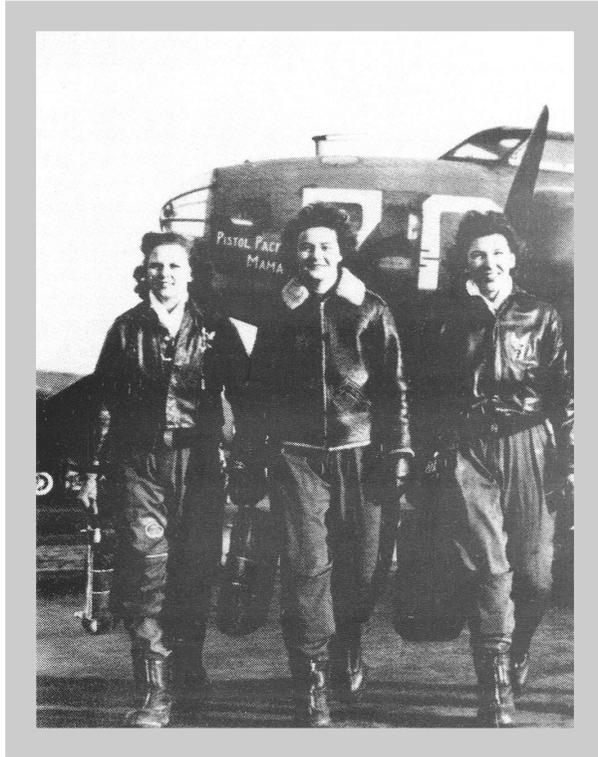




FALCON
FOUNDATION



SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF

WOMEN AIR SERVICE PILOTS

Women Air Service Pilots

Within nine months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States was facing a dangerous lack of pilots. By then a group of American women was ferrying aircraft in England for the Air Transport Auxiliary under the command of Jacqueline Cochran, the most famous woman flier of the twentieth century. Knowing the need and convinced that with training American women could fly military planes, Ms. Cochran proposed to General H. H. "Hap" Arnold an experiment in which, if successful, American women pilots would free male pilots for overseas duty. Hard pressed for pilots, Arnold agreed to the experiment.

Few women then had the flying experience required for immediately joining the Air Transport Command. Mrs. Nancy Love undertook to find and enroll them into a women's squadron for the ATC. By December, twenty-five had qualified to ferry light trainers. By mid-November 1942, twenty-eight women with a minimum of two hundred hours had reported to enter the experimental program to teach women to fly the Army Air Corps way. Their success or failure was to determine the future of the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), whose members called themselves the "Woofteddies." All but three proved their flying skills, and two others were discharged for medical reasons. Their rigorous training was analogous to that of male aviation cadets except for combat flight training. Meanwhile, Mrs. Love's Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) in January 1943 enrolled its last member, and thereafter all women pilot joining the ATC were required to graduate from the WFTD. Facilities at Houston proved inadequate and the WFTD moved to Sweetwater, Texas.

WFTD graduates were soon climbing into cockpits for flight duties other than ATC ferrying, and the name Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron was no longer suitable. A new all-inclusive name - Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) - fused the organization with Ms. Cochran as Director and Mrs. Love as Executive for women pilots in the ATC.

Aviation had not then witnessed - nor is it ever likely to do so again - anything like what the young women pilots tackled and accomplished. Their flying program which initially was deemed highly experimental and probably headed for failure, rapidly proved the exact opposite. The first assignments exterior to the ATC were top secret. Under hush-hush conditions, a group reported for training as tow-target pilots. On completion of their training, some went on to flying radio-controlled target planes; one WASP in a tiny PQ-8 target plane sat in her craft ready to take over controls in an emergency, plunging and zooming while the inexperienced WASP in the "mother ship" learned radar calibration. In groups WASPs reported to and graduated from B-17 Flying Fortress School, piloting four-engine Boeing bombers. At the B-26 Martin Marauder School they tamed a twin-engine bomber called "the prostitute" because it has no visible means of support. Others flew and loved the twin-engine B-25 Billy Mitchell bomber. Having learned their piloting skills, the young women reported to bases devoted to training men as anti-aircraft and airborne gunnery crews, often as not using live ammunition. Sometimes WASP planes landed with holes in them as well as in tattered targets. In the Air Transport Command, WASPs took training at Pursuit School, flying P40's, P-39 "Flying Coffins",

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P-47 Thunderbolts, and P-51 Mustangs. Some also ferried twin-engine attack planes like the P-38 Lightning.

Throughout the United States WASPs in other commands flew cargo, top secret weapons, and personnel. At Training Command bases they flew as test pilots, “wringing out” reconstructed planes to be certain they were safe for instructors and students. They flew for the Weather Wing. They towed gliders. Whatever their assignment, WASPs performed with a willingness, zest and expertise that won them acceptance and praise and buried forever the term “experimental.”

But unlike women in other military services, Women Air Force Service Pilots never achieved promised militarization. Thirty eight lost their lives in line of duty, but they died without military honors or benefits. Yet in every way save one,

WASPs lived a military life. That exception was the right to resign, a right few exercised until they were told they were to be released from service. That day came on December 20, 1944.

In the mid-1970's, newspapers announced that the Air Force planned to train its “first women military pilots.” Outraged because they knew better, women who had flown as WASPs began a campaign to be recognized as the veterans they knew themselves to be. In the 1979 the Air Force acknowledged their service and the WASPs “became” veterans. The WASPs are proud that in 1984 they received the Victory medal of World War II and the American Theater medal. They cherish their memories of having served our nation well as pilots, so well, in fact, that what they achieved lights the way for any American woman seeking to serve the United States as a military pilot or member of the Air Force.

Dear General Bellis,

It is indeed a pleasure to be able to establish a Falcon Foundation scholarship in honor of the Women Air Service Pilots of World War 11. It is funded primarily by contributions from Jacqueline Cochran and many of her friends. As a fitting reminder, Gen. H.H. "Hap" Arnold in 1944 referred to the WASPs as "The Best Women Pilots in the World."

Sincerely,

Wendell B Sell

*Wendell B. Sell
Maj. Gen., USAF (Ret.)
Chairman
The Falcon Foundation*



The Falcon Foundation is a 501(c)(3), non-profit foundation. Its purpose is to provide scholarships to College or Preparatory Schools for motivated young people seeking admission to USAFA and a career in the Air Force.

Although it is a separate organization, the Falcon Foundation works closely with USAFA.