

WARBIRDS
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WARBIRDS is the relatively untold story of the pioneer women who flew planes for the army during the Second World War, and the subsequent fight for gender equality.

Female pilots were used in non-combat roles, ferrying planes to the theater of war and therefore freeing men to fly combat missions. Their effort was paramount to winning the war; however, once the tide of war changed, men began expressing their concern that training jobs that women held would no longer be available to them. That was the beginning of the end for the female pilots of the Women's Air Force Service Pilots(WASP).

There were two women who dueled in the race to form a women's force: Jackie Cochran and Nancy Love.

Cochran had ties to Eleanor Roosevelt and used them to offer the services of women to the war effort. The result was that she was sent to Great Britain where she studied an English version of a female ferrying command known as the ATA.

Love was married to Major Robert Love, who worked for the Ferry Command stateside. She convinced General "Hap" Arnold to begin a program to utilize female pilots for non-combat roles. The result was Women's Air force Service Pilots aka WAFS.

Cochran got wind of Love's program, and wasn't pleased, as she believed women flying for the army was her purview. She returned stateside and was given command of the Women's Flying Training Detachment aka WFTD. By 1943 the women set aside their differences and were working together as WASP, merging their respective commands with Cochran serving as director and Love in command of the ferrying division.

WASP training began and ended at Avenger Field in Texas. The women trained from sun up to sun down. These exceptional pilots, who were to fly over 60 million miles and deliver planes to the theaters of combat. In fact, there was not a single type of plane that WASP flew that did not see action. The WASP pilots flew anything and everything from heavy bombers to fighter planes.

Just because the WASP did not see combat did not mean their world was without tragedy. Women died training. Cornelia Ford was one such pilot. She died accidentally when a male pilot clipped her plane. Training wasn't the only danger the WASP faced in their regular duties: the pilots towed targets for live anti-aircraft artillery practice, as well as simulated strafing missions. In total thirty-eight WASP died in service. Women of the Air force did not have the same benefits as men at that time. There were no provisions, no benefit, in fact the Army

refused to allow the American flag to even be draped over the coffin of a lost flyer. The women did it anyway, and it was a common practice that the women chipped the paltry amount they did make to send the body back to the pilot's relatives.

It was for this and other reasons that the move to militarize the WASP was pushed for. Cochran was so adamant to militarize she made the mistake of making an ultimatum: let us militarize or shut down the program. The timing was poor for the WASP. The war was winding down and men were returning home, anxious that their jobs would be taken by women. It was a male centric world back then, and despite the massive contribution of women in the war on a multitude of fronts, the world was simply not ready for gender equality. The bill to militarize the WASP failed, albeit narrowly, and the WASP were disbanded. They weren't even given transport home.

