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Exhibit highlights World War II efforts of Women Airforce Service Pilots

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Sacrifice was common in World War II, as military personnel and civilians joined together to fight fascist foes in Europe and imperial conquest in the Pacific.

But a select group of women — civilians who worked with military aircraft — sacrificed for their country by straddling both worlds. More than 1,000 young women quit their jobs, left the security of homestead and the comfort of kin to pay their own way to Texas and learn to fly “the Army way.”

They came to be known as the WASP — Women Airforce Service Pilots — and their story was largely ignored by WWII historians because their records were sealed for more than three decades after their national service.

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But in the last decade, a project known as Wings Across America has been capturing and preserving, one by one, the personal histories of surviving WASP across America, so the country doesn't lose this extraordinary saga of proud dedication.

Nancy Parrish, Wings' executive director, is herself

the daughter of WASP pilot Deanie Parrish of Waco and the late Lt. Col. Bill Parrish, a career Air Force B-29 pilot. She describes Wings as an inspirational, cutting-edge digital history project — with the aid of Baylor University — to capture for all time the story of the first women to fly America's military aircraft.

WASP were stationed at Waco Army Air Field from April 28 to Dec. 20, 1944. They flew BT-13s and AT-6s as

## A time line of the Women Airforce Service Pilots

**June 1939** — The federal government establishes the Civilian Pilot Training Program, anticipating the need should war break out. The program provided pilot training across the country, but a quota system allows only one woman to be trained for every 10 men.

**September 1940** — Aviator Jackie Cochran writes to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt suggesting the establishment of a women's flying division of the Army Air Corps.

**June 1941** — Women are banned from participating in the Civilian Pilot Training Program.

**September 1942** — The Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) is established, with 25 of America's top women pilots. Jackie Cochran

engineering test pilots, administrative pilots, ferrying pilots and as instrument instructors.

More than 25,000 women applied to be WASP, agreeing to pay their own way to training in Texas. A total of 1,830 were accepted into training, with 1,074 women graduating during the program's brief existence.

The women are her heroes, Parrish said. The pioneering pilots took the same oath, went through the same training, followed the same rules and received the same official orders as the Army Air Force male pilots — but without military benefits or a post-war GI Bill.

"They wanted to 'do their part' to help win a war, and they all loved to fly," Parrish said. They served in every type of aircraft in the Army Air Force arsenal and on every type of mission flown by the male AAF pilots, except combat. Assignments included ferrying aircraft from manufacturers to ports of embarkation and military bases, towing targets for live air-to-air gunnery practice and live anti-aircraft artillery practice, flight testing aircraft, simulated strafing and night tracking missions, weather missions, smoke laying, radio control drones, transporting cargo and personnel.

WASP were instructors for instrument and flight training for male cadets and pilots and piloted missions to train navigators and bombardiers. They also flew B-26s and the B-29 to prove to the male pilots those planes were safe to fly, Parrish added.

The first women in history to fly America's military aircraft, WASP were stationed at 120 Army Air Bases and Army Air Fields all over the nation after their seven-month training regimens. The female aviators were trained to fly noncombat missions in order to free male pilots for combat missions.

Not that what they did wasn't fraught with danger as well.

One of the 38 WASP who lost her life while serving was Bettie Mae Scott, 22, who was killed at Waco Army Air Field on July 8, 1944. An engineering test pilot, the California native died in a crash during a test hop in a BT-13 aircraft she was assessing for airworthiness before a male cadet could fly it. Investigation later showed the aircraft's tail assembly malfunctioned.

Because the WASP was never militarized, those who served were considered civil service employees. When WASP were killed in the line of duty, the families of the

establishes the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) under chief of the Army Air Forces, Gen. "Hap" Arnold.

**November 1942** — The first class of 28 recruits from the Women's Flying Training Detachment reports to the Houston municipal airport.

**February 1943** — Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, welcomes its first class of women pilots. The WFTD school in Houston closes.

**August 1943** — The Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) merge with Jackie Cochran's training program to form the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).

**December 1944** — After more than 1,000 women graduate and 60 million miles in missions are flown, the WASP program is deactivated.

**1977** — Congress grants WASP military veteran status. Their WWII service medals don't arrive for another seven years.

### Events honoring WASP

\* Wings Across America presents: ["Fly Girls of WWII,"](#) an exhibit that honors a brave group of young women that flew military aircraft during World War II, at the Mayborn Museum Complex at 1300 S. University-Parks Drive. Known as the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots), these female aviators played an important but largely forgotten role in America's past. The show continues through Jan. 22. For more information, call 710-1110.

\* At least three of the surviving 100 or so WASP of World War II fame will be on hand to greet visitors to the **2007 Texas Air Fiesta**, 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Nov. 10 at the Texas State Technical

fallen or their classmates had to pay for their bodies to be shipped home.

Baylor University boasts one WASP among its honored alums: Ruth Ellen (Dailey) Helm of Grapeland, (113 miles east of Waco). She earned a bachelor's degree in business from Baylor in 1937 before earning her pilot's license in 1939.

She accumulated more than 250 hours of flight time in three years. In 1942, she qualified to serve in the Women's Airforce Service Pilots and trained in Houston.

Earning her wings on May 28, 1943, she then reported to the 5th Ferrying Group at Love Field in Dallas and put in about 800 hours in the sky for Uncle Sam.


**Sources:** *On Final Approach* by Byrd Granger, [The Baylor Lariat](#), [WingsAcrossAmerica.us](#) | [WASPWWII.org](#) | [WWII-women-pilots.org](#).

College-Waco airfield. The free event, conducted by the Commemorative Air Force, places a special emphasis this year on women's military service and aviation derring-do. WASP Marion S. Hodgson will sign copies of her book, *Winning My Wings* (2005), from noon until 3 p.m. For more information, visit [RangerWingCAF.com](#) or call Joe Nemmer at 756-5456.

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