

# The WASPs

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An organization known as the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) was formed in August 1943 as an amalgamation of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, started by Air Transport Command employee Nancy Love in September 1942, and the Women's Flying Training Detachment, founded in

November 1942 by Jacqueline Cochran. Both women were accomplished pilots, and their chance to contribute came in the dark, early period of World War II, when the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) desperately needed pilots. Cochran was given command of the WASPs, while Love became the WASP executive member on the Ferrying Division Staff of Air Transport Command.

Some 25,000 women applied for the WASPs, but only 1,830 were accepted for training. Of these, 1,074 graduated to active status. The program's entrance requirements were tougher than those for male aviators. Applicants at first had to have prior experience, including at least 100 hours of flying time—a number later reduced to 35. Graduate WASPs wore uniforms and had officer privileges but were civilians, for all practical purposes. They received no benefits, and their pay was less than that of a second lieutenant.

Forbidden by Congress to fly outside the continental United States, WASPs undertook a formidable array of flying duties nevertheless. These included assignments as pilot instructors, pilots for navigator and bombardier student flights, target-tug pilots, glider tow pilots, weather-reconnaissance pilots, engineering test pilots, instrument



instructors, transport pilots and—perhaps their best known role—ferry pilots. WASPs flew nearly every airplane in the USAAF inventory, including attack aircraft such as the A-24; bombers such as the B-17, B-24, B-25, B-26, and B-29; and fighters such as the P-38, P-39, and P-63, to name a few. They also flew various training and cargo planes, from the AT-6 and AT-11 to the L-5 and C-47. It was not unusual for a WASP ferry pilot to have flown over 50 different aircraft types during the war.

The program was officially deactivated on 20 December 1944, as the USAAF began to draw down its training establishment. By that time, the WASPs had logged over 30 million flying miles, and 38 of their members had paid the ultimate price in operational accidents. Not until the late 1970s were the WASPs finally accorded the status of World War II veterans. These air pioneers can justly claim to have blazed the trail for today's female pilots of the US Air Force.



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