gaining public opinion by sending out regular updates through the newsletters, red alerts, “action now” appeals, and supplying vital information to their legislative allies.

Meanwhile, Dr. Dora Dougherty Strother took on the task of preparing the testimony for the House and Senate hearings. Strother, the sixth woman in the United States to be certified as an airline transport pilot license, who earned her doctorate and became a record-setting helicopter pilot after the war. Her primary approach to preparing her personal testimony was translating the information collected by Granger, Wyall, and the communications team to illustrate how the WASP forged new mission roles for women in the military. Strother’s own legacy proved that the WASP program’s success was critical to the success of the Army Air Force in World War II. During the war, Strother commanded the famed B-29 Superfortress bomber “Ladybird” in the summer of 1944. Her crew was personally selected by Colonel Paul Tibbets to demonstrate the safety of the world’s biggest, most innovative aircraft at the time. The AAF pilots were reluctant to fly the B-29, not only because it was much larger and heavier than any bomber flown before, it also hadn't gone through the years of operational testing to which Boeing had subjected its predecessor the B-17. Strother and the WASP were pivotal in Initial Operational Capability of the bomber by showing the male crewmembers that “two luscious femmes” had mastered the Superfortress in just three days of training<sup>115</sup>. Colonel Tibbets would ultimately command the infamous B-29 “Enola Gay,” and while the WASP would never fly the bomber again, their role contributed to the Allies victory over Japan.<sup>116</sup> Strother went on to become an internationally recognized aerospace Human Factors Engineer as well serving as a member of the U.S. Army

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<sup>115</sup> “Women Fly the B-29,” PBS | The American Experience | Fly Girls.

<sup>116</sup> Patricia Collins Hughes, “WASP Queried Why Do You Care?,” Clipping, The Stars and Stripes-The National Tribune, Washington, D. C., June 23, 1977. p. 10, June 23, 1977.

Science Board. Her leadership in the WASP Congressional Hearings was essential to their success in the House and Senate.

In addition to leading the charge on preparing for the hearings, Dr. Strother served as the chief witness before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees in May of 1977, and again in September of 1977<sup>117</sup>. This role included preparing statements for each witness who testified during the proceedings, and preparing the strategy for the hearings with the assistance of Bruce Arnold. The individuals and organizations that Strother helped prepare for testimony included Sen Barry Goldwater, Rep Margaret Heckler, Rep Lindy Boggs, Col Bruce Arnold, WASPs Dora Storther, Doris Tanner, Margaret Boylan, and Bee Haydu, in addition to representatives from the Air Force Association, the Reserve Officers Association, the National Organization for Women, the National Coalition of Women in Defense, and the American Veterans Commission<sup>118</sup>. Strother's efforts were further aided by the WASP's final newsletter sent before the congressional vote, which urged their supporters to take "ACTION NOW" before what would become the last of the House hearings, scheduled to take place shortly after Labor Day 1977. These final suggestions included clipping as many weekly columns from the Stars and Stripes as possible to send to their representatives in congress, which could then be recorded and used as supporting evidence in the hearings. Suggesting the scheduling of in-district meetings to bring petitions, clippings, and supporting evidence to their members of congress in person within the last weeks of advocacy, Strother and the rest of the committee acknowledged how important this grassroots advocacy campaign was:

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<sup>117</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

<sup>118</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

Yes, at the outset women military flying was undertaken on an experimental basis...it was known as the Women's Flying Training Detachment. When the name was changed to the WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS, it was with the knowledge by the Armed Services that these women had proved that they would and could do the job<sup>119</sup>.

These actions helped legally validate WASP service as active duty military service during this pivotal timeframe.

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<sup>119</sup> WASP Congressional Hearings Committee, "ACTION NOW"



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## CHAPTER FIVE

*“A historical review of the WASP program revealed certain facts and arguments that appear to us to warrant support of WASP legislation. This would not only correct past inequities, but would also represent a strong symbolic statement of this Administration’s commitment to equality and the All Volunteer Force.”*

-Charles W. Duncan, Jr., Deputy Secretary of Defense

### ***Part One: Not To Be Forgotten, Again***

Despite their neverending campaign, the WASP movement received fairly little outside support during this pivotal moment. In fact, leaders of the Order of Fifinella have compared their efforts at convincing organizations and individuals to support their mission to pulling teeth.<sup>121</sup>

Much of the opposition to the WASP movement in the 1970s came from Veterans’ organizations managed by men, just as it had three decades earlier. These organizations included The American Legion, American Veterans (AMVETS), the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and Disabled American Veterans. The main argument these groups used to oppose WASP militarization was that they believed the women did not serve as the men had.<sup>122</sup> The opposition

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<sup>120</sup> WASP Assemble on Senate Office Building Steps, photograph, May 25, 1977; University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

<sup>121</sup> Bernice Falk (Bee) Haydu, “Lest We Forget,” Letter, The Portal to Texas History, Unknown.

<sup>122</sup> Haydu, “Letter from Bernice Haydu to Communications Captains”

from these organizations was influential because of their ties to Members of Congress. These service organizations maintain permanent Washington offices for the purpose of influencing legislation affecting Veterans and representing their families. Consequently, these organizations were able to maintain continuous contact with the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs through their permanent DC legislative representatives and lobbyists. When the WASP bill was introduced to Congress in 1977, the legislative representatives of these specific Veterans organizations notified Congress of their unwavering opposition to the legislation<sup>123</sup>. John Sommer, Jr., representing The American Legion at the hearing, said that the organization opposed Veteran status for the WASP because it would "denigrate the term veteran." He argued that the VA would then have to grant similar privileges to other civilian groups who served under military jurisdiction during war time, such as the Merchant Marine.<sup>124</sup> The Order of Fifinella was put on the defensive with this development.

To counter the gender-biased arguments launched by these Veterans organizations, the WASP employed grassroots efforts to change the minds of the organizations' leadership. The Order of Fifinella's militarization committee implored each individual WASP to personally contact the groups on the local level in addition to their headquarters<sup>125</sup>. Specifically, Bee Haydu asked the WASP to document the support of local chapters in alignment with the WASP cause and in support of the WASP legislation. The specific organization whose opposition the WASP targeted after the first Senate hearing was The American Legion. Continuing their grassroots efforts, Bee Haydu urged the Order of Fifinella's communications captains to conduct outreach

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<sup>123</sup> Bee Haydu, "Special Pre 'Red Alert' Notice," Letter, The Portal to Texas History, February 1977.

<sup>124</sup> John Sommer, Jr., Chief of Claims Service, The American Legion, "Hearing before a Select Subcommittee," Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 95th Congress (1977).

<sup>125</sup> "New and Vital Information in Support of Amendment 954 to H.R. 8701," n.d., The Women's Collection at Texas Women's University.

within their specific regions, enlisting all WASP with connections to The American Legion. Bee did so in hopes that, even if they could not convince the American Legion's national officers to at least drop their opposition to the legislation, they could prove that the opposition didn't apply across their thousands of posts and millions of members:

The group who strongly opposed us (their main theme, that we are not Veterans) was the American Legion. This is a peculiar situation since the local Posts, many of the County and States posts are for us. That is why we need all American Legion resolutions, letters, or whatever... Then we can state with documented proof that while the D.C. Headquarters of American Legion have a policy against us, this is not so at the "grass roots."<sup>126</sup>

While national leaders of The American Legion, AMVETS, VFW, and Disabled American Veterans continued to oppose the WASP effort, the WASP collectively and successfully maneuvered around their attempted blockade.

### ***Part Two: The Adversary - No Place for a Lady***

While the WASP anticipated the opposition from male-dominated Veterans' organizations in their hearings, the most unlikely adversary was a woman. Dorothy Starbuck, the Chief Benefits Director of the VA's Department of Veterans Benefits. She testified against the WASP legislation in both the House and Senate Hearings. Having served during World War II as a Captain in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Starbuck was assigned the Eisenhower's London Headquarters and hand-carried 'Top Secret' documents to Allied commanders. Starbuck went on to become the first woman to serve as the Chief Benefits Director of the VA. Her

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<sup>126</sup> Haydu, "Letter from Bernice Haydu to Communications Captains"

38-year federal service career was distinguished by many ‘firsts’ for women in government. Yet, despite her shared history with the WASP, Starbuck sided with the bureaucracy by declaring:

The WASPs as civilians differed from the enlisted and commissioned members of the Army Air Forces proper in regard to the disciplinary procedures to which they were subject and the nature of their employment commitment. As civil servants they were not subject to court-martial procedures.<sup>127</sup>

Starbuck similarly stated that recognizing the WASP as Veterans would “open a floodgate for other potential claimants,” reasserting the claim that the WASP were not different from other groups who supported the war efforts and that these women did not face unique danger and risks during their service.<sup>128</sup> Her comments were later refuted by WASP evidence, including Byrd Granger’s extensive report, Marty Wyall’s investigative archive, and Dora Strother’s powerful testimonial.

Even more divisive was opposition from certain members of the WASP themselves. In April 1977, Representative Teague inserted a handful of letters written by WASP against militarization into the official record. This was another example of women who served in WWII claiming that WASP service was not worthy of Veterans status. In response, Haydu asked the Communications Captains to stage further counter-offensive action, collecting hundreds of letters to Representative Teague, asking him why he chose only to present the opposing declarations<sup>129</sup>. As represented by Teague’s eventual support of the WASP, this is another

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<sup>127</sup> Patricia Collins Hughes, “Dora Dougherty Strother Testifies for WASPs Veterans’ Status, Administration Opposes WASPs Bill, Sen. Goldwater Supports WASPs Bill, Sen. Matsunaga Supports WASPs Bill,” Newspaper, The Stars and Stripes-The National Tribune, Volume 100, Number 22, June 2, 1977

<sup>128</sup> Duncan, “Letter to Mr. James T. McIntyre, Jr.”

<sup>129</sup> Nona Pickering and Adele Beyer, “Letter to All WASP: Urgent Communication Request from Prexy Bee,” April 18, 1977, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) - Postwar, The Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University.

example of the Order of Fifinella's grassroots influence. The most conspicuous antagonist was Jackie Cochran, who testified in another important congressional battle during the 1970s, the decision to open military service academies to women. Jackie argued forcefully against this idea, with testimony that contrary to her own professional experiences, stating there was no role for women in the military during peacetime. She felt the proper and primary role for women in American society was as mothers and housewives<sup>130</sup>. Cochran's critics point out that she had parlayed her considerable influence to become an official consultant to NASA in 1961, and was campaigning for a women in space program just as she lobbied to command the WASP in 1941<sup>131</sup>. Unfortunately, in the 1970s it appears that cultural norms caused some female servicemembers and bureaucrats to adopt patriarchal attitudes in which women's participation in the military was seen as a challenge to a masculinized space, and women's traditional roles were in the sphere of the home. Fortunately, in this controversy, Congress refused to listen to such sexist arguments and mandated that the academies would begin admitting women in September 1976.

### ***Part Three: Waiting in the Wings***

The importance of the decision to open up the service academies brought forth an ally from within the Carter Administration, Antonia Handler Chayes, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Administration. Working within the U.S. Military, Secretary Chayes' support further assisted the WASP in challenging gender norms within the military as a male dominated sphere. Upon meeting with members of the WASP Militarization Committee and reviewing Granger's report, Chayes concluded that the WASP deserved to gain

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<sup>130</sup> Stiehm, *Bring Me Men and Women*. pp 18-20.

<sup>131</sup> Amy Shira Teital, "Why Did the Mercury 13 Astronauts Never Fly in Space?," Popular Science, July 17, 2016.

Veteran's status. Taking a considerable risk to her high-ranking government executive position, Chayes diverged from the previous White House position, redefining the Department of Defense's position and securing the written support of the Pentagon.<sup>132</sup> Secretary Chayes was a "surprise witness" during the HVAC hearing who was "critical to the successful passage of the law" and "believed their recognition would be significant in the ultimate integration of women pilots in the Air Force."<sup>133</sup>

Additional support manifested in the WASP's mobilization of a new alliance that attested to the necessity of Militarization. During the hearings of the legislation in the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, in addition to testimonials given by Senator Goldwater, Representative Heckler, Representative Boggs, Colonel Arnold, and WASPs Dora Storther, Doris Tanner, Margaret Boylan, and Bee Haydu, representatives from five different organizations testified in favor of the WASP. These organizations included the Air Force Association, the Reserve Officers Association, the National Organization for Women, the National Coalition of Women in Defense, and the American Veterans Commission<sup>134</sup>. With the leadership of these women and the action of thousands of WASP and their allies nationally, the WASP succeeded in their goal as Public Law 95-202 passed through Congress on Nov 23 1977, determining that:

the service of any person as a member of the Women's Air Forces Service Pilots shall be considered active duty for the purposes of all laws administered by the Veterans

Administration<sup>135</sup>.

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<sup>132</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

<sup>133</sup> Deborah G. Douglas and Amy E. Foster, *American Women and Flight since 1940* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004). pp 194.

<sup>134</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

<sup>135</sup> "Public Law 95-202:" (November 23, 1977).

The passage of this legislation specified the process for WASP to be granted Veteran status and, although the law's narrow language would ultimately limit their military entitlements, it put an end to this chapter of the WASP's battle for recognition.



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## CHAPTER SIX

*"...if they don't know history, if they don't place any importance on history, we're in trouble, because history is so important...not just the history of women, the history of our country!"*

-Doris Brinker Tanner, WASP

### ***Part One: Victory Without Glory***

Even after Congress finally voted to give the WASP Veteran status, not a single representative of these pilots was extended an invitation to the signing ceremony at the White House:

With no fanfare, no photographers to record the historic occasion, and not even one WASP or official representative of the WASP organization present, the military recordation of this country was summarily corrected and “the rest is history.” Except to us.<sup>137</sup>

The first issuing of honorable discharges was in a special ceremony at the Pentagon nearly two years after the passage of Public Law 95-202, in May 1979. While the observance received

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<sup>136</sup> WASP at Highground Memorial, photograph, Date Unknown; University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History; crediting National WASP WWII Museum.

<sup>137</sup> Patricia Collins Hughes, “Hallelujah! WASPs Are VETERANS At Last!,” Newspaper, The Stars and Stripes-The National Tribune, Volume 101, Number 48, December 1, 1977.

extensive TV and newspaper coverage, this ceremony itself and the process in which their Honorable Discharges were issued highlighted the hollow victory of the Battle of Congress. In a time-consuming procedure, WASP had to apply individually for discharge. Once processed, their discharge certificate and DD Form 214 were mailed. Only then, years later, could they apply for VA benefits. Lillian Roberts, the WASP president who succeeded Bee Haydu, noted “the responsibility for taking the next step is ours. Each of us must now make application for discharge.”<sup>138</sup> It was not until seven years later, in 1984, that every WASP was awarded their World War II Victory Medal, the service ribbon issued to members of the U.S. armed forces during WWII. Disrespectfully, these heroines’ medals were delivered in the mail in plain brown envelopes.

Once again, Hughes articulated the WASP’s struggle in the *Stars and Stripes* to correct the women’s narrative, taking a stand against those who continued to belittle their effort:

At a time when the nation is turning its attention to the rights of women as individuals to the drum beat of emotionalism at its precarious best, our achievement which should be universally acclaimed has been relegated to yesterday’s news and nearly gone unnoticed.

Not even a blurb in the local press announced the triumph of these American women who had been officially recognized by the men empowered to give recognition.<sup>139</sup>

Even Colonel Bruce Arnold editorialized these notable tensions at the conclusion of the WASP’s Battle of Congress, and questioned the lack of a ceremonious conclusion to these efforts in an article titled “WASPs Win 33 Year Battle For Vet Status”:

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<sup>138</sup> Lillian Roberts, “Letter from Lillian Roberts to the WASP, March 1979,” Letter, The Portal to Texas History, March 1979.

<sup>139</sup> Hughes, “Hallelujah! WASPs Are VETERANS At Last!”

It seems strange that on this day a thirty-three-year-long battle that sometimes rose to heights of bloody passion has finally ended in victory in a rather quiet, almost mundane manner... The WASP fight ended on the House floor in much the same manner, although the dead had long since been buried and the wounded had all but been forgotten<sup>140</sup>.

Bee Haydu subsequently highlighted her frustration with this treatment in a letter to the Order of Fifinella, sent after she resigned her position as President and a new Board was elected:

The realization of where credit should be given might not have been known to one who had not participated in our battle... Being involved in the thick of battle would have revealed the details of what had transpired and it would have been evident that without [this effort] our receiving these Honorable Discharges would not have been possible... The current lack of respect, belittling of past accomplishments, attempts to take credit, arrogance to those who did so much to make this moment possible must not continue. It is not deserved<sup>141</sup>.

Conflicts within the Order of Fifinella itself, particularly centered upon the changes in leadership in 1979, overtook the struggle to claim the narrative around WASP militarization.<sup>142</sup> The WASP had figuratively won the battle, but lost the war.

Some of these tensions can be explained by this clash within the leadership of the Order of Fifinella, but the true challenge in reclaiming their narrative, or their rightful place in history, centered around the misogyny these women faced. At a time in which women's liberation movements were gaining real traction, the WASP struggled with a lack of recognition from

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<sup>140</sup> William Bruce Arnold, "WASPs Win 33 Year Battle For Vet Status," Clipping, The Stars and Stripes-The National Tribune, Washington D.C., November 10, 1977. p. 1, November 10, 1977.

<sup>141</sup> Haydu, "Lest We Forget"

<sup>142</sup> Patricia Collins Hughes, "Credit Where Credit Is Due," Clipping, The Stars and Stripes-The National Tribune, Washington, D.C., November 17, 1977. p. 3, November 17, 1977.

leaders of feminist movements and the complications of feminist identities within their history. The WASP movement was not united through the radical roots of the New Left as most Thought Leaders of second-wave feminism were<sup>143</sup>. Despite support during congressional hearings from the National Organization for Women and the National Coalition for Women in Defense, the WASP's identities as feminist changemakers were not claimed by the leaders of the movement until well into the 1990s.<sup>144</sup> In fact, most gender commentary during the 1970's and 1980's came from Senator Barry Goldwater's reflection on the legislation:

I don't want to overdo this aspect but it is a fact that these girls did bear extra burdens simply because they were women... it is much to their credit that the women achieved an outstanding record in the face of difficulties which only they, as women, encountered<sup>145</sup>.

Goldwater's reluctance to cite gender discrimination in his statements before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees themselves can further illuminate the reluctance in the WASP's tentative movement toward defining the Battle of Congress as feminist action. Informed by over thirty years of forced silence, the mandated return to tradition women's roles post-war, and the complications of cultural gender norms during their initial disbandment in 1944, many WASP have documented a tentativeness to assert their militarization campaign as feminist action. Similarly, many scholars have hesitated to define twentieth century advances for women in the military, including the WASP Battle of Congress, as part of the feminist movement. This

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<sup>143</sup> The Cambridge Dictionary defines a "thought leader" as "an expert on a particular subject whose ideas and opinions influence other people." Most thought leaders within second-wave feminism were united in what was considered to be radical in both ideology and practice. Many WASP leaders did not consider themselves feminist thought leaders, nor have they been considered so within historical and scholarly works.

Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, Penguin Books (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

<sup>144</sup> Rebecca Wright et al., "Oral History Interview Transcript of Women Airforce Service Pilots," Text, The Portal to Texas History, July 18, 1999.

<sup>145</sup> Hughes, "Sen. Goldwater Supports WASPs Bill"

mutual reluctance is often defined by a refusal to credit organizing or advocacy, arguing that advances for women in the military parallel advances in society around it, thus crediting societal change over time for these advances.<sup>146</sup> WASP leaders have cited the perceived authority of these arguments, prevailing across historical and scholarly research, alongside continued prejudice as contributing factors to their complicated identities as feminists icons.<sup>147</sup>

Further hesitancy in reclaiming the WASP narrative arose from the homophobia of the mid 20th century, which was regularly targeted against women in the U.S. Military. This homophobia seeped into both the opposition towards women's service in wartime and the opposition against the WASP's Battle of Congress. During wartime, women in service were regularly portrayed as hypermasculine, demonized by male military leadership and the general public for challenging notions of womanhood and female sexuality<sup>148</sup>. General Eisenhower, during his leadership of members of the Women's Army Corps in World War II, has been quoted as seeking a list to "ferret out the lesbians" from military service in WWII. It is believed that Eisenhower only dropped this quest after Nell "Johnnie" Phelps, his trusted assistants and secretaries convinced him that ejecting these members from service would dangerously deplete their forces<sup>149</sup>. President Eisenhower demonstrated his homophobia, signing Executive Order 10450 in 1953<sup>150</sup>. His rigid anti-gay policies inform the disappointment from leaders of the Order

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<sup>146</sup> Michelle Sandhoff and Mady Wechsler Segal, "Women in the U.S. Military: The Evolution of Gender Norms and Military Requirements," in *The Modern American Military*, ed. David M. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>147</sup> The first evidence of WASP leaders claiming "feminist" identities is in a 1992 article titled "Pushing the Limits". Further instances include a 1992 article titled "Pilot speaks out on harassment", an undated article from the 1990's titled "Local WASPs recall famed leader" and July 1999 Oral History Transcripts conducted by Rebecca Wright.

<sup>148</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*. pp. 33–51.

<sup>149</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 1. paperback ed (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012). "Johnnie Phelps interview with Bunny MacCulloch, 1982"

<sup>150</sup> Executive Order 10450 was signed on April 27, 1953 by President Eisenhower. It contributed to the "Lavender Scare", defined members of the LGBTQ+ community as "sex perverts", and identified homosexual tendencies as

of Fifinella in Jackie Cochran's support of Eisenhower. Cochran's own suppression of WASP fraternization and sexual orientation has been frequently documented, referred to as "Cochran's Convent" and often dismissed as merely the "Army Way" of sublimating sexuality. This homophobia has also kept some members of the WASP cause from telling their truths, in fear of backlash, particularly in remembrance of their fear of being outed during and after wartime.<sup>151</sup> These are secrets that many WASP have taken with them to the grave and likely will never be fully told, as even the youngest of the WASP, who are now in their early 90's, seldom expand this issue within their narrative to the world.

### ***Part Two: The Aftermath - Picking up the pieces***

At the conclusion of the WASP Battle of Congress in 1977, members of the Order of Fifinella were 33 years older than they had been in 1944 during their original legislative battle. This three decade gap is characterized by many changes which resulted in a loss of contact between members: changes in careers, changes in married names, and changes in addresses. It's hard to imagine a world without email and social media, when newspapers were actually used to get the news, petitions were prepared on typewriter and signatures collected door-to-door instead with clicks on a smartphone. The WASP had dispersed across the country and around the world, married, and raised children.<sup>152</sup> Their attentions had been directed elsewhere, and many simply looked fondly back upon their roles as Women Airforce Service Pilots, humbly grateful to have had the opportunity to serve their country during wartime at all. These changes posed challenges not only in the Battle of Congress itself but also in recognizing their roles as heroes of war and

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threats to national security. Under the order, thousands of lesbian and gay applicants were barred from federal employment and over 5,000 federal employees were fired under suspicions of being homosexual.

<sup>151</sup> Harold Newcomb, "Clipping: Cochran's Convent," Clipping, The Portal to Texas History, Unknown.

<sup>152</sup> Erin Miller, *Final Flight Final Fight*

heroes of this battle<sup>153</sup>. Even with the rewarding of their Honorable Discharges and the WWII Victory Medals, these women continued to remain humble, asserting that they felt they were merely doing their part during wartime.

Further complications arose as the WASP didn't feel that they had accomplished a complete victory, even after the conclusion of the Battle of Congress. The passage of Public Law 95-202 only accorded that WASP service was only considered active duty for laws administered by the Veterans Administration.<sup>154</sup> As a result, the WASP were unable to count their time in service during WWII as active duty for the calculation of Air Force longevity pay or military retirement. This time similarly could not be counted toward, educational benefits, social security, or Veteran's preference laws toward civil service employment. This is because many of these policies were implemented by powers other than the VA, such as the DoD's Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Veterans in the cases of military retirement credit and preference laws.<sup>155</sup> This meant that despite receiving honorable discharges and victory medals, the WASP had to return to Congress for another hearing in September 1981, in which Senator Goldwater and WASPs Patricia Hughes and Elaine Harmon testified once more, introducing records from other WASPs including Dora Stother, Jeanne McSheehy, Ruth Trees, Virginia Jones, Pat Pateman in petition that their service be counted toward military retirement. These requests from the WASP were denied by Congress.<sup>156</sup>

Even the VA's Chief Benefits Director Dorothy Starbuck, one of the key witnesses against WASP militarization, has expressed her regret in building roadblocks against the WASP.

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<sup>153</sup> Wright et al., "Oral History Interview Transcript"

<sup>154</sup> "Public Law 95-202:" (November 23, 1977).

<sup>155</sup> Milton R. McFarland, "Letter from the Department of the Air Force to Eleanor Brown, June 11, 1979," Letter, The Portal to Texas History, June 11, 1979.

<sup>156</sup> Wise, "Report of WASP Militarization Campaign"

Discussing the challenges that the WASP faced in reclaiming the narrative of their service, Starbuck explained that her first Congressional testimonial as a newly-appointed administrator was on the legislation to give military recognition to the WASP. She conceded that she supported the WASP movement and felt guilty that she played a role in the silencing of women in service:

When the VA General Counsel told me I would be the witness at that hearing, I said great, let's give it to them. They've earned it. I'd known them during my military service and felt they should have been members of the military. But the General Counsel said no, the Administration's position was opposed to passage of that bill... I sat there wishing the floor would open up and take me away<sup>157</sup>.

Starbuck felt, as the first woman VA Chief Benefits Director, she had betrayed the women by testifying against their recognition in front of 20 to 30 WASP in the audience at the hearing. She was interviewed by the *Disabled American Veterans'* magazine on the eve of her retirement, and explained that she was personally delighted at the time that the bill passed, and that she understood how challenging it was to be a woman in the U.S. military or government service.<sup>158</sup>

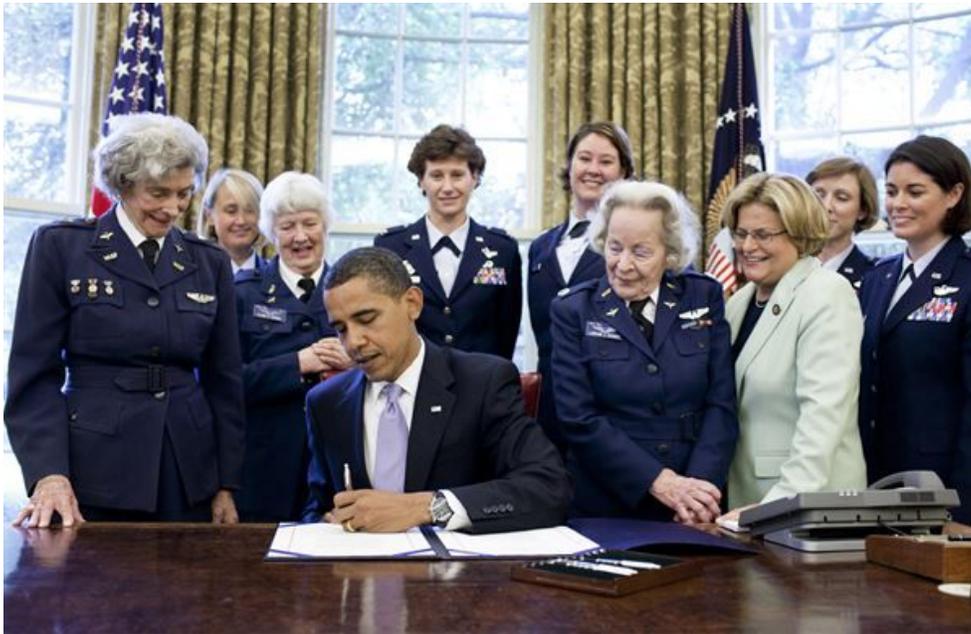
Starbuck's testimonial is another example of the necessity for constant reclamation of the WASP historical narrative well past the conclusion of the Battle of Congress. The WASP served their country when it needed them and then fought to be remembered when their nation forgot them—over and over again<sup>159</sup>. The WASP campaign and the necessity of organizations like the Order of Fifinella has not ceased since their victory, and will likely prevail into the future.

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<sup>157</sup> "VA Chief Benefits Director Dorothy Starbuck Speaks Her Mind... One Last Time," *DAV Magazine*, January 1985, 2.

<sup>158</sup> "VA Chief Benefits Director Dorothy Starbuck Speaks Her Mind"

<sup>159</sup> Erin Miller, *Final Flight Final Fight*



## EPILOGUE

*"The Women Airforce Service Pilots courageously answered their country's call in a time of need while blazing a trail for the brave women who have given and continue to give so much in service to this nation since. Every American should be grateful for their service, and I am honored to sign this bill to finally give them some of the hard-earned recognition they deserve."*

-President Barack Obama

The passage of Public Law 95-202 was monumental to correcting the truths of the WASP's history, reclaiming the narrative of their wartime contributions, and showcasing at last what women can do in military aviation. The Battle of Congress demonstrated the ways that these women could organize a diplomatic, successful legislative movement. Although the WASP's fight for cultural impact first required shedding their program's experimental designation, their mission of earning equal status with male Veterans was not completely

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<sup>160</sup> President Barack Obama signs S.614, July 1 2009; White House, Pete Souza.

accomplished by the Battle of Congress alone. It can be argued that the WASP militarization of 1977 forged new roles within both the Armed Services and Public Policy. In that sense, the WASP's legacy is important both politically and culturally. During the passing of another 33 years, a second generation of revolutionary women in military aviation fought for the right to fly every type of aircraft from the space shuttle to combat jets. The media concentration on the WASP effort in turn inspired many young women to become military pilots:

Through newspapers and television programs, the WASP issue brought attention to all women in aviation. In 1970 there were 29,832 licensed women pilots. Nine years later there were 52,392, an increase of nearly 80 percent, in contrast to an 11 percent increase in the number of male pilots<sup>161</sup>.

The same year that President Jimmy Carter signed Public Law 95-202 which granted former WASP veteran status with limited benefits, the Air Force graduated its first female pilots. This change came on the heels of the passage of the 1972 Equal Rights Amendment and the subsequent passage of Public Law 94-106, which mandated the acceptance of women into military academies. In 1978, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services recommended that women be accepted into the military on the same basis as men. By the conclusion of that year, all branches of the Armed Services were successfully integrated with male units. The issuing of the World War II Victory Medals for all WASP came six years later, with American Campaign Medals issued to all women who had served more than one year.

Despite being allowed in the Air Force on the same basis as men and earning equal status with male Veterans, women were still not allowed to see combat. In April 1993, combat

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<sup>161</sup> Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation*, "U.S. Department of Transportation, FAA, Civil Airmen Statistics 1970-1980."

exclusion was lifted from aviation positions by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, permitting women to serve in almost any aviation capacity. Meanwhile, the Pentagon retained a ground Combat Exclusion Policy (CEP) that excluded women from most roles in the Armed Services:

Service members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground.

The policy included assignments to the infantry, artillery, special forces, and armor. Following a unanimous recommendation by the joint Chiefs of Staff, the CEP was lifted twenty years later by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, giving Military branches until January 2016 to implement changes. This new decision removed the military's ban on women in combat, opening all U.S. Armed Services roles to women. With the changes that came after the passage of the WASP mobilization bill in 1977, the WASP legacy inspired this new generation of women in military aviation to push harder and further than ever before. In the past 40 years, the next generations of pioneering military aviators have credited the WASP with launching their success. Colonel Eileen Collins became the first woman shuttle pilot, and carried one of Amelia Earhart's scarfs and a pair of WASP silver wings into space in 1995. Colonel Martha McSally became the Air Force's first female pilot in combat, and championed bipartisan WASP AIR Act in 2016. Colonel Nicole Malachowski (whose callsign is "Fifi") became the first female Thunderbird, and drafted the bill that led to the WASP Congressional Gold Medal. Another inspiring leader, Brigadier General Jeannie Leavitt, became the first woman to command a U.S. Air Force combat fighter wing, and recently became a cultural icon as one of actress Brie Larson's inspirations for bringing Carol Danvers officer-turned-superhero 'Captain Marvel.'

In the 40 years since militarization, the WASP continued to face challenges in reclaiming recognition and accurate representation for their wartime contributions. In June 1981, Byrd Granger suggested the selection of an archive as a permanent official repository for WASP Materials to the Order of Fifinella. In 1992, the WASP voted to establish their national archives at the Carnegie-level research library of Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas. Their collection, begun by Marty WYall in the process of militarization, was designated to be a permanent part of the Women's Collections at TWU, including documents, reports, trainee handbooks, military records, and artifacts. Unable to research the WASP's history in libraries or any school books, writer/director Nancy Parrish, daughter of WASP Marie "Deanie" O'dean Bishop Parrish, began to bring the WASP narrative into the public historical cannon by creating "Wings Across America." This nonprofit, 501(c)(3) project was developed at Baylor University in 1998 with the mission to educate, motivate and inspire generations with the history of the pioneering WASP. Parrish's award-winning project evolved from its first web pages, digital interviews, and a simple historical timeline, to over 2000 pages of accessible digital information, over 100 interviews with WASP across the country, a comprehensive book on the WASP's wartime service, a traveling WASP exhibit, and even an app. In the past 20 years, "Wings Across America" has exceeded all expectations:

as a cutting-edge, digital, multi-media project, blazing a trail into the future of education, where digital information will explode into learning adventures, and where history will come alive through the colorful and unique eyewitness accounts of surviving Women

Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, the first women in history to fly America's military aircraft.<sup>162</sup>

Five years after the creation of “Wings Across America,” Parrish set out again to create a lasting memorial to the story of the WASP with the dedication of a museum. Beginning in 2003, with the help of the city of Sweetwater and its local residents, the National WASP World War II Museum broke ground at Avenger Field. It opened officially in May 2005 on the 62nd anniversary of the graduation of the first WASP class. Visitors can experience the Army life of the WASP inside the museum’s main exhibits, built within the original Hangar One, which features a re-creation of their barracks, displays uniforms, vehicles, and aircraft including Boeing-Stearman Model 75 biplane, a Fairchild PT-19 trainer, a UC-78 Bamboo Bomber and a Vultee BT-13 Valiant trainer.

Although not the same operational tempo as the Battle of Congress, the WASP and their allies continued to seek the help of Congress to continue correcting the truths of their history. Parrish and other children of the WASP formed a tight-knit community named the “Fly Girls” who, with the help of Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and Barbara Mikulski and Representatives Susan Davis and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, secured 76 Senate co-sponsors and 335 House co-sponsors for a bill which became Public Law 111-40, to award the WASP the Congressional Gold Medal<sup>163</sup>. In July 2009, WASP Elaine Danforth Harmon, Bernice “Bee” Falk Haydu and Lorraine H. Rodgers attended a ceremony at the Oval Office in which President Barack Obama signed the bill and, in May 2010, all 300 surviving WASP and family representatives of deceased WASP were invited to a ceremony in Washington, DC, where they each accepted a

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<sup>162</sup> Nancy Parrish, “Wings Across America”

<sup>163</sup> Nancy Parrish, “WASP Gold Medal Celebration,” WASP “Fly Girls of WWII”

medal from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other congressional leaders while dressed in their Santiago Blue uniforms. For many WASP, it was the first tangible recognition they received for their distinguished service<sup>164</sup>. In remembrance of the Greatest Generation's *Fly Girls*, their families have found new ways to remember and honor their legacy, whether it be in attending the annual Sweetwater homecomings in their place, or fighting for recognition for their wartime contributions. In 2015, Erin Miller, granddaughter of WASP Elaine Harmon, lobbied to allow the WASP to be buried at the Army's Arlington National Cemetery, one of the honors previously denied to WASP because of the narrow language of their 1977 militarization legislation. Miller's powerful campaign in social and traditional media, detailed in her book "Final Flight, Final Fight," led to the passage of legislation of H.R. 4336 in 2016, to amend title 38 of the U.S. code, allowing for the inurnment all military members whose service was deemed active duty by the GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977.<sup>165</sup> Miller now carries on the WASP mission in educating younger generations about the truths of WASP wartime contributions, including advocating for their inclusion in school curriculums.

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<sup>164</sup> Nancy Parrish, "WASP Congressional Gold Medal," 2010, Wings Across America.

<sup>165</sup> Martha McSally, "H.R.4336 - An Act to Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Provide for the Inurnment in Arlington National Cemetery of the Cremated Remains of Certain Persons Whose Service Has Been Determined to Be Active Service," Pub. L. No. H.R.4336 (2016).



## CONCLUSION

*“Any nation that does not honor its heroes will not long endure.”*

-President Abraham Lincoln

In light of the victories of the WASP and women in military aviation over the past eight decades, we must look back and see the significance of the WASP story. It is now the duty of the next generation of historians, scholars, and citizens to recognize the WASP as warriors in all senses of the word, for fighting not just in World War II, but in the battle for recognition within the military itself, and for recognition from society and from history. The WASP narrative forced a shift in expectations both of and for women, supplementing the momentum of gender equality in a postwar society with the expectations that women were to leave the workplace and return focus to their prescribed roles as homemakers and family women. When the WASP can no longer tell their own story, we must assert the truths of their history, recognizing their wartime contributions, showcasing their model of what women can do in military aviation, and their role in pushing boundaries for women’s involvement in policy change. With female aviation superheroes gracing the big screen in Captain Marvel, organizations such as the Ninety-Nines, Women Military Aviators and Women in Aviation International growing rapidly each year, the legacy of the WASP is more important than ever. We can continue to honor the WASP legacy not just by telling their story, but also by living by the WASP motto, turning our focus to the

future while recognizing the historical framework within which we live. We, too, can “live with the wind and the sand, but our eyes are on the stars.”

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAF	Army Air Forces
ATA	Air Transport Auxiliary (Great Britain)
ATC	Air Transport Command
DACOWITS	Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service
DoD.	Department of Defense
FAI	Federation Aeronautique Internationale
O.O.F.	Order of Fifinella
RAF	Royal Air Force
WAAC	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
WAC	Women's Army Corps
WAF	Women in the Air Force
WAFS	Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron
WASP	Women's Airforce Service Pilots
WAVES	Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service
WFTD	Women's Flying Training Detachment
WWII	World War II
V-E	Victory in Europe

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