

The WASP Wings -The Pilots and the History of their Wings



JACQUELINE
COCHRAN

The Leaders

In 1939, on the day after Germany's tanks rolled into Warsaw, pilot Jacqueline Cochran sent a letter to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt encouraging the use of women pilots in the armed forces. In May 1940, another pilot, Nancy Harkness Love wrote the Ferry Division of the Army Air Force with a similar idea, but the Army was not ready to put women in the cockpit of planes.



NANCY LOVE

The demand for male combat pilots and warplanes left the Air Transport Command with a shortage of experienced pilots to ferry planes from factory to a point of embarkation. The leaders remembered Love's proposal and hired her to recruit twenty-five of the most qualified women pilots in the country to ferry military aircraft. These outstanding women pilots were called the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, or WAFS.

By September 14, 1942, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, also approved a program that would train a large group of women to serve as ferrying pilots. The training school was placed under the direction of Cochran. The program was called the Army Air Force Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD).



General Henry
'Hap' Arnold

On August 5, 1943, the WAFS and the WFTD were merged and were redesignated the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP. Cochran was appointed Director, and Love was named WASP executive with the ATC Ferrying Division.

The Training

Love and the WAFS first gathered as a squadron at New Castle Army Air Base in Wilmington, Delaware. Although the WAFS were required to have 500 hours of flying time, those that arrived averaged more than

1000 hours. The pilots were checked out and trained for just a few weeks before they were assigned to their posts.

While the WAFS were beginning their ferrying duties, Cochran began organizing the WFTD and recruiting classes of women pilots. The training involved six months of ground school and flight training. The first three classes trained in Houston, Texas at the Municipal Airport. Bad weather and crowded skies led Cochran to move the program to Avenger field in Sweetwater, Texas.

The Jobs

The WAFS and the first classes that joined the Air Transport Command out of the Houston and Sweetwater training programs ferried planes from factory to point of embarkation.

Eventually, the Air Transport Command complained that it could not take all the pilots graduating from Avenger Field. Cochran announced to all the air bases that she would accept any job (she called them “dishwashing jobs”) which the WASP could do and thus relieve additional males for combat duty. Besides flying all the airplanes in the Army’s arsenal, WASP taught flight instruction, flight testing, flew radio-controlled planes and anti-aircraft tow targets.

Deactivation and Militarization

Unfortunately, the WASP and WAFS were hired under Civil Service. Cochran and General Arnold had intended the women pilots to be made part of the military, but the need for pilots was so great and the road to militarization was slow, requiring an act of Congress. They began the program with the idea of militarizing later.

In 1944, just as the bill to militarize the WASP went before Congress, the need for pilots lessened. The decision was made to deactivate the WASP in December 1944. General Arnold would record that “in any future total effort, the nation can count on thousands of its young women to fly any of its aircraft.”

The amazing experiment using women pilots during wartime almost seemed destined to be forgotten. Then, in the mid 1970s, the Navy announced to the media that, for the first time in history, women would be permitted to fly government planes. The announcement reverberated among the former WASP, and like nothing else, mobilized them to seek recognition. With the help of Bruce Arnold, son of General Arnold, and political help from Senator Barry Goldwater, who commanded women pilots in his squadron, the WASP finally gained their belated militarization from Congress in 1977.

THE WASP WINGS

We must remember the WASP's were not military and therefore were not awarded wings by the Army Air Corp. But Jacqueline Cochran had a very good understanding of what wings mean within the US Military and knew she had to reward the women who trained and became WASP's. Using her own funds she developed wings. Many of these wings are very rare today because of the small number that were made and awarded. While it is not known how many were made for certain we can get an idea by the size of each class. What is interesting is that the first seven graduating classes each had their own wing, class W-8 was due to get the new standard WASP wing, but the wings did not arrive on time so they got one of their own. After that everyone got the new unofficial, official wing. Here are the details of the wings as best as we can figure them out.



Jacqueline Cochran
pinning on wings of
WASP at 43 W-1

Class 43-W-1

The wings were made by a jeweler in Waco, Tx. He made the wings by taking a standard Army Air Corp wing and soldering a shield for the class on the center. The shield was the training shield of the 319th Training Squadron in the center of the wing. The first wing was actually made of two styles. He used both the Air Corp Cadet hat badge missing the propeller that was in the center and the second was of the GEMSCO Aerial Gunner which had the bullet ground down flat and the shield solder on the wing.



Hat Badge Sterling Silver



GEMSCO Sterling Silver

Cadets 58
Graduated 38
Graduation
April 24, 1943



Class of 43-W-2

Something must have gone wrong with the first jeweler as the rest of the wings W-2 to W-8 were made by another Waco, Tx jeweler. But he followed the same concept of taking a Army Air Corp Wing and soldering the shield for each class on top. The W-2 wing was similar to one of the W-1's in that they used the cadet hat badge without the propeller and he shield in the center.

Note This wing is incorrect and will shortly be replaced. The 318 should be 319.



Class 43-W-2
graduation re-
view

Jacqueline Cochran (in
black dress) and class 43-W-
2 WASP graduates.



Cadets 60
Graduated 43
Graduation Date: May 28th, 1943



1988

Class of 43-W-3

Starting with the wing for Class 43-W-3 we find that the wing that was selected changed once again. This time the jeweler used a Balfour Pilot wing. Considered at the time to be one of the nicer wings made. He cut down the center shield and ground it flat. Then once again soldered the training DI to the center.



Betty Hanson and Vivian Gilchrist

Cadets 58
Graduated 38
Graduation Date: July 3, 1943



Graduation



Leader is Gretchan Gorman and holding Guidon is Dora Dougherty.



Class 43-W-4

The wing for Class 43-W-4 once again changed. This time the background wing that was selected was a Bell Observer. Once again he cut down the center shield and ground it flat. I do know that working with this wing it is much harder to flatten the center area and wonder if the section was due to good looking shoulders in the design of the Bell wing. Then soldered the training DI to the center.



Graduation



Katy Loft (shoulder length hair), Didi Moorman, Gene Slack, Kathleen Kelly,?
Cadets 151
Graduated 112
Graduation Date: August 7, 1943



Eileen Roach PT-19



Cadman, Epsberg,
Fremd

Class 43-W-5

The wing for Class 43-W-5 did not change from W-4. The Bell Observer wings was used again for this class. The only change was the correct W-5 DI in the center.



Ringling the Bell



Unknown



Ethel Finley

Cadets 127
Graduated 85
Graduation Date: September 11, 1943



Mary Timothy on the wing of a PT-19.

Class 43-W-6

The wing for Class 43-W-5 did not change from W-4 and W-5. The Bell Observer wings was used again for this class. The only change was the correct W-6 DI in the center. Maybe a standard had been established.



Joanne Trebtske and Marjorie Logan



Frances Snyder, Ann Waldner, Marjorie Wakeham, Bonnie Jean Welz

Moya Mitchell
with a B-26



Cadets 122
Graduated 84
Graduation Date: October 9, 1943



Virginia Hope

Class 43-W-7

The theory of a standard went out the window with the issue of W-7 wings. Or the fact that a standard wing was coming resulted in what can only be called a mess for W-7. The must have known that with Class W-8 a new standard wing had been selected and Josten had been selected to make them. I am willing to bet he did not want to stock wings for future classes as it appeared the end of his production was near. In the case of W-7 three different background wings were used. They were all similar in design since they were what was called the Juarez Design. The name comes from the selling of these wings across the border to new Flyers who went down south for a weekend, etc. The three wings used were: Pilot in Sterling, Pilot in Coin Silver and an Observer in Sterling.



Marian Mann



Giles inspects guard of honor

Cadets 103

Graduated 59

Graduation Date: November 13, 1943



Betty Wright and
Helen Trigg

Class 43-W-8

This was the first class that was due to obtain the new official wings, but they did not arrive in time from Josten. So the jeweler had to make up a wing for this class. The new wing design was based on a diamond or lozenge shape in the center of the wing, representing the shield of Athena, goddess of war and wisdom. The wing shown below was made from a Amico Pilot wings with a diamond shape soldered onto the center.



May Ball, Jana Crawford, and Mary Estill.
P-51



Cadets 96
Graduated 48
Graduation Date: December 17, 1943



Classes 44-W-1 to 44-W-10

The "Official" WASP Wing made by Josten in sterling silver finally arrive for class 44W-1 and became the standard for all classes until the program ended with the graduation of class 44W-10.



L-R Mary Hilberg (44-W-6), Helen Venskus (44-W-8), Anita Paul (44-W-6), Jean Ward (44-W-8), Mary E. Martin (44-W-3), Ruth Hageman (43-W-5), Katherine Kleinecke (44-W-9), Mary Hiller (43-W-5).

44-W-1 Cadets 101 Graduated 49
Graduation Date: February 11, 1944

44-W-2 Cadets 112 Graduated 49
Graduation Date: March 11, 1944

44-W-3 Cadets 100 Graduated 57
Graduation Date: April 15, 1944

44-W-4 Cadets 95 Graduated 52
Graduation Date: May 23, 1944

44-W-5 Cadets 132 Graduated 72
Graduation Date: June 27, 1944

44-W-6 Cadets 136 Graduated 72
Graduation Date: August 4, 1944

44-W-7 Cadets 103 Graduated 59
Graduation Date: September 8, 1944

44-W-8 Cadets 108 Graduated 49
Graduation Date: October 18, 1944

44-W-9 Cadets 77 Graduated 55
Graduation Date: November 8, 1944

44-W-10 Cadets 117 Graduated 68
Graduation Date: December 7, 1944



44W-2 Back: Dulaney, Heckman, Gilbert, Edwards, Lindstrom. Next to top row: Hascall, Harris, Adams, Henderson, Johnson, Hawkins. One by herself between Clark and Hascall (1st and 2nd rows) unknown. Front: Clarke, Keil, Cleverly, Laraway.



44 W-3

Frances E. Coughlin
(44-W-6)

Reunion Wings-

As with any group they held reunions and they also had wings made for the reunions. Unfortunately some people have sold the reunion wing as real. They look like the Josten wing but use a pin back and not clutch back as the original. Two other reunion items are sold as real, they are mascot pins made of sterling silver. These reunion items as shown here.



Annual Armed Forces Day, Findley, Ohio. Front Row: Elizabeth Shipley, Mary Ellen Keil, Marty Wyall, Madge Moore, Caro Bosca, Mary Edith Engle, and Sara Gleeson. Back Row: Clarice Bergemann, Jean McCreery, Betty Turner, Kaddy Steele, Shutzy Reynolds, Thelma Miller, Nadine Nagle, Betty Nicholas, Ethel Finely, Thelma Nadine Bluhm, Leona Zimmer, Jeanette Jenkins, and Madge Minton.