

## Teaching American History Project

### *WWII: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS*

By Kathy Bryce

Grade – 8

Length of class period – 45 minutes (one to two classes, or possibly more if students explore websites: pilot interviews, WASP records, etc.)

Inquiry – What was the purpose of the WASP program?

What were the requirements to become a WASP and how did the requirements for female pilots compare to those for males?

Why was there a lack of recognition for the program and how was this rectified?

Objectives – Students will identify and describe various aspects of the WASP program during World War II.

Students will interpret a statistical chart and will compare those statistics for male cadets and female trainees.

Students will write a fictional letter regarding those comparisons in the context of an historical event.

Materials – Background information about the two-year civilian WASP program, recognition in 1977, and awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to surviving pilots in 2010

Excerpts from WASP Founder and Director Jacqueline Cochran's Final Report: Ch. III Objectives of Women Pilot Program and Ch. IV Requirements

WASP Statistics: chart including requirements, flying/training statistics, miles flown, accident rate, and comparative costs and benefits

Congressional Bill giving WASP Veteran Status

Excerpts, chart, and bill also available at: [www.wingsacrossamerica.us](http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us)

Activities – Introduce students to the background information about WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS and discuss the history of the program. Discuss differences between military and civilian programs during WWII.

Have students read the excerpts from the Cochran Report and examine the WASP Statistics chart. Through class or small group discussion, identify the reasons for

the program and the requirements to become a pilot. Students should note the comparisons between male and female pilots.

Distribute the worksheet with questions and writing assignment choices. Students may respond with partners or individually to the questions. Assign the letter as an independent piece.

Assessment – Class and small group discussion about the origins and requirements of the WASP program, and about the comparisons regarding male and female pilots.

Written responses to the questions about the excerpts from the Cochran report and the WASP Statistics chart.

Written work: letter format, complete sentences, reasons for point of view and supporting details.

Connecticut Social Studies Framework: Grade Level Expectations – 3.1; 3.2; 1.1

Use evidence to identify, analyze and evaluate historical interpretations.

Analyze and evaluate human action in historical and/or contemporary contexts from alternative points of view.

Create various forms of written work to demonstrate an understanding of history and social studies issues.

## **Handouts and Resources Attached**

## WWII: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

Background material excerpted from the 1997 script of a speech given by Nancy Parrish, and Gordon Lubold's article, "Decades later, women pilots from World War II get their due" published in the May 10, 2010 [Christian Science Monitor](#). Additional information is from the Wings Across America website.

It all began in 1942, when there was a severe shortage of male pilots. Jacqueline Cochran, America's foremost woman pilot, convinced General Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces, that she could bring together a corps of seasoned women pilots and train them the "Army Way," so they could replace the male pilots being sent overseas. When they heard the call, young women from all over America responded. But the requirements for acceptance of females was tougher than of men, so only 1,830 of the 25,000 women volunteers were eventually accepted. The first class of 29 young women began their training, under extremely adverse conditions, at the municipal airport in Houston, Texas, and flew dilapidated civilian aircraft that had been taken over by the Army, until military trainers were made available. Three months later, at Avenger Field near Sweetwater, Texas, the United States Army transformed a base that was being used to train male cadets into the only military flying school for women in the United States. When each class of trainees arrived at Avenger Field, they were given no special treatment. They lived in barracks with 6 cots to a room, ate in a mess hall, followed a strict set of regulations, and marched. They marched everywhere. They marched to the barracks, they marched to the mess hall, they marched to their classes, and they marched to the flight line. Their training program was the same as the one male cadets were going through all over the country: ground school, flight school, cross-country flying, night flying, instrument flying, daily calisthenics, flying link trainers, and constantly marching --the Army way. At the end of each phase of flight training, they were given Army check rides by Army Air Force officers in good weather or bad weather, in dust storms, or with snow up to the propellers. Those who didn't pass washed out, packed their bags, and paid their way back home. Only 1,074 of the original 1,830 graduated. They were honored with a dress parade at a graduation ceremony where they received their official WASP wings. Together with 28 WAFS, they became WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS, the FIRST women in the history of America authorized to fly military aircraft. Their Army orders directed them to report to air bases all over the United States to the Air Transport Command, Training Command, the 1st, 2nd and 4th Air Force, the Proving Ground Command, the Weather Wing, the Air Technical Service Command, and the Troop Carrier Command. They lived in the officers' quarters and took their orders from Air Force commanders. They flew every type of aircraft the Air Force owned--trainers, fighters, bombers--they flew them in all kinds of weather and under all kinds of adverse conditions. They ferried personnel and hauled cargo, they delivered aircraft to points of embarkation, they test flew new planes, old planes, rebuilt planes, and some planes that male pilots refused to fly. They towed targets for ground-to-air anti-aircraft gunnery practice, and targets for air-to-air gunnery practice--always for gunnery trainees firing live ammunition. And they delivered many old war-weary airplanes to the junkyards and scrap heaps of America. In less than 2 years they flew more than 60 million miles for their country. They flew every kind of mission the Air Force had (except combat), and 39 of them made the supreme sacrifice. They, too, went home, but with no help from the country they had given their lives for. Unlike the male pilots, WASP families or friends had to

pay for their final trip home...

General Hap Arnold, the Commanding General of the Air Force was the keynote speaker at the graduating ceremonies for the last class of WASP on December 7, 1944. General Arnold said, *"You and more than 900 of your sisters have shown that you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your bothers. If ever there was any doubt in anyone's mind that women can become skillful pilots, the WASP have dispelled that doubt. I want to stress how valuable I believe the whole WASP program has been for the country. . . We . . . know that you (they) can handle our latest fighters, our heaviest bombers; we. . . know that you (they) are capable of ferrying, target towing, flying training, test flying, and the countless other activities which you have proved you can do. So, on this last graduation day, I salute you and all WASP. We of the Army Air Force are proud of you, we will never forget our debt to you.* Eleven days later, on December 20, 1944, over the objections of General Arnold, the WASP were disbanded. At hundreds of air bases all over America, the WASP hung up their Army parachutes for the last time, packed their bags, and paid their way back home. There were no GI benefits, no fringe benefits, and no dress parades--just the satisfaction of knowing that they had done their duty and they had completed their mission. Despite General Arnold's pledge that the Air Force would never forget them, it did, and so did America.

For over 30 years the records from the bases where the WASP were stationed were locked away inside US archives and marked "Top Secret ."

The US Air Force announced in 1976 that female pilots would begin flying jets for the first time, essentially negating the WASP program. That angered many of the female pilots, who promptly organized an effort to have their story told. Their records were opened and in 1977, a Congressional Bill gave Veteran Status to the WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS.

In 2010, President Obama signed a bill to honor the women with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor Congress can bestow. About 300 of the pilots who are still alive were invited to Washington for the event.

"All we ask is that our overlooked history would no longer be a missing chapter" in the history of aviation and the US, said Deanie Parrish, who accepted the gold medals on behalf of all WASPs.

Many of the women said they never thought what they did was a big deal and they never sought the recognition. On the other hand, the government's attempts to deny their service within the military prompted efforts to push for greater awareness of what they did.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
—

***WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS***

1. What was the purpose of the WASP program?
2. What information was available about female pilots up to and during WWII?
3. How many women applied to the program? How many were accepted? What were some of the reasons women were eliminated from the program?
4. How long did the WASP program last?
5. What were some of the reasons the age, height, and hours requirements for the program changed from its inception to its end?
6. Compare the costs of getting to flight school, room and board, and uniforms for male Air Force cadets and female WASP trainees.
7. Compare the insurance, injury or illness, and death benefits for males and females.

8. Compare the pay for male cadets and female trainees in their respective pilot programs.

Which candidates had the better “deal”? Why?

### **WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

Letter choices:

- As a pilot, write a letter to General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold protesting the discrepancies between female WASP trainees and male Air Force cadets.
- Write a response letter from General Arnold explaining the discrepancies.
- As a former WASP, write a letter to your Congressman in response to the Air Force’s announcement in 1976 that female pilots would begin flying jets for the first time.
- Write a letter to President Obama on behalf of your deceased grandmother who was a WASP during WWII. Thank him for the Congressional Gold Medal and tell him what this means to your family.

## WASP... STATISTICS



### WOMEN'S ARMY AIRFORCE FLIGHT TRAINING PROGRAM WFTD-- ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

CLASS	DATE	AGE	HT	EDUCATION	PILOT HOURS
43-1	Nov. '42	22-35	5'2"	HS or equivalent	200
43-2	Dec. '42	21-35	5'2"	HS or equivalent	100
43-3	Jan. '42	21-35	5'2"	HS or equivalent	75
43-4 +	Apr. 14, '43	21-35	5'2"	HS or equivalent	35
	Aug. '43	18 1/2	5'2"	HS or equivalent	35
		18 1/2	5'4"	HS or equivalent	35

### REQUIREMENTS FOR JOINING FERRYING SERVICE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY FERRYING SQUADRON (WAFS) (Limited to 25 women pilots--total of 28 hired)

CLASS	DATE	AGE	HT	EDUCATION	PILOT HRS	H.P. RATING
WAFS	Oct. '42	21-35	5'2"	HS or equivalent	500	200 h.p. 50 hrs. last 6 months

### FLYING/TRAINING STATS: WASP

APPLIED	ACCEPTED	ELIMINATED FROM PROGRAM	GRADUATED
---------	----------	-------------------------	-----------

		FLYING	RESIGNED	MEDICAL	DISCIPLINE	
25,000	1830	552	152	28	14	1074

MILES FLOWN BY WASP

<b>WASP in ATC/Ferry Command</b>	<b>9,224,000</b>
WASP, all other Commands	50,776,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60,000,000</b>

ACCIDENT RATE PER 1000 HOURS FLYING TIME

WAFS	WASP-ACT	WASP-OTHER	TRAINEES	OVERALL: WOMEN	OVERALL: MEN
.210	.120	.068	.032	.060	.088

AAF CADETS/PILOTS vs. WASP/TRAINEES  
COMPARATIVE COSTS OF FLIGHT TRAINING/BENEFITS

	MEN	WOMEN
Transportation to flight school	Provided at no expense	Paid all their own expenses
If washed out of program	Assigned to other military duty	Paid their own way home
Room/board	Provided at no expense	Charged \$1.65/day (Class 43-5 to end) Houston, WASP paid all expenses
Insurance	\$10,000	None. Companies cancelled personal policies. WASP contributed to an emergency fund.
Uniforms	Provided	Paid over \$100 for their own
Pay	\$75/month	\$150/mo plus \$26 overtime
Injury/Illness	Automatic care--no expense	Paid for their own in the beginning. Army hospitals provided for later classes
Death benefits	Automatic. Escort home. Military funeral. Family authorized to	\$200 and a plain pine box. No military escort. Not entitled to use American flag

	display Gold Star	on coffin. Survivors of WASP trainees w/ no right to display Gold Star.
--	-------------------	---

### OFFICER'S PAY COMPARISON

	2nd Lt.	1st Lt.	Captain	WASP
Per diem	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$6.00
Base Pay	\$150	\$166	\$200	\$250
Supplement	\$21	\$21	\$21	0
Quarters	\$45	\$45	\$45	0 <sup>1</sup>
Flight Pay	\$75	\$83	\$100	0 <sup>2</sup>
Uniform Allowance	\$200	\$200 +	\$200 +	0
TOTALS	\$291	\$330	\$396	\$250

1. If BOQ was available, WASP **had to pay from \$15 to \$20/month**. Otherwise, they paid for civilian housing (which was very expensive and in critical demand).

2. The most recent WASP graduate, assigned to fly training planes, received the same pay as WASP who had been on duty since the inception of the women pilot program and were flying the most complex and dangerous warplanes. WASP squadron officers had no boost in pay with the added duties. AAF squadron C.O's, on the other hand, usually were at least majors, and had the added pay increase.

### III

#### OBJECTIVES OF WOMEN PILOT PROGRAM

The objectives in activating the women pilot program were as stated by the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces:

- (1) To see if women could serve as military pilots and if so, to form the nucleus of an organization that could be rapidly expanded;
- (2) To release male pilots for combat;
- (3) To decrease the Air Forces' total demands on the cream of the manpower pool.

The experimental purpose of the program ranked along with but subordinate to the purpose of releasing male pilots from routine and non-combat duties for combat service. In the fall of 1942, it seemed clear that every pilot released from home duty for front line duty was needed urgently. It was anticipated then and even before, that global war would require all of our qualified men and many of our women. But it was not known how many of our young men could qualify to pilot the tens of thousands of planes which American industry had undertaken to produce. The Navy the Ground Forces, and the Service Forces were all drawing heavily on our highly capable young men. If a woman could effectively handle a trainer plane it was a waste of manpower to have it handled by a pilot fully trained for higher duty. If women could do the routine of towing targets; or tracking or searchlight missions, or ferrying, whether of a fighter or heavy bomber, it seemed wise to let them do so and release men who had already received combat training, or, of equal importance, release men for other branches of service who would otherwise have to be taken for flying training.

But all that was known about women as pilots was that about 3,000 had qualified for licenses, a few had done outstanding air work down through the years from the time of Harriet Quimby, Ruth Law, and other pioneer American women pilots. England had already found use for about all of their own and 25 of our American women pilots, and Russia, according to general information, was using women pilots even in combat and extensively in routine flying. How women pilots would prove out as a whole in relation to fatigue, strain, emergencies, and in connection with physiology peculiar to their sex, were largely unknown factors for determination. The women pilot program was started basically without the benefit of precedent. The two objectives had to be kept in mind, i.e., saving of manpower and determination of what could be expected of women as pilots, should any wide scale need for their services develop. Changes in requirements, in training curriculum, and in other features of the program as it developed, were a natural consequence,

When the training program was inaugurated, there were no clear cut physical standards available. There were available only ideas and opinions in the absence of exact

information about the specific influence certain conditions would have on the capacity of women regularly to fly military aircraft. There were nearly 6,000,000 single women in the United States between the ages of 18 and 28, and many more would be available if married women were included or the age limit raised above 28.

It was necessary, in order to meet with success, to determine that women in large groups could be trained as pilots to take over, efficiently, effectively and regularly, flying duties that would otherwise have to be performed by men. To do this, emphasis was placed on developing good operational pilots, rather than "hot" pilots. It was known that a few chosen pilots would be able to fly every type of plane. It was of importance to prove that a whole group of women, without special selection except for physical requirements, could be assigned to the Fortresses or the B-26's or the B-25's, pass through their transition training as successfully as the men pilots and thereafter carry on regularly in operations without undue fatigue or higher than normal accident rate. Stunts or "headline" flying was consequently discouraged. The WASP were continually cautioned to leave the glamor and glory for their brother pilots who were over the front lines, and that the WASP operation was a routine group endeavor.

## IV

### REQUIREMENTS

For the original ferrying group taken, for operational duties, the minimum requirements were fixed by the Air Transport Command, and included:

1. Age limit, to 35 inclusive
2. High school education
3. Commercial pilot license with 200 hp rating
4. Not less than 500 hours of logged and certified time
5. American citizenship
6. Cross Country flying experience

As stated above, 30 women were accepted under these requirements for the WAFS unit, two of whom were released before assignment to operations. At the start of the women pilot training program the requirements were set as follows for students:

1. Age 21 to 35 inclusive
2. High school education or equivalent
3. Minimum height -- 60 inches
4. 200 hours flying time
5. Medical examination by an Army flight surgeon
6. American citizenship
7. Personal interview with an authorized recruiting officer.

It was known from the beginning that the requirement of 200 hours would not permit the then objective of 500 trained women pilots to be obtained, but the desire was to have the more experienced licensed women pilots in the earlier classes to help get the program off to a smooth start. The requirement as to needed flying hours, having the objectives in mind, was quickly and successively reduced to 100 hours, then to 75 hours, and finally to 35 hours, where it remained until the end of the program. In point of fact, some of the earlier trainees had more flying hours logged than many of the original ferrying group. They chose to take the training course first, in the belief that they would be better off in the end. Opportunity was thus also presented to follow experienced pilots who went to work without the training course, experienced pilots who took the training course, and younger, less experienced pilot material.

The 35 hour requirement was not for the purpose of getting experienced pilots. In all cases after the first two classes, training was ab initio, i.e., as if the trainees had had no previous flying experience. This requirement was to act as a natural screening process. There were more than 25,000 young women who applied for pilot training and only a small portion of them could be accepted or even interviewed. By requiring 35 hours, all women unable or unwilling to meet this reasonable minimum would be immediately eliminated and those with 35 certified hours -- having shown interest and tenacity in obtaining such training -- would be more qualified for interviews and possible acceptance into the program.

During the initial stages of the program women were used to fly only the lighter types of planes. But it was contemplated at an early date that they would prove qualified on many types of planes, including heavy bombers. This consideration, plus the experience gained in the first few weeks of the program, caused a change upward in the requirements as to minimum height. The 60 inches was increased to 62 1/2 inches in April 1943 and in the summer of 1944 was raised to 64 inches.

The AAF limited its male flying cadets to the age group of 18 to 26 inclusive and experience was clearly to the effect that the best pilot material was to be found in this age group. The upper age limit for women pilots was never lowered below 35, but in selection of candidates few were taken over 26 years of age. On the other hand the lower age limit for women pilot trainees was reduced from 21 years to 18 1/2 in August 1943.

There were some outstanding pilots in the WASP program who were both in the upper age brackets and below 64 inches in height, but they were the exception to the rule. The finest material for pilot training, speaking generally, was to be found in the lower age brackets. The 1,102 WASP who were assigned to operational duties fell into the

following age classifications:

21 or under	29 %
22 to 27 inclusive	57 %
28 to 32 inclusive	11 %
Over 32	3%

## CONGRESSIONAL BILL

### Giving WASP Veteran Status

PUBLIC LAW 95-202--NOV. 23, 1977

#### TITLE IV--WOMEN'S AIR FORCES SERVICE PILOTS

Sec. 401. (a) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the service of any person as a member of the Women's Air Forces Service Pilots (a group of Federal civilian employees attached to the United States Army Air Force during World War II), or the service of any person in any other similarly situated group the members of which rendered service to the Armed Forces of the United States in a capacity considered civilian employment or contractual service at the time such service was rendered, shall be considered active duty for the purposes of all laws administered by the Veterans' Administration if the Secretary of Defense, pursuant to regulations which the Secretary shall prescribe--

(A) after a full review of the historical records and all other available evidence pertaining to the service of any such group, determines, on the basis of judicial and other appropriate precedent, that the service of such group constituted active military service, and

(B) in the case of any such group with respect to which such Secretary has made an affirmative determination that the service of such group constituted active military service, issues to each member of such group a discharge from such service under honor- and conditions where the nature and duration of the service of such member so warrants Discharges issued pursuant to the provisions of the first sentence of this paragraph shall designate as the date of discharge that date, as determined by the Secretary of Defense, on which such service by the person concerned was terminated.

(2) In making a determination under clause (A) of paragraph (1) of this subsection with respect to any group described in such paragraph, the Secretary of Defense may take into consideration the extent to which--

(A) such group received military training and acquired a military capability or the service performed by such group was critical to the success of a military mission.

(B) the members of such group were subject to military justice, discipline, and control,

(C) the members of such group were permitted to resign,

(D) the members of such group were susceptible to assignment for duty in a combat zone, and

(E) the members of such group had reasonable expectations that their service would be considered to be active military service.

(b) (1) No benefits shall be paid to any person for any period prior to the date of enactment of this title as a result of the enactment of subsection (a) of this section.

(2) The provisions of section 106(a) (2) of title 38, United States Code, relating to election of benefits, shall be applicable to persons made eligible for benefits, under laws

administered by the Veterans Administration, as a result of implementation of the provisions of subsection (a) of this section.

#### TITLE V--EFFECTIVE DATES

Sec. 501. The provisions of this Act shall become effective on the first day of the first month beginning 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, except that the provisions of title I and section 304(a) (1) (A) shall be effective retroactively to October 1, 1977, the provisions of sections 201 and 202 shall become effective on January 1, 1978, the provisions of section 203 shall be effective retroactively to May 31, 1976, and the provisions of sections 301, 302(2), 304(a)(1)(B), 304(a)(2), 305(a)(3), 305(b)(3), 305(b)(4), 305(c), 306, 307, 308, 309, and 310 and of title IV shall be effective upon enactment.

Approved November 23, 1977.\*