INTRODUCTION

Two articles from the Columbus Dispatch exemplify the ongoing debate about women in the military. "Women not right for all combat roles. Marines say," and "'Famous flyer' says women have place in flying—but not in combat plane." While the direct link between the two is women in combat, the underlying theme is the question of what role women should play in America's armed forces. When you take into consideration that these articles were written several years apart, it becomes all the more clear that as a society, women in the military continue to be a topic of debate. The first article appeared on Sunday, September 20, 2005, and relates to the shift in policy allowing women greater access to battlefield positions especially following the successful completion of two women from the army's Ranger program in August of that year. The second article appeared on Sunday, December 7, 1941, the Sunday paper presented prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor and this article discussed in a more generalized manner the rise in female pilots and how they might be useful in more combat missions or complete heavy transport operations.

Just as Ranger graduates Capt. Kristen Griest and 1st Lt. Shane Harper proved taxpayers wrong in 2015, the members of the Women's Air Force Service Pilots proved taxpayers wrong in 2015.

Ladies of Lockbourne

Jenny Sage

Women Airforce Service Pilots and the Mighty B-17 Flying Fortress
(WASPs), a group of female pilots during World War II, proved that women were capable of flying all manner of planes, including heavy four-engine B-17 bombers. The formation of the WASPs in late 1942 represented the culmination of separate efforts by Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran with the support of Henry "Hap" Arnold, Nancy Harkness Love, and various members of the Air Transport Command. The goal of both Cochran and Love was to create a group of women pilots capable of ferrying and testing military planes to free up men for the war effort. Just like the women who found jobs in factories, as epitomized by Rosie the Riveter, the WASPs sought to lend a patriotic hand in a field dominated by men, all the while proving their ability against detractors from the American public to their military bosses. Building on the public successes of pilots like Amelia Earhart and Jackie Cochran, a pilot even more accomplished than Earhart, women took advantage of the growing interest in aviation. This study will argue that the WASPs not only played an integral role in the World War II home front by assisting the Army Air Forces in multiple ways—thus freeing men for combat purposes, all the while facing opposition from numerous sources while trying to do their part—but were also assigned to B-17 training at Lockbourne Army Airfield in central Ohio, contributing to the war effort by engaging in work that many thought women were unable to handle.

Primary sources vary widely in the amount of information available. Media sources provide information about the program and the social response to women in the war effort, from articles in national media like the New York Times and TIME, to local outlets like the Columbus Dispatch. These stories are limited, however, because they are dependent on the release of information by the WASPs and their Army directors, which, as will be discussed later in this study, did not always take place. Reports from the military, which are now easily available from several archives across the country, provide an excellent account of the WASP program and the military perspective about the women involved. Each base completed an official history of the women stationed at their bases, and comprehensive histories about the entire program include interviews with base personnel. While the major histories are widely cited in the existing WASP scholarship, the local histories have largely been ignored, especially the Lockbourne base history, which is referenced throughout this study. Additionally, many WASPs have provided oral histories, including two of the Lockbourne graduates.

Beyond just a history about women, this research will show the role and contribution women made in the larger narrative of World War II. By integrating the Lockbourne stories into the larger narrative of the WASPs, "The Ladies of Lockbourne" will explore the story of how the WASPs' training on the B-17 was significant not only for the war but also for perceptions of women pilots. Using the ideas of Karen J. Warren and Molly Merryman, an analysis of the language used by important figures such as Jackie Cochran, Nancy Love, and Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold, and detractors such as those in Congress who argued for disbanning the WASPs, will show how society as a whole devalued the work of the women in this program, despite the fact that seventeen talented women proved their ability at the training base in Lockbourne, Ohio.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Works about the WASPs have been growing in number in the past three decades. This is influenced by two events: declassification of WASP records, and the push led by former WASPs and supporters to get military recognition, which culminated in the 1979 passage of a law authorizing veterans' benefits for those who applied. Typically, works regarding the WASPs fall into four categories: general military histories; general histories about women involved in the war; WASP specific works, including biographies and autobiographies; and period primary sources.

Books that tell the entire history of the Air Forces of World War II, and those that focus on the role women played in the war effort, have the smallest

4. Archives consulted for this study include the aforementioned WASP Archive at Texas Woman's University; the archives at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base; and the Air Force Historical Research Agency, located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, but also searchable online.
6. One source not used in this study but worth noting is Vera S. Williams, WASPs (Osceola, Wis.: Motorbooks International, 1994), which has an excellent collection of photographs and personal artifacts.
7. See, for example, Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., The Army Air Forces in World War II (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995); The Official Guide to the Army Air Forces: A Directory, Almanac and Chronicle of Achievement (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944).
8. See, for example, Maj. Gen. Jeanne M. Holm, USAF (Ret.), ed., In Defense of a Nation:
amount of information. The WASPs were, after all, only about one thousand members out of a large force of millions during the war, and still a small proportion of the several hundred thousand women who served in the various military organizations. These works do contribute to the discussion of the role the WASPs played in their short time, but rarely mention the B-17 pilots.

Comprehensive works focused on WASPs themselves, such as those written by former WASPs Byrd Howell Granger and Adela Rieck Schara, and provide immense detail about the program. Sally Van Wagenen Keil's book includes a chapter about the B-17 training at Lockbourne, based likely on the accounts of her aunt Mary Parker, one of the Lockbourne graduates. The problem with this work along with Schara's is a lack of source material listed. The stories match accounts found in other works, and are well written and tell wonderful stories, but it is difficult to use them without knowing where their information came from. Molly Merriman's work stands alone as she discusses not only the creation and disbandment, but also the battle this civilian organization engaged in for military recognition after the war's end, all within an analysis of how gendered notions of work influenced decisions made about the program.

Servicewomen in World War II (Arlington, Va.: Vandemere Press, published by special arrangement with Military Women’s Press, 1998). For a larger discussion of women’s roles in military industry, and other areas of life, see Emily Yellin, Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II (New York: Free Press, 2004). In this work, the WASPs share the chapter “On Duty at Home” with the WAVES (Navy), SPARS (Coast Guard), and Marines’ women groups.


13. Other works that analyze the messages being sent about women and the work they could do during the war include Donna B. Knaff, Beyond Rostov the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2012).

Biographies and autobiographies, from that of the matriarch of the WASPs, Jacqueline Cochran, to women pilots themselves, give a nuanced view into private lives and deliver personal recollections that government documents do not always include. Rhonda Smith-Daugherty and Sarah Rickman provide detailed accounts of Jackie Cochran and Nancy Love, which help us understand their motives and actions. There are several other works that focus on individual pilots, but none were used for this study as they were not written by or about Lockbourne graduates.

While these works are very helpful in seeing the experience in more personal terms, there are few works with a detailed account of the B-17 WASPs. This study will combine the creation of the WASPs and the role gender played throughout, and will use the experiences of the women chosen for B-17 training as a focus. This will give a greater understanding as to how these women's stories fit into the larger narrative, especially considering the aircraft they learned to master.

**Formation of the WASPs**

It would be easy to label Jackie Cochran and Nancy Love as rivals as they are the women responsible for the formation of separate groups that would be combined to form the WASPs; however, doing so would diminish the efforts made by each on behalf of American female flyers. Though their background and leadership styles were very different, their intention of giving talented women the opportunity to participate in the war effort is what made them alike. Employing an analysis of the word rival and its connection to gendered ideals, Merriman puts it another way: "Indeed, these adversarial constructions only represent the negative cultural images of powerful women at that time." These were two well-connected and skilled pilots, and an understanding of who they were helps understand how the WASPs evolved.

Jaccumine "Jackie" Cochran, born Bessie Pitman sometime between 1906 and 1910, was an orphan raised in the impoverished South. Her foster family

14. Several works not cited in this work offer important details about WASPs and their experiences. Some are more historical in nature, while others are more narrative and offer less in the way of source. In the first group, see Sarah Bryn Rickman, Nancy Batson Crews: Alabama’s First Lady of Flight (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2009). In the second group, see Jan Churchill, On Wings to War: Teresa James, Aviator (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower Univ. Press, 1992); Marion Stegeman Hodgson, Winning My Wings: A Woman Airforce Service Pilot in World War II (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996).
15. Merriman, Clipped Wings, 11.
moved to various mill towns, and she worked and attended school with relative irregularity. One consistent factor in her early life was the desire to make something of herself on her own terms. The name Jacqueline Cochran, for example, was her own creation from names she found in the phone book because she thought it sounded more sophisticated than her birth name.16 She would ultimately go into the cosmetic industry, eventually earning enough money to start her own successful business during the Great Depression. Financial security also allowed her to pursue a new hobby—flying.17 Her eventual marriage to Floyd Odlam, a millionaire investor, and her successful career in air races permitted her strong-willed persona to grow and introduced her to some very influential members of American society.

Nancy Love was born Hannah Lincoln Harkness on February 14, 1914, into a family of means living in Michigan. Her father, a physician, preferred the name Nancy over Hannah Lincoln, which was chosen based on her mother’s family tradition.18 As opposed to Cochran’s haphazard education, Love attended the Milton boarding school outside of Boston, and attended Vassar College for a short period, though financial difficulties during the Depression forced her to drop out.19 Her passion for flying began when she was fourteen after seeing a barnstormer in a biplane who offered to take passengers up for “a penny a pound.” Her father, who bucked tradition with her name, supported his daughter in her unconventional hobby.20 Her flying career gave her options after she left college, and a job at Inter City Aviation in Boston not only allowed her to work doing what she loved, it also introduced her to the owner and her future husband, Robert Love.21 A marriage built on respect and a mutual love of the skies, the Loves’ social connections, and her husband’s eventual commission into the Army Air Forces would give Love an inside track to develop her vision of a division of female pilots.

Cochran and Love would separately work to create a pathway for women to provide services to the Army Air Forces. Cochran began arguing for a women’s pilot unit prior to the war, writing directly to Eleanor Roosevelt in September 1939. She wrote that “lady birds” would not “engage in combat . . . but every trained male pilot will be needed in active service.”22 That correspondence paid off. After a brief time in England to observe Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), Britain’s version of an all-women’s air corps, she returned to New York in June 1941, and received an invitation to lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt at Hyde Park to discuss what she had experienced.

Shortly thereafter Cochran was invited to the White House, and Mrs. Roosevelt arranged formal introductions for her with Gen. “Hap” Arnold and Gen. Robert Olds, who became the head of Ferry Command, later named Air Transport Command (ATC). Cochran outlined her idea of a training program to attract a large number of licensed pilots to put into service in a variety of jobs,23 but Olds was more interested in hiring a smaller number of already experienced and trained women for immediate service. This began a tumultuous relationship between Cochran and General Arnold, who seemed to believe in her ideas but not quite her methodology, and General Olds, subordinate to Arnold, who never agreed with Cochran on a multitude of issues. Cochran ended up back in England, recruiting a small group of American women to work for the British ATA group while waiting for Arnold to make up his mind.24

Tact and an understanding of gender roles at the time become major considerations in understanding why Love’s plan was accepted before Cochran’s. As accomplished pilots, both were in a position to make recommendations about how others in their community could be used in the war effort. It is at this point that the dichotomy that is Jackie Cochran comes more into focus. She was as traditional as she was brash. As the owner of a successful cosmetic company, she believed in women maintaining a feminine appearance, and her plan for a women’s air corps was to be in use only while there were no male pilots to fill the job. She was adamant about how the group should be organized, emphasizing that she would be the one in charge. In this way she both

17. Ibid., 18-19.
19. Ibid., 11–16, 22.
20. Ibid., 8.
21. Ibid., 25–32.
23. A biography of Arnold’s seems to give more credit to him than to the women involved. Dik Alan Dasso writes: “The WASP concept was born in late 1941 when Arnold called upon noted aviatress Jacqueline Cochran to train and utilize American women pilots.” Arnold may have given the order, but Dasso’s work gives far too much credit to Arnold, and too little credit to Cochran, and omits Love altogether. This could be simply an accident, as the WASPs have only one paragraph in the book and perhaps Dasso did not want to do any additional research, or at the worst tried to give Arnold total credit, which is undeserved. Dik Alan Dasso, *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of American Airpower* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 169.
maintained the gender standards she had been raised to follow in the America of the early twentieth century, while also joining the ranks of women who had seen their roles expanding during World War I and the Great Depression.

Meanwhile, a more subtle Love developed a plan with Col. William Turner, who worked with her husband Bob Love in the ATC, a division originally commanded by Robert Olds before he was replaced for health reasons. Love and Turner worked within the parameters outlined by Olds and further negotiated with his replacement, Gen. Harold George.

On September 5, 1942, General Arnold approved the plan that created the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) with Love in command. The swearing-in ceremony on September 10 was attended by General George and Nancy Love. General Arnold’s attendance was expected at this ceremony, but he was conspicuously absent. Adding to the intrigue of the situation, Cochran planned to return to the United States from her commitment in Britain on September 5, but her departure was mysteriously delayed until September 9, and she did not arrive home until late on September 10. In her eponymous autobiography, she writes of this situation that “trouble was brewing” and implies that General Arnold was oblivious to what was happening under his nose, though this seems unrealistic. This may also be what gave rise to the notion of Cochran and Love as rivals. While ultimately the WASPs would be a positive mark for female pilots, when Cochran’s ego came out, she showed that she was really more interested in self-promotion.

The separately established WAFS under Love and the Women’s Flying Training Program under Cochran were officially merged on August 20, 1943, into the unified WASP program, with Cochran named director and headquartered in Washington, D.C. Love shifted to the position of “executive for WASP ferrying operations for the Air Transport Command,” located in Cincinnati. As administrator, Cochran organized the training and continued to recruit and approve prospective students. Love continued to work with members of the ATC to ensure that WASPs would be able to fly the planes that needed to be moved.

In order to ferry the various planes being built, the women had to be certified to fly them. Love took it upon herself to be certified to fly as many planes as possible, believing that if she proved that one woman could do it, then any of the WASPs could do it. One of Love’s original WASP pilots, Delphine Bohn, said of this plan, “Mrs. Love became a real artist in the promotion of progressive airplane transition for herself and for her squadrons.” On February 27, 1943, Love flew and was qualified on the P-51 Mustang, the first woman to do so, and in July of the same year she and her good friend and first WAF recruit Betty Gillies went to Lockbourne Army Air Base to transition on the B-17. The original plan was to have Love and Gillies participate in a mass transport of B-17s to England, but the women’s place on the trip was canceled at the last minute by General Arnold, who Gillies said “didn’t want women flying into the war zone.” While this was a personal setback for Love, she had proven her point that women were capable of handling not only the fastest pursuit fighters, but also the biggest bomber at that time.

**Lockbourne Army Airfield and the B-17**

After World War I pilots saw air combat for the first time, the United States and other governments around the world began a period of innovation and experimentation with aircraft. Between December 1903, when the Wright brothers made their first flight, and the dawn of World War II, aviation had grown by leaps and bounds. As the Army continued its expansion into the aerial field, it became evident that their arsenal was ill equipped to handle any long-range missions. Two Army engineering and bombardment officers, Col. Hugh Knerr and Col. C. W. Howard, developed a long-term plan that called for the design of bombers capable of carrying out long-range bombing missions. Through trial and error, the B-17 emerged as the solution.

Nicknamed the “Flying Fortress” because of its massive size, payload capacity, and ample gun mounts, the B-17 would become one of the most fearsome parts of America’s World War II air strategy. Created by the Boeing Corporation

25. Ibid. Cochran maintained that she believed General Arnold had “promised” her control of a female pilot program, and that the timing of the WAFS announcement and her delayed return flight was beyond coincidence.
29. In Cochran’s eyes, this was a victory.
31. Quoted in Rickman, *Nancy Love*, 107. The term transition refers to the process a pilot takes to train on a specific aircraft, obtaining the required hours and completion of a series of maneuvers required to be checked off for each craft.
33. Ibid., 143.
in 1935, the heavy bomber featured four 1,200 horsepower engines, which enabled the plane to have a top airspeed of 287 miles per hour, and a maximum altitude of over 35,000 feet. Production of the B-17 was slow prior to the war; the four-engine plane was seen as an unnecessary expense when other two-engine planes, which were cheaper to produce and used less fuel, were also being designed. As the war in Europe escalated, Washington witnessed arguments over funding, as some in the War Department "could not seem to understand the superiority of one B-17 over two twin-engine B-10’s or B-12’s and continually tried to postpone the procurement of ‘those monsters.’"  

However, once the war began, production increased, with early models sold to England as part of the Lend-Lease Act. After the United States entered the war, over twelve thousand B-17s were produced between the Boeing, Douglas, and Lockheed (Vega) plants. With so many B-17s rolling off the production lines, and each plane requiring a larger than normal crew complement, ATC had to create bases for pilots to learn the intricacies of a four-engine heavy bomber.

The city of Lockbourne, a suburb on the south side of Columbus, Ohio, had an airfield prior to World War II. Though it was originally slated to be a bombardment field, on June 16, 1942, the Columbus Dispatch reported that a $7.5 million project would transform the base into an Army airfield with the intent to train glider pilots. By project completion in July of that year, there would be four hundred officers and 4,500 soldiers at the field. In less than six months, though, the field’s training program was expanded significantly. On January 29, 1943, the Dispatch reported that the base would host B-17 pilot training. The article cited base commander Col. Albert C. Foulk as saying, “in view of the ever-increasing need for pilots of four-engine ships, training is to continue uninterrupted 24 hours a day, seven days a week.” The students would be those who already had knowledge in flying medium-weight bombers.

**SEVENTEEN REPORT FOR “SPECIALIZED TRAINING”**

When Love qualified on the B-17, she proved that it could be flown by a woman, though as previously mentioned, only in noncombat zones. The increasing need for B-17s meant that more would have to be built, and more crews would receive training. This opened the door for the WASPs to step in to assist in the ferrying (at least within the United States) and training. The orders were sent on October 12, 1943, in what Byrd Howell Granger writes was “a special milestone for Jacqueline Cochran, denoting a climax for her efforts to prove that, given the chance, women pilots can fly anything the Air Forces have.” Cochran set about picking the seventeen women who would learn to fly the powerful four-engine bomber. All of these women came from the group that trained at Sweetwater, Texas, and consisted of graduates of the classes of 1943–45 and 1943–46. They were some of the best pilots from their respective classes, and from the data available, almost all were above five and a half feet tall, which would be advantageous for flying the B-17; smaller pilots would have a more difficult time reaching the pedals, and a concern was whether a woman even had the physical strength to handle the immense horsepower. Or, as the official base historian described them, “They were healthy, and many of them were ‘outdoor girls,’ but they definitely were not Amazons.”

Upon notification of their assignment to Lockbourne, the seventeen women made their way to Columbus, Ohio. The Army paid for their trip, and as civilian employees of the Army, the women carried official transfer orders. The new graduates from Sweetwater, Texas, took the train. Virginia Broome Waterer recounts that on the train, they went to the dining car with the other servicemen. When they got there and expected to get priority service, there was confusion.

36. Glines, The Compact History, 144.
38. “Four-Engine Pilot School Opened at Lockbourne Base,” Columbus Evening Dispatch, Jan. 29, 1943, 1A.
39. See appendix to this article for a list of the women assigned to Lockbourne, their heights, and their assignments on completion or noncompletion of the transition training.
41. None of the women in this B-17 cohort came from the WASPs originally recruited by Nancy Love. In terms of the class identifiers, the first number is the year of graduation (1943 for these two groups of women), and which class each woman graduated with (the fifth and sixth classes, respectively, graduated in 1943).
42. Capt. Joseph G. Burris, Station WASP History, Lockbourne Army Air Base, obtained from the archives of the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio, 3. The use of language here shows some of the beliefs about body image during this time. The women had evidence of physical ability, but not so much as to seem either physically unattractive given the standards of the day, or so overly masculine as to pose a threat to the perceived manhood of their trainers.
This was a continual problem for the WASPs and their situation—they were civilian employees working for the Army, carrying official Army transfer papers, but they did not have a uniform. (WASPs would eventually get a uniform, but at that time their “uniform” was khaki pants and a white dress shirt.)

Upon arrival, they were shown to their new quarters—they would be living in the nurses’ quarters. Because of their small number, and the uniqueness of their assignment, there were no other places on the base for them to stay. Also, given the time, it would have been completely unacceptable for them to be assigned quarters in the same area as the men, officers or otherwise. This situation was repeated at bases across the country, where many facilities had been built prior to the increase of female participation, whether WASPs or the other newly created units.

As training began, there were questions about whether the women would be able to succeed. All WASP applicants had to hold a private pilot’s license, but that required only thirty hours of flight time. WASP advanced training included flying a twin-engine Cessna, but “that ship had only one-tenth the horsepower of a B-17.” WASPs Waterer and Patricia Bowser Gibson said they were instructed to tell no one of their assignment, which Lockbourne base historian Captain Burris echoes: “Information on the class during the training period was considered classified military information.” Given the financial cost of the training and the planes themselves, and the potential publicity nightmare should this experiment fail with a female pilot crashing a B-17, the secretive nature of the training should not be a surprise. Merrymn addressed this in the context of the eventual congressional debate over the existence of the WASPs: “In 1944, military secrecy and the AAF’s fear that women pilots would fail kept Congress and the American public from knowing about the missions the WASPs had performed. Individual WASPs did not testify before Congress or submit letters or telegrams in support of the program—indeed, they were strictly forbidden from doing so. Because the War Department’s official public relations’ policy on the WASPs prohibited media contact, the WASPs and the AAF did not counter spurious information that arose in media accounts, which had been fostered by the male civilian pilot’s lobby.”

There was a lot of pressure on the training staff and on the women themselves, which informal unit leader Helen Dettweiler addressed in a meeting with their new commanding staff: “We are here to do our best, but we want this understood. We want to be treated like any other students here. If we pass, all right. If we don’t, too bad. We don’t want special consideration or partiality. We don’t want to be pampered. We are students first, and the fact that we are women is incidental.” Dettweiler, a golf champion prior to the war, understood what it meant to participate at a high level in an arena dominated by men. Her words express the acknowledgment that the B-17 students were an experiment, and that they too felt the pressure to succeed and at the same level as their male counterparts.

Once training began, the standard nine-week training had to be lengthened to twelve when the leadership discovered that the curriculum given at Sweetwater had not prepared the women to their liking. At Lockbourne, the women had ground school, including extensive instrument training, and ample flight time. The group was divided between three instructors, and each cohort often flew together, rotating between the pilot and copilot seats. While in the air, they had to learn how to fly by instruments only and how to control the plane when any of the four engines was stopped. A key feature of the B-17 that made it such a deadly part of the U.S. air arsenal was the fact that it could fly so high. This meant that anyone flying had to be trained to use the oxygen equipment. The WASPs made the short trip to Wright Field in Dayton and the Aero Medical Laboratory’s pressure chamber, where they all passed the orientation process to understand the effect of high elevation on the human body.

One of the more curious issues was about a woman’s ability to fly a plane during her menstrual cycle. After one commander (not at Lockbourne) gave the order to ground women the week prior to and during her menstrual cycle, ATC surgeons determined that women did not need to be grounded, but could choose not to fly if they wished. The Lockbourne surgeon noted, “During menstruation periods the WASPs did not care particularly to fly and

43. Virginia Broome Waterer, interview by Sarah Rickman, June 20, 2005, The Woman’s Collection, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas, 39.
44. Burris, Station WASP History, 4.
45. Rickman, Waterer interview, 38; Patricia Bowser Gibson, interview by Sarah Rickman, May 20, 2005, The Woman’s Collection, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, Texas, 13.
46. Burris, Station WASP History, 8.
47. Merryman, Clipped Wings, 144.
48. Burris, Station WASP History, 4-5.
49. Ibid., 10.
51. Burris, Station WASP History, 11-12.
52. Granger, On Final Approach, 272.
53. “Women Pilots with the AAF, 1941–1944,” Army Air Forces Historical Studies, no. 55 (March 1945), 41. Pregnancy was upheld as a medical condition that could result in a pilot being grounded, though there were stories of some continuing to fly during the early months of pregnancy, or as long as they could still pull the stick back toward their bodies. Pregnancy was not an issue for any of the women at Lockbourne during their training.
if they did not wish to fly they remained on the ground." This factor may be one reason why the WASPs had a difficult time being universally accepted. They could prove themselves as pilots and as civilian soldiers, but still had a medical "disability" strictly based on their reproductive cycles.

As for the question about stamina, the majority of the WASPs stationed at Lockbourne performed at or above expectations. While the base surgeon’s report listed the women as having stamina "comparable to those of the current male officer personnel on full flying status," the report from the deputy for training and operations was less complimentary. In this report, the women are described as having "great difficulty in emergency operations and in other phases of training that required effort on the controls." It was the recommendation of the commanding officer that minimum physical criteria be established for any future recruits assigned to Lockbourne. Since there were no subsequent classes for B-17 training, these numbers were never specified. Though height and weight were not given for all students in the base history, the data supplied show that two of the four women who failed training were at or above the average for those who did pass, so height alone could not have been the only concern.

Mental stamina was another concern held by many—could a woman operate the Flying Fortress without being overcome by its size, its power, or the danger associated with technical problems that might arise? Maj. Paul Dorney, commander of Group Six, said they "seemed much at ease in the planes, were not excited, and were slow and easy on the controls." Flight commander Maj. John Hurley said of the women, "They aren’t as nervous as men—or maybe it’s just that they don’t realise [sic] danger as much." The WASPs may not have shown it, but they did feel it. When asked about her first B-17 flight, WASP Gibson said she was "scared to death." In the end, the physical and mental strength displayed by the women, along with their superior training, resulted in zero accidents.

Any concern about how students would get along with their instructors and male counterparts was quickly put to rest. All reports, from the official base and command histories to the recollections of the women themselves, are positive and speak of a productive working environment. Major Dorney admitted that there was concern about how the military instructors and civilian pilots would get along as the WASPs were seen as "outsiders." The base history refers to some prejudice from male students, and that some of the enlisted men were "a bit ’leery’ about flying with the WASPs." Responses from the women prove that once everyone realized the WASPs were there to work and the men would take them seriously, things began to work well. WASP Gibson said, "Our C.C. there . . . was just all for his girls. He was wonderful." Referring to a commander named Col. John Gullett, WASP Waterer said he "was very pleasant and charming," and about the instructors, "The group of people that he picked to train us, were also enthusiastic about our being there." At the completion of their training, WASP Waterer recalls that "Colonel Gullet had a farewell party for us at the Officer’s Club complete with a big cake decorated with our Fifinekella insignia—so kind & thoughtful!" One story shared by several of the WASPs was that of a Christmas gift from Maj. Fred Wilson, one of their commanding officers. As recounted in a letter home written by Blanche Osborn: "We opened them and it was a silver dollar with a pair of Air Corps wings on each. . . . The wings exactly fit the silver dollar and we will have it as a lucky piece. All the girls think he is a swell person. After batting around Sweetwater, we couldn’t believe it when he was so nice to us here."

WASP Director Jackie Cochran herself sent a letter from her headquarters to Colonel Gullett, in which she said that if any future classes of WASPs were to receive B-17 training, she hoped they would be stationed at Lockbourne because "it certainly gives them a better opportunity if they are training under a condition where there is no prejudice."

Perhaps a sign of the time, the base history makes a final note on "acceptance" of the WASPs by base personnel, making sure to note the fact that three of the seventeen WASPs sent to Lockbourne would end up marrying officers.

One of the pairs, Lucille Friessen and training inspector Maj. John McVey, were married on New Year’s Day, with one of the commanding officers giving the bride away. Despite the secrecy under which the program began, the wedding drew national media attention for the novelty of two pilots getting married.

54. Burris, Station WASP History, 17.
55. Ibid., 16-17.
56. Ibid., 11.
57. Rickman, Gibson interview, 26.
58. Burris, Station WASP History, 16.
59. Ibid., 22-23.
60. Rickman, Gibson interview, 17.
61. Rickman, Waterer interview, 41-42.
63. Quoted in Burris, Station WASP History, 22-23.
64. Ibid.
There was no regulation about married women serving in the WASPs, and certainly many were married and some had children, but in the case of the three who married out of Lockbourne, they resigned shortly after marriage, never to use their B-17 training. For all the good done by those who stayed in the program, those who resigned ended up fueling the fire from detractors as to why the WASP program was an unnecessary expense.

**THE SHORT CAREER OF THE WASP B-17 PILOTS**

After their January 1943 graduation, nine women transferred to Buckingham Army Air Field to fly B-17s at the Flexible Gunnery School in Fort Myers, Florida. These pilots all received excellent ratings and were qualified to be first pilots on one of the biggest planes in the skies at the time. Given the experiences they had at Lockbourne, the pilots were fully expecting to be put to work. But this was not the case.

The purpose of Flexible Gunnery School was to train the members of the B-17 crew who would be firing the many mounted guns—those using doors and located in the turrets. The WASPs were transferred to be pilots and copilots flying the planes the gunners were training in. In other instances, they flew the planes, while trainees in pursuit planes practiced attacking them with mounted cameras, or they would take crews up to high altitudes to practice using oxygen equipment and operating in the extreme cold temperatures. WASP Waterer recalls the pilot she worked with letting her fly some of the time. Others recall the commanding officer’s decision to allow the women to be only copilots, and to not certify them as being first or lead pilots. News of this made it back to Lockbourne. When it was reported that his graduates were unable to get check flights to be first pilots, Major Hurley said, “This reflected upon our instruction here. We eliminated four of the original seventeen, but those who completed the course were fully qualified and should have been given full opportunity to fly as first pilots.” Once they were finally checked by Buckingham Army Air Force personnel, they expected to be used more as first pilots, but when a new commanding officer arrived, they were confined to being copilots again. On July 1, 1944, WASP Dawn Rochow took the issue to a higher power, WASP Director Jackie Cochran.

The B-17 flying career for the Lockbourne WASPs was over almost as soon as it started. On August 24, 1944, slightly more than eight months after they graduated, they were transferred from Buckingham Air Force Base to Las Vegas and Roswell Air Force Base. The B-17 was being phased out, and Buckingham was going to be training gunners to fire from B-29-style turrets fitted to B-24 planes. Even though B-24s were a similar four-engine configuration to the B-17s, the women had not been trained on the B-24s, and since both were being replaced by the B-29, there was no sense training this group on a new plane with a short life span. Some were able to continue flying end-of-life planes to determine whether they were salvageable.

As exciting and frustrating as their B-17 career was, it would only get worse. In October 1944, General Arnold announced that the WASP program would end by December 20. All women still employed would be separated from the military and their civil service positions. By this time, the nine who were ordered to Buckingham were down to seven, two having resigned to get married.

WASP deactivation happened for several reasons, two of the most important being militarization and questions about jobs for men after the war. The issue of militarization had been a problem since the use of women in the skies was first envisioned. Cochran had originally supported the idea of a militarized women’s pilot program, but only if she was in charge. The Army already had a women’s program, the Women’s Army Corps (WACs), but Cochran did not want her group to be part of the WACs because she would have to be under the authority of the WAC director. To be an independent entity, they would need Congress to pass a law authorizing the creation within the Army’s structure. And though bills were introduced into both houses of Congress, they were defeated, especially after the House Committee on Civil Service and chair Robert Ramspeck completed an investigation of the WASP program and decided it was not worth the cost. TIME magazine published an article in

66. Rickman, Waterer interview, 54.
67. Ibid., 45.
68. Granger, On Final Approach, 375. This would be another criticism of the WASP program. Because they were actually civilians, they were not required to follow the standard mili-
May 1944, prior to the official presentation in the House of his investigation, outlining the argument between Ramspeck, General Arnold, and Cochran, citing that it cost $20,000 to train a WASP, with a failure rate that was unacceptably high. He also cited that only three WASPs are qualified to fly a four-engine bomber.73 By the time this article was published, the Lockbourne thirteen would have been five months out of school; the investigation would have been completed after their graduation date. As previously discussed, certain details of the WASP program were either officially secret, or kept from the media by the Army or WASP officials. Merryman notes that the lack of official information about the program would lead to “irreconcilable problems” for the WASPs in the long run.74

The second item that brought the end to the WASP experiment was one of the original intents of the program: to free men for war service. As the war was winding down, and more men were becoming available to do pilot work under either military or civilian authority, the women were no longer needed.75 A TIME article from October 16, 1944, describes the decision: “Admitting that there were now enough men to carry on the WASPs’ jobs, principally ferrying of Army aircraft, he [Arnold] swung the washout brush, picked the December date ‘to permit the WASPs to reach their homes by Christmas.’” And with a final slap to those who still wished to work, the article continues, “Home is where most WASPs will land, according to Mrs. Hazel Taylor, their public-relations officer, who predicted: ‘Their careers will be marriage.’”76

Reflections from afar

Reflecting on the work of Love and Cochran, and the experiment that was the B-17 training at Lockbourne, it would be easy yet ultimately incorrect to blame the demise on gendered stereotypes and excuses about gendered work. At the end of the program some of the women did, or had already, returned to their homes and were raising children. But others wanted to continue. WASP Gibson recalls when she and three friends flew from their Las Vegas base to Los Angeles to look for a job before they were disbanded. “We snot-nosed kids,” she says, “thought we were going to be big-shot pilots. They wouldn’t even talk to us.” She would eventually find a job working for the Red Cross and then the Special Services.77 WASP Waterer had already resigned to marry, and would end up going back to school and starting her own interior design company.78 Some had the financial ability to continue flying recreationally, but many who could not find jobs in aviation and could not afford it would never fly again. For WASP Helen Richey, not flying was not an option, and she committed suicide in January 1947.79

Cochran herself is a dichotomy. She fought to get the program started, but questions linger about whether this was for personal aspirations or to advance the role of women in American society. She advocated that this would only be temporary work while men were away, but then fought to militarize the group, which would have created a more lasting structure. She was herself a reflection of the time, but was also an agent for change. Had she truly believed in the traditional place of a woman in the home, she would never have advocated for the program in the first place. And while a personal competition with WAC leader Oveta Hobby would help end the program, the undying fight to get her way allowed the WASPs to experience so much more than many ever imagined.

The selection of the women to be in the WASP program itself had ties to society’s expectation of women. Love created her group starting with people she was personally acquainted with. For Cochran’s program, because the numbers were so much higher, the stakes of who entered the program were also higher. Cochran screened all the applicants: over 25,000 would apply for what ended up being 1,076 spots. In her autobiography she writes: “I looked for clean-cut, stable young women who could show flying hours properly noted and certified in a log book.”80 This would inevitably mean that women considered socially undesirable for the time would be excluded. Merryman notes that this could have included factors such as social class or “perceived sexual orientation,” but that no proof exists or remains to substantiate such assumptions. What we do know is that Cochran kept with the military’s segregationist policies, and that no African American applicants were admitted, though two women of Chinese descent were.81

74. Merryman, Clipped Wings, 29.
75. Ibid., 123.
77. Rickman, Gibson interview, 24, 27.
78. Rickman, Waterer interview, 1.
80. Cochran and Brinkley, Jackie Cochran, 199.
The military and political establishment comes out of this story with the most resistance to change. Cochran's acerbic personality may have caused the Ramspeck investigation to be a little more hard-hitting than if Love were running the WASPs, but his attacks on the very idea of women being used in military roles reflects that there was a line that women were not yet permitted to cross, and the WASPs had crossed it. The military, too, is guilty of shortsightedness in the area of gender parity. Former WASP Julie Ledbetter would rise to the level of lieutenant colonel in the Army, but that was because she enlisted after disbandment, and most of her posts were in recruiting or with the WACs. The various military branches would not allow women back into a cockpit until the 1970s. In making these decisions, the military and government were prioritizing the type of work available to men and women, sending the message to women that their work was valuable only in certain areas. To men it sends a dual message: your work is more valued because we need you to do the difficult jobs, but you are also expendable because we will not assign women to a job that could put them in harm's way (with the very important exception of military nurses, whose jobs often put them in military zones, albeit usually not by plan).

The media of the time also sent a fractured message to women about the kind of work they could do, as seen from examples in the Columbus Dispatch and TIME. The article "Women Take to the Air" is misleading. Though it briefly describes those women who have pilot's licenses, it spends the majority of the time talking about women working in aviation factories. A feature photo spread in the Sunday paper titled "Women with Wings" shows women working in aviation-related jobs, and advertises that the Civilian Employment Squadron of the Army Air Forces would be interviewing for jobs at Wright-Patterson field. The jobs shown include driving personnel, mechanical work, drafting, and packing parachutes, but no mention is made about women seeking jobs as pilots. The woman shown working with parachutes is referenced as a pilot, but nothing is said about her flying for the Air Forces. The WACs are mentioned in several articles through 1943, including one titled, "Women Enlisting in WAC Now Can Pick Army Air Force as Field for Service." This service, however, is not flying, but dispatching and working in the weather groups.

The seventeen WASPs who entered B-17 transition training at Lockbourne Army Air Base were part of a grand experiment—to see if women could successfully complete an array of jobs that many in society thought they were incapable of doing. Whether it was simply flying (and landing) a plane, or flying (and landing) one of the most powerful planes of World War II, their determination proved that women were capable of completing tasks that many thought impossible for their sex. When the final WASP class graduated on December 7, 1944, General Arnold delivered the graduation address in which he said, "Frankly, I didn't know in 1941 whether a slip of a young girl could flight [sic] the controls of a B-17 in the heavy weather they would naturally encounter in the operational flying. ... Well, now in 1944, more than two years since WASP 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 the national media, a TIME article references that "WASPs have shown how to be spectacularly useful..." having "flown more than 30,000,000 miles." It describes WASPs as being better at delivering smaller planes than men because "A trip in a trainer may take weeks because of adverse weather. The WASPs sweat it out with womanly patience when male pilots would be driven mad." In all of these examples we see language that, on the one hand, praises women for their involvement in the war effort, but on the other describes jobs that require less skill than those being completed by their male counterparts.

Perhaps the major reason the WASPs were the outcast among the other female military organizations like the WACs and counterparts in the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines is because the jobs the WASPs were completing were ones traditionally done by men. Women in the other branches were doing "women's work" as exemplified by the Columbus Dispatch articles. Or, as Merryman writes, "WASPs were involved in activities considered both dangerous and adventurous for the men who performed them; thus a high level of status was associated with their roles and missions... they all served in positions desired and admired by men."

CONCLUSION

82. "Women Take to the Air," Columbus Evening Dispatch, June 7, 1942, Third Section, 6.
86. Merryman, Clipped Wings, 2.
an airplane you can't handle." Perhaps this was a bitter pill to handle, especially since the women graduating were active for only thirteen days before the entire program was deactivated. But his words showed recognition that the entire program, especially the work of the Lockbourne graduates, was not in vain. Recognition from the highest level of the Air Force was a significant message that their work was seen and appreciated.

All of them were in some way affected by the fate controlling the times: be it those who left to fulfill the social expectation to be a housewife, or those who were deactivated against their will. Over one thousand women flew for the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II as part of the WASPS or WASPs. They fought prejudice and smashed stereotypes, all while working within a system intent on keeping them down. In an era when women in the military is still a hot topic, it is important that we continue to tell stories like these so that women everywhere and from every time get the credit they deserve for laying the foundation for future pilots everywhere.

Table 1: WASPs Assigned to Lockbourne
Presented here are the names of the WASPs assigned to Lockbourne Army Airbase, their graduating class from WASP training at Sweetwater, and their assignment after Lockbourne for those who completed training and those who did not. The class shows the year they graduated and of which class that year each woman was a part. Height is also included for some of the women (where data were available) because a woman's physical capability to fly the B-17 was questioned at the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Age</th>
<th>WASP Class</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Assignment after B-17 Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florence Acher, 32</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'8&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Bowser, 23</td>
<td>1943-46</td>
<td>5'4&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Broome, 24</td>
<td>1943-46</td>
<td>5'6&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Helen Dettweiler, 30</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'9&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Remained at Lockbourne for Central Instructors School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucille Friesen, 26</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'7&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Parker, 27</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'9&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Remained at Lockbourne for Central Instructors School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances Green, 23</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'7&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Kirchner, 24</td>
<td>1943-46</td>
<td>5'7&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Remained at Lockbourne for Central Instructors School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Ledbetter, 23</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Mitchell, 23</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanche Osborn, 28</td>
<td>1943-46</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn Rochow, 27</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Buckingham AAF, Florida</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Waldner, 24</td>
<td>1943-46</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Remained at Lockbourne for Central Instructors School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Clements, 26</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'9&quot;</td>
<td>Blytheville AAF, Arkansas—Did not complete B-17 training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris Bristol, 24</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td>5'8&quot;</td>
<td>Columbus AAF, Missouri—Did not complete B-17 training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenie Garvin, 24</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus AAF, Missouri—Did not complete B-17 training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta Mundt, 31</td>
<td>1943-45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blytheville AAF, Arkansas—Did not complete B-17 training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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