

The Women Air Force Service Pilots of WWII  
by  
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American air power during WWII was charged by the mighty forces of B-26s and B-29s flown in air raids throughout the Pacific in 1941. Numerous accounts have been documented from airmen of their experiences in the deadly battles within the air that took many lives. However, history tells another story. Although hidden for more than sixty years, it has recently been revealed that in 1944 the U.S. Air Force trained women (Women Air Force Service Pilots) to fly military aircraft that included B-26 and B-29 bombers.

On March 10, 2010, after patiently awaiting their turn for recognition, this group of courageous women, have received the Congressional Gold Medal, our nation's highest civilian honor and will finally be included in historical record as active U.S. military. Comprised of slightly more than 1,100 young women, civilian volunteers, WASPs performed routine activities such as ferrying planes extensive distances from factories to bases, testing newly overhauled planes, and even towing targets to give ground and air gunners target practice with live ammunition.

Although many have passed away, several remain to tell their story of life as a WASP. An article by Susan Stamberg, titled *Female WWII Pilots: The Original Fly Girls*, offers accounts of a few of the women who were on active duty during the two year period, before the program was cancelled. Of the group, Margaret Phelan Taylor recalls explaining to her father the reason she needed him to lend \$500 for a pilot's license to fulfill her adventure. "I told him I had to do it," Taylor says, "And so he let me have the money." After discovering she was half an inch shorter than the 5-foot-2-inch requirement, she remarked, "I just stood on my tiptoes." Upon arriving at Sweetwater, Texas where other WASPs signed up for training, she learned that she was not the only short one.

Not to be taken for granted, this was a dangerous job. According to Taylor, once while ferrying an aircraft between Arizona and California; she saw smoke in the cockpit. Naturally, her instincts signaled her to bail out. "But the parachutes were too big. They weren't fitted to us," she said. Asked was she scared? "No," remarked Taylor, "I was never scared. My husband said it's pretty hard to scare you." It turned out that the plane's instrument panel had burned out and there was no real threat at all. However, during the two years of training 38 female pilots did lose their life.

In commenting of the WASP experience, Caro Bayley Bosca said, "We would have done it for free. It was hot, we were sticky half of the time, but we were having a ball because we had those airplanes and we all loved to fly." Nell "Mickey" Bright "towed targets in anti-aircraft training." A large target was actually shot at by male trainees with rounds of live ammunition while being dragged 25 feet behind the plane.

As the war ended, males returned home. The Flight Training Corp for Women was no longer needed. The WASPs likewise returned to the life they once knew and some even continued flying. According to an article reported in USA Today by Dorrell and Ruin, the WASPs' assignments were varied and included such roles as flight instructor to being an Alaskan bush pilot.

Despite non-receipt of official military status, their courageous efforts paid off as they countered any skepticism about women's capability of becoming pilots. On July 1, 2010 President Obama signed into law a bill to award 300 WASPs the Congressional Medal of Honor and full recognition as military volunteers for their contributions during WWII.

Facts and comments courtesy of: National Public Radio, Radio Diaries, USA Today, and Grand Rapids Press.

Learn more about Women Air Force Service Pilots and other important WWI & WWII facts at Sulphur Springs Public Library. Our collection of WWII memorabilia is quite extensive, comprised of books, journals, artifacts and numerous collectibles of interest. For location and hours go to [www.sslibrary.org](http://www.sslibrary.org) or call 903-885-4926.