

The W.A.S.P.:
Allow Them to Swarm or Squash Them Like a Bug?
8th to 11th Grade
Melissa Robertson – Daniel Jenkins Middle Academy

Directions:

The following documents show the statistics training scenarios and accommodations involved with the **Women Air force Service Pilots** of World War II. You are to read/analyze each of the following documents then answer the corresponding questions that follow each one in the order they are given. Finally, you will utilize the documents, your answers and background knowledge of the time period to respond to the following essay prompt.

Your essay should include an introductory paragraph followed by a body that makes specific reference to the documents that have been provided for your use. You should end the essay with a strong paragraph tying all the information together.

Background Information:

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 were 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 cadet's 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. 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.

On December 20, 1944, over the objections of General Arnold, the WASP was 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.¹

Essay Prompt:

Using the visual and literary documents, write an essay stating whether the W.A.S.P. program deserved to be militarized or deactivated. You must be able to support your decision with evidence from the sources that follow.

Document A: PRE WASP QUOTE FROM FIRST LADY, ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

"The CAA says that women are psychologically not fitted to be pilots but I see pictures every now and then of women who are teaching men to fly. We know that in England, where the need is great, women are ferrying planes and freeing innumerable men for combat service. It seems to me that in the civil air patrol and in our own ferry command women, if they can pass the tests imposed upon our men, should have an equal opportunity for noncombat service. I believe in this case, if the war goes on long enough and women are patient, opportunity will come knocking at their doors. However, there is just a chance that this is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with all our ability and every weapon possible. **Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used.** As my correspondent says: "I think it is time you women spoke up for yourselves and undertook a campaign to see that our 3500 women fliers, everyone of who is anxious to do something in the war, be given a chance to do it." Hence I am speaking up for the women fliers, because I am afraid we cannot afford to let the time slip by just now without using them."

SEPTEMBER 1, 1942: "MY DAY" by Eleanor Roosevelt. (Syndicated Column)

1. What does Eleanor Roosevelt encourage women to do in this article?

2. What does she say women pilots are in the article?

Document B: W.A.S.P. Dora Dougherty Strother giving an account of how the program began and the commendations it received. ~excerpts from the full account

The WASP was formed in August, 1943, from two earlier, relatively independent programs for women pilots: the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), an experimental squadron of experienced women pilots employed to ferry aircraft for the Air Transport Command, and the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), a training program established to supply pilots for the squadron. The intent of the women-pilots programs was:

¹ (Parrish)

- (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' demands on the cream of the manpower pool.

Many accolades and commendations were made to the WASPs. At the graduation of the last class of WASP cadets at Sweetwater, Texas, on December 7, 1944, General Hap Arnold said:

Frankly, I didn't know in 1941 whether a slip of a young girl could fight the controls of a B-17 in the heavy weather they would naturally encounter in operational flying. Those of us who had been flying for twenty or thirty years knew that flying an airplane was something you do not learn overnight. Well, now in 1944, more than two years since WASPs first started flying with the Air Forces, we can come to only one conclusion--the entire operation has been a success. It is on the record that women can fly as well as men. Certainly we haven't been able to build an airplane you can't handle. From AT-6s to B-29s, you have flown them around like veterans. One of the WASP has even test-flown our new jet plane. So, on this last graduation day, I salute you and all WASPs. We of the AAF are proud of you; we will never forget our debt to you.²

1. What are the objectives of the women-pilots program?

2. Were these objectives met based on General Arnold's statement?

3. Why was General Arnold originally concerned about regarding female pilots?

Document C: AAF CADETS/PILOTS vs. WASP/TRAINEE'S 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 display Gold Star	\$200 and a plain pine box. No military escort. Not entitled to use American flag on coffin. Survivors of WASP trainees w/ no right to display Gold Star.

Statistics taken from "On Final Approach" by Byrd Howell Granger. Falconer Publishing Company, Scottsdale, AZ, 1991.

² (Strother)

1. What expenses did female pilots have that male pilots did not?
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2. What were the death benefits of female pilots in this program? How was this different from male pilots at the time?
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**Document D: November 1, 1944 Brigadier General Nowland, Commander ATC
Ferrying Division**

"Secret Memorandum"

To Commanding General, Air Transport Command

The announced inactivation of the WASP on 20 December 1944 will have a profound effect on the ability of the Ferrying Division to meet its commitments and to deliver pursuit type aircraft. Since June 1943 women pilots have been delivering fighters in increasing numbers, and at this date 117 WASPs, or 82 per cent of the total number assigned this Division, are "frozen" on pursuit planes. They represent 49 percent of our total "frozen" pursuit pilots in the five Groups to which WASPs are assigned. It was planned to keep this group of civilian pilots on pursuit deliveries permanently, thus releasing men for progressive upgrading in order to meet our quotas...

Replacement of these experienced pilots with an equal number of male pilots will entail a month's training at Brownsville for each pilot. These replacements must be chosen from the ranks of our more experienced personnel, since it has been demonstrated that a minimum of 400 hours and an instrument card are necessary prerequisites for pursuit training and subsequent safe delivery of fighters. The 117 WASPs we have been using on pursuit deliveries are already experienced in this specialized type of flying and have established a remarkable low accident record...

The cost of training a fighter pilot at the 4th OUT is approximately \$9,336.00, or \$1,085,312 for the 117 replacements required upon the discharge of the WASPs...

The loss of the women pilots in the Ferrying Division will affect a definite hardship upon the operations of the Groups. The discharge of the WASPs in December will necessitate the immediate freezing on pursuits of 117 male pilots to replace them. These officers will consequently be ineligible for upgrading and foreign quotas for a minimum period of five months, since pursuit training consumes one month, and a period of four months of pursuit flying has been demonstrated to be the minimum period to insure effective utilization.

These pilots, even after training, will not be as efficient, due to lack of experience, as are the WASPs who have been specializing in this type of flying over a period of eighteen months. It is obvious that the elimination of this group of pilots will not only seriously hamper the Ferrying Division in performing its ferrying mission, but will result in needless expenditure of a considerable amount of money in training and replacements.

According to Miss Merryman, General Arnold's reply came via another 'secret memorandum' which said, in part: "Evaluation of this program in terms of dollars and cents is not the immediate issue at stake and personnel under your control should scrupulously avoid any discussion along this line."

This excerpt is from Molly Merriman's fantastic book, "**Clipped Wings**"
New York University Press, 1998. pp 121 and 122.

1. How will the deactivation of the WASP program affect the Ferrying Division?

2. Was it cost effective to deactivate the program based on the statement above?

3. Why does General Nowland feel that male pilot replacements will not be as efficient as the current WASP?

Document E: Representative Stefan rises to speak on behalf of the WASP and all American Women!~excerpts from full speech

Mr. Chairman, I feel that the women pilots who are now doing such a valuable work for our Army Air Corps should be commended. I hope that nothing be done here to eliminate them and that those women who are now flying transports will not only be retained but be given the rewards to which they are entitled. I have first-hand information as to their great ability, and I resent insinuations that these or other American women have not rendered tremendous service to our Nation. I could give you names of many of these women pilots who have flown combat planes and are continuing to fly these fighting planes and transports from coast to coast. I wish that the war censors could give me permission now to tell you of the individual flights of these wonderful women in delivering fighting planes to our allies from the factories to the coast.

No matter what this House membership feels about the women in our armed forces, Mr. Chairman, I feel now that we are discussing them I cannot resist in some way championing their cause. We of this Congress have seen the birth of the women of the Army Auxiliary Corps, the marines, the Navy, the Coast Guard, and our other services. They number into the many thousands and they have relieved men so that men could go into the combat services. These women of our services have left colleges, schools, professions, jobs, and homes. Their services are remarkable. Many have left highly paid positions for this patriotic work in the time of our Nation's need. And they are doing work are beyond the expectations of even those who voted against the creation oOf their organizations. These and the army of housewives and business and professional women have been a real challenge to our enemies and an inspiration to those who express amazement at the ability and efficiency of American women.

In the homes of America, Mr. Chairman, the fires of hope are burning because the American women are making that hope live. In these few minutes allotted to me I wanted to add my word of homage to American womanhood and give thanks to the Almighty that American men honor and respect our women. For their great service I voice my appreciation and thanks.³

1. What accomplishments does Representative Stefan state about women pilots?

2. Does he wish for the program to be deactivated or retained? Why?

³ (Stefan)

Document F:

**WAR DEPARTMENT
Bureau of Public Relations
PRESS BRANCH**

December 19, 1944

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In a statement released by the War Department today, the accomplishments of the Women's Air force Service Pilots program were reviewed by Miss Jacqueline Cochran, Director of Women Pilots for the AAF. The WASP program is to be deactivated Wednesday, December 20. Miss Cochran's statement follows:

"The WASP have flown military aircraft substantially more than seventy-five million miles as their contribution in the air to the war effort. The major portion of this mileage was flown on operational duties; the minor part in training. The WASP are being demobilized because the pilot shortage which existed in 1942 and which caused the women pilot program to be started has now been effectively corrected. If continued in service longer, the WASP would be using flying time on domestic operations that could be spread to better advantage among the available male pilots who are awaiting their assignments abroad or who have returned from their completed combat missions and are available for domestic duties. Also the reduction of flying training has released for domestic flying from the civil contract schools many qualified pilots who have been instructing cadets. Thus the WASP have successfully fulfilled their main objective. The experimental features of the women pilot program have been successfully completed. The experience gained proved that this country has an enormous reserve of efficient pilot material among our young women. Scores of thousands of women, capable of being trained to perform flying duties of a widely diversified nature, are available in case of need, with the few months time to train them as the only delay. More than 30,000 applied to join the WASP although there was no recruiting program. The WASP had as low an elimination rate during training as the flying cadets. They were purposely assigned to varying kinds of duty with different Commands and Air Forces and flew all types of AAF aircraft. They flew at night as well as by day, in simulated bombing and strafing, in searchlight and radar practice missions, in target towing and in ferrying. They flew as many hours per month as male pilots in similar work. Substantially more than twelve thousand hours were flown in the overall program by WASP per fatality. The rate of fatalities among WASP was approximately the same as among male pilots doing similar work. Such weak spots as were disclosed during this experimental woman pilot program, which had no precedent to serve as guide, were almost entirely incidental to the fact that the WASP were not militarized. On the whole, however, the loyalty and good sense of the individual WASPs overcame these inherent organizational weaknesses. It was primarily to meet these problems that militarization of WASP was proposed early in 1944 at a time when expansion of the WASP program seemed likely. The subsequent progress of the war and other changing circumstances relating to availability of pilot material changed the need for militarization from the standpoint of the Army Air Forces because it changed the need for the WASP themselves. As a consequence the WASP are not entitled to any veterans' benefits and the next of kin of those who died have no Government-sponsored insurance or similar allowances. Failure to militarize was not the reason for demobilization of the WASP but rather successful completion of their double mission as above stated. The Director of Women Pilots did not make the original recommendation to deactivate the WASP but followed through whole-heartedly because of the logic of the pertinent facts and the timeliness of the action. Although the WASP wanted to continue to fly with the Army Air Forces their disappointment over demobilization is overshadowed by the satisfaction that the war has progressed so favorable and our Air Forces are so strong that women pilots are not longer needed. On behalf of WASPs generally gratitude is

expressed to General Arnold and all the other military authorities who gave the Women Pilots their opportunity to serve in the air in the war effort."⁴

1. Why are the WASP being demobilized per Miss Cochran?

2. Were the objectives of the WASP program met?

3. Why were WASP not entitled to military benefits?

4. Why did Miss Cochran allow the recommendation to deactivate the WASP program?

Directions for the essay portion:

- Your essay should include at least four paragraphs; an introductory, two to three body paragraphs and a conclusion.
- Be sure to incorporate supporting details from the documents given to you to support your position in the essay.

Essay Prompt:

Using the visual and literary documents, write an essay stating whether the W.A.S.P. program deserved to be militarized or deactivated. You must be able to support your decision with evidence from the sources that follow.

⁴ (Cochran)